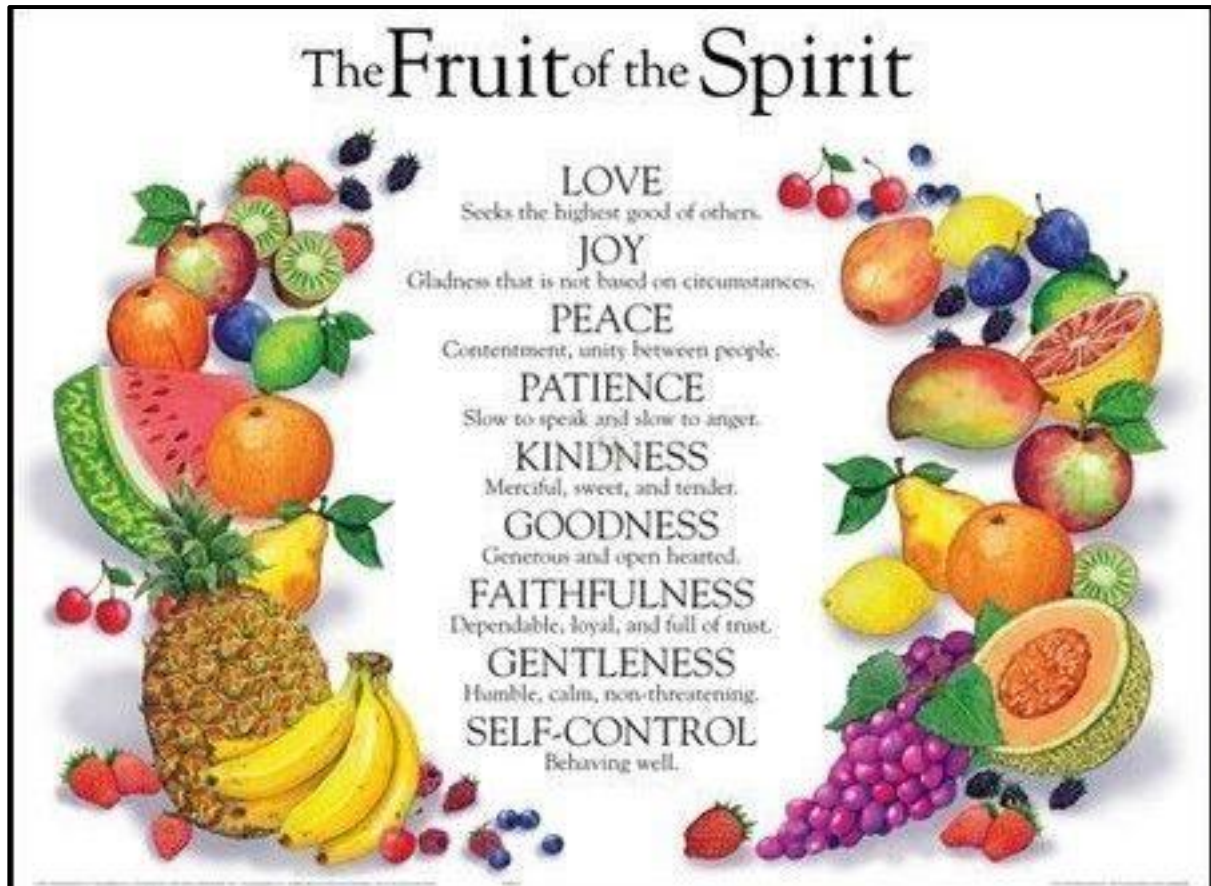


17. Encouragement for the Journey



Sermon

Wednesday, 14th October 2020 – Glenda Bolitho



“Growing in Fruitfulness”

Bible Readings: Galatians 5:22-23

Psalm 1:1-3

Isaiah 32:17

Before I commence, let me pray,

*“May the words of my mouth and the
Meditation of my heart,
Be pleasing in your sight,
O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”*

Amen

Introduction

Our Bible Text for to-day is taken from Paul's letter to the Galatians (5:22-23) which reads, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."*

For the Christian, fruitfulness is a natural by-product of the life of Christ within us. As we abide in Him, certain things begin to grow instinctively within us. These we call the **"Fruit of the Spirit"**.

As we are talking about fruit to-day, let me begin by telling you three short stories about plum trees.

A Visit to an Orchard on the Queensland Granite Belt

Story 1 begins when I was at High School.

One of my closest friends was Barbara. In Year 11, Barbara and her family sold their Brisbane home and bought an orchard near Stanthorpe, which is up in the Granite Belt, in the mountains, about three hours south west of Brisbane. They lived in the little hamlet of Applethorpe, just outside of Stanthorpe. I loved going to visit. Sometimes my parents put me on the Greyhound Coach, other times they drove me. This particular day my Father drove me up to Applethorpe as we had been invited to Barbara's 21st Birthday party.

When we arrived, the plum trees were in season and the rows of plum trees in the orchard looked outstandingly lovely with their beautiful fruit waiting to be picked for market. As we pulled up, I remember my Father recalling with a twinkle in his eye that as a kid he had always dreamed of the day when he could stand under a real plum tree and pick a plum and eat it. His family was not very well off, so I doubt they had fruit too often. As Barbara and her family warmly greeted us, they said to my Dad, *"George, you go over there and you stand under a plum tree and you help yourself to as many plums as you like"*. And I remember Dad and I laughing and doing just that. Reflecting on that story over the week-end, I felt quite sad as I realised it was probably the last long trip my Dad and I did together, as he died very suddenly just a few months later, not too long before my 21st Birthday.

Camping Remote Gold Mining Town in the Victorian High Country

Much more recently, about 10 years ago, our son Tim took us and his two children, Liam and Caitlin, (who were very little then, they are teenagers now), camping in what is called the Dargo High Plains, in the Victorian High Country. It was beautiful and mountainous four-wheel drive country and we were heading for a camping ground at Talbotville which had once been a remote gold-mining town in the 1850's.

As Tim and Larry pitched the tents and got the camp-fire going, Liam and Caitlin and I went exploring. They enjoyed wading in the pristine mountain stream. Then, not too far away from our camp-fire we saw beautiful trees with what looked like large cherries on them. We discovered they were delicious small ripe plums, just waiting to be picked! The fruit was perfect, not a sign of a fruit fly or any imperfection. Right next to the plum trees was a fig tree loaded with figs! It kind of felt like walking into the Garden of Eden!

Later on, we came across the occasional rose bush amongst the native trees. It was really quite poignant when later I read an information board complete with photos, and realised the fruit trees and rose bushes were what was left from the community of early settlers who lived in this remote little town 150 years ago. One photo was of a group of them, dressed in their Sunday best gathering on a verandah for a Church Service. However, I found no evidence of their homes but I did find a fenced cemetery and grave stones. What a hard life those early settlers carved out. To finish the plum tree story, Liam and Caitlin collected a billy-can of ripe plums to take home, and we had fun making plum jam with them.

Mike Has a Plum Tree in his Garden

This is "Mike's Story". Mike has a plum tree in his garden. It is of good stock, was planted properly and has been fed and pruned. Yet, after several years, the most it has ever managed to produce is half-a-dozen plums. It is as fruit trees go, completely useless! Mike says there is nothing more useless than a "fruitless" fruit tree. And likewise, there is nothing more useless than a "fruitless" Christian.

Thankfully, God has made provision through His Holy Spirit for things to be very different. For through His Spirit, God wants to bring forth in our lives the fruitfulness that He had planned from the beginning.

Fruitfulness and the Purposes of God

From the very beginning, God's purpose was that both the world and the human race would be fruitful, thereby expressing something of the abundant heart of God. There are many mentions of fruitfulness right throughout the Bible, let's refer to a few of these.

- (1) At creation, God blessed the fish and the birds and said, *"Be fruitful and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth..."* (Genesis 1:22).
- (2) Fruitfulness in the Promised Land. The spies Moses sent to explore Canaan came back with the following report - *"We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit"* (Numbers 13:27).
- (3) Fruitfulness for the righteous. Here we turn to Psalm 1.1-3 *"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."*
- (4) And if we go right over to the Book of Revelation, we read of the fruitfulness of God's new creation. In Revelation 22:1-2, John is giving us a dazzling picture of the New Heaven and the New Earth, *"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."*

Fruitfulness, then, runs through God's purposes for his people from beginning to end. It should not surprise us to discover that the Spirit of our God who abounds in fruitfulness wants us to be fruitful too.

Good Trees, Good Fruit

Fruit in our lives is seen in various ways in the Bible. One of the main ways is to do with our words and actions, which are seen as **"fruit"** growing from our innermost being. Jesus taught that our true character is seen in our words and our actions and that you can recognise people **"by their fruit."** He says this in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 7:16: - ***"By their fruit you will know them."***

Fruit in our lives finds expression in a number of ways:

- the life we live
- the words we speak
- the service we offer
- the prayers we pray
- the witness we bear
- the gifts we give

The Fruit of the Spirit

Fruitfulness needs the help of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, it just becomes a matter of will and effort. This was what the Galatians were drifting into. They were forgetting that the Christian life can only be lived in the power of the Spirit. As we live by that Spirit, Paul says, old things have a way of dying and new things begin to grow. It was these new things that he described as the "fruit of the spirit", things that grow naturally when He is in command (Gal 5:22-25).

The nine **"fruits"** are actually seen as one, therefore Paul speaks of the **"fruit" (not "fruits")** of the Spirit. They are not like lollies in a "Pick 'n Mix Shop", where you take some and leave others. They all belong together, for they are all the result of the Spirit's work.

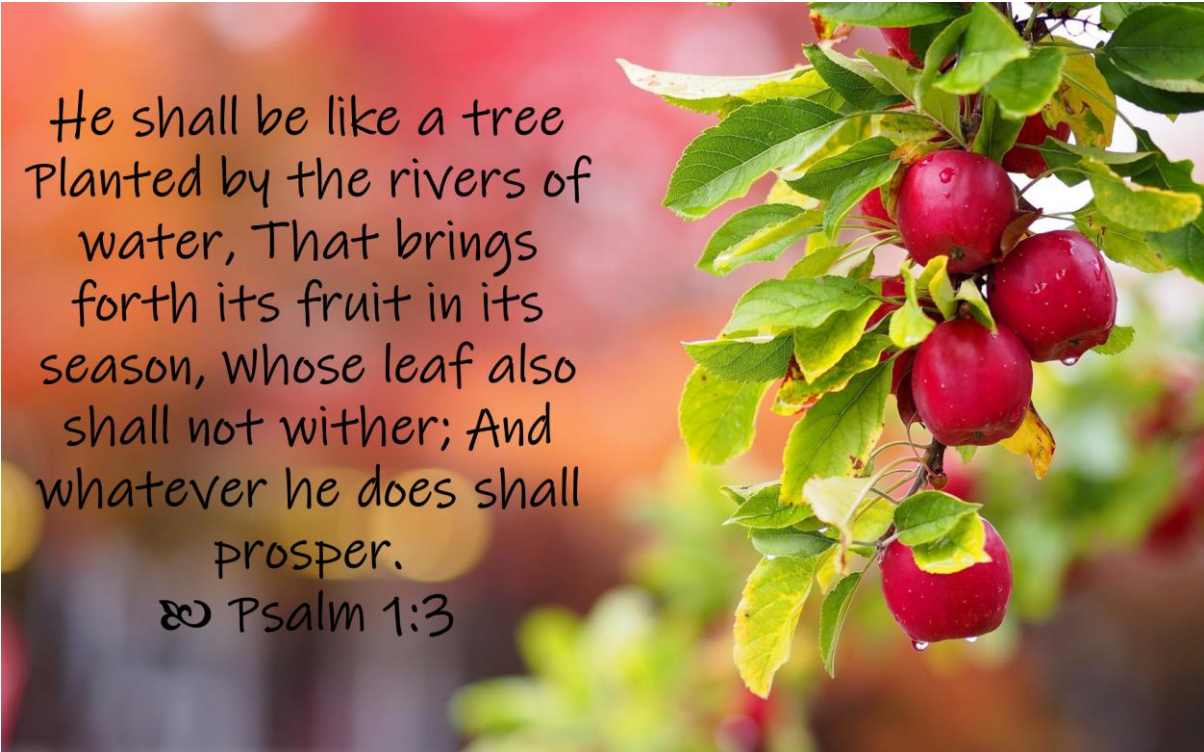
Note, too, that every one of them is a characteristic of God Himself. It is nothing less than His own nature that His Spirit is seeking to grow within us! How best should we describe these Fruit of the Spirit? I thought the descriptions beneath the pictures of the fruit on today's printed sheet had been thoughtfully chosen and appropriate. Let's turn to those for a moment and read them through.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with these words of Our Lord from John's Gospel (15:5). Jesus says, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit."*

I look forward to sharing with you further thoughts about these beautiful fruit of the Spirit, of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control when we meet next week.

Amen



He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of
water, That brings
forth its fruit in its
season, Whose leaf also
shall not wither; And
whatever he does shall
prosper.
☞ Psalm 1:3