

Opening: Recap of first two sermons

- We are really getting into fruit these days! A couple of weeks ago, we began a sermon series that examines Galatians 5:21-23- where in Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit.
 - We heard the scripture for the first time and we examined how the fruit is the result- the produce if you will—of God’s Holy Spirit working within us.
 - We learned that each of us is created to be fruitful.
 - We came to better understand that the fruit of the spirit is not a list of things that we are to be working on, hoping to get better at.
 - Rather, these “qualities of the fruit” are “the result” of the Spirit at work within us and through us.
 - The Spirit is the grower, at work in each of us, to make us fruitful.
 - And then we learned that each of us has all of these qualities- we don’t pick and choose them.
 - Some may come easier to us than others, but they are all there, inside us.
 - You own the whole fruit basket!
- The first fruit we examined was Love and we explored how the Spirit works within us to develop us into more loving people.
 - The fruit symbolizing love was an Apple—as expressed in the saying “the apple of my eye.”
 - Remember Sandra’s story about her challenge to pray for someone in our perimeter who wronged us or perhaps someone whom annoys us.
 - And she shared that as she prayed, those hard feelings began to evaporate and were replaced with feelings of love.
 - I was relieved to hear last week, how many of you thanked Sandra for praying for you, because I was pretty sure she might be talking about me.
 - And do you suppose Sandra is now wondering who might be praying for her?!!
 - It’s funny how that works, isn’t it?
- Last week we examined Joy and its symbolic fruit, the orange.
 - When we are filled with joy, we tend to view life as juicy, sweet and bright—so very satisfying.
 - Joy, just like oranges, are exceptionally good for you.
- Now before I get too far, I want to ask, how are you doing with your scripture memorization?

- I have to admit that memorizing scripture is not a strong skill for me, so you may have to bear with me as I struggle to learn even a mere two sentences.
- And remember that we have a prize for anyone who memorizes Galatians 5:22-23.
 - I believe the prizes have been received and to claim your prize, you can simply come to me or Sandra and recite the scripture.
- So, let's give this a try, shall we? We're going to read this together. You can find it on page 191 of your pew Bible, or you can save the trouble of finding it, by turning to the back cover of your bulletin, where you'll find it printed in green lettering.
 - Or if you're one of those brave souls, who think you've already memorized the scripture, why don't you try saying it from memory.
- Regardless of how you do it, I'd invite you to join me for our third scripture from Galatians 5:22-23.
- Scripture: By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

What is peace?

- So today, we're looking at Peace.
- These days the word peace is used in a variety of contexts.
 - Peace is a word used to bless another person.
 - Here in worship, each Sunday, we quote scripture, offering a blessing to one another, when we say "Peace be with you."
 - Sometimes peace is used as a caution to keep silent—as when someone might say "Hold your peace".
 - Peace is frequently the subject of the music we listen to.
 - "Let there be peace on earth" and "Give peace a chance" are cultural icons, representative of our longing to achieve a state of peace.
 - And to some, peace means bringing about social and economic reform.
 - In the Peace Corps, volunteers organize around a common mission of improving the lives of people across the world.
- **But just how do we define peace as it relates to the fruit of the Spirit?**
 - Is it the absence of conflict?
 - Harmonious relationships, perhaps?
 - Maybe it's the general security of our being?
 - I don't think any of those on their own, hit the mark.
 - Peace which results from the fruit of the Spirit is more than just the absence of strife or struggles.
 - The fruit of the Spirit is peace which lives in us, even in the midst of struggles.
- If you attend Christmas Eve worship here, you know that we conclude worship by lighting candles and singing the hymn "Silent Night".

- As we sing the words “all is calm, all is bright,” we light the candle of the person next to us.
- The sanctuary, initially dark, becomes brighter and brighter, as candle, after candle is lit – symbolic of the light of Christ.
- And one can feel the Spirit’s peace.
 - That whatever you may be going through in life, as the light of Christ enters the sanctuary and passes from person to person, chasing away the darkness, there is this wholesome, nurturing, nourishing peace.
- That’s the kind of peace we’re talking about here.
 - It’s Shalom.
 - It’s everything is as it should be.
- And this Peace isn’t something which we work on or that we instantly have.
 - It’s something that when we allow God’s Holy Spirit to work within us, the Spirit begins to change our hearts.
 - And it gives us a new perspective and we begin to find that perfect peace.

Things we worry about (some of us are natural born worriers)

- Now, Sandra mentioned that each of us has all the fruit’s characteristics, albeit that some come easier than others.
 - And some of us are natural born worriers—we just worry more than others.
 - And most of us can find things to worry about, which invade our peace.
 - As young adults, we may place our worry on romantic relationships.
 - Then as we become established in life, we find other things to worry about.
 - If we’re raising a family, we worry about our kids.
 - We worry about our careers and how to move up the corporate ladder.
 - We worry about finances—about having enough to live on.
 - We worry about getting our piece of the American pie.
 - As we grow older and reach our golden years, our focus may change to worrying about our health.
 - Or about loneliness and companionship.
 - We worry about not being a burden to our families.
- **The point is we can find all sorts of things to worry about in life.**
 - Seven years ago, I was hired to lead a company that was losing a lot of money.
 - Things were bad and most people didn’t expect that the company to survive.
 - Back then, I worried about having to reduce the size of our staff.
 - I worried, how we would make payroll?
 - I feared that I might fail and then we’d all lose our jobs.

- Well, seven years later, the company is still here and things are good—the best they’ve been in seven years.
 - And you’d think, I’d stop worrying so much.
 - But I’ve just replaced those old worries with new ones.
 - Now, I worry about how we maintain our financial strength.
 - I worry about having enough staff.
 - It seems like in bad times or good, I still find things to worry about!
- **I turned 60 this past week and I received the coolest gift from kids.**
 - It’s a birthday book from the New York Times, containing the front page covers over the years, for my day – May 17th.
 - And I love looking at the front pages and seeing what was going on in our world, on my birthday, over the years.
 - And I thought I’d share just a few of the interesting things I noticed.
 - In 1960 the headline read “U.S.-Soviet clash disrupts summit talks.”
 - In 1974 “Impeachment panel hears evidence on hush money.”
 - In 1980, there’s an article about cutting the flow of refugees from Cuba.
 - In 1992 there’s the headline “North Korean site has A-bomb hints.”
 - In 2003 “U.S. sees signs of revived Al Qaeda.”
 - You may have noticed, what I noticed.
 - The things we worry about today doesn’t seem to have changed in 60 years.
- Do you see yourself anywhere in this picture?
 - Is it possible that any of these worries, your worries?
- In the parable of the sower, Jesus speaks about this kind of worry when he tells about the seeds which fell among the weeds and the thorns grew up and choked them out. (Matthew 13:1-23)
 - He said “This is like one who hears the word, but the cares of the world choke out the word and it yields nothing.”
 - We long for peace. We long for Shalom, and yet worries consume us and choke out that peace.

The fruit of Peace: the watermelon

- The fruit of peace is like a Watermelon.
 - Inside the watermelon is this fruit that is really good for you.
 - It’s juicy, sweet and refreshing and it tastes amazing.
 - It’s good for you. It hydrates your body and provides nutrition.
 - Yet, inside there are also seeds, which are a bit of a nuisance.
 - They can be a real pain, very frustrating.

- And if we allow these seeds to dominate our focus, they frustrate the enjoyment we get from eating the fruit.
 - Similarly, if we allow the seeds of conflict, fear and struggle to become the focus of our lives, worry enters in and chokes out the peace which nourishes our souls.

What do we do when our peace is invaded?

- What are we to do then, when conflicts and fears and struggles invade our peace?
 - **In Matthew 6**, Jesus reminds us that our focus should be on the Kingdom of God within us, not on external things around us.
 - He says “Do not worry. Why do you worry about what you will eat or drink? The birds in the air don’t store away food and yet our Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”
- In his letter to the believers in Philippi, the Apostle Paul also offers an answer.
 - “Do not worry about anything,” he says, “but in everything by prayer and petition with THANKSGIVING let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)
 - Now you might envision Paul, relaxing in a sunny meadow, gazing out at the flowers as he pens these words.
 - But Paul was sitting in a Roman dungeon when he wrote these words and he knew that he would either be released or executed.
 - Yet, he had peace.
 - The Spirit had given him a peace which surpasses all understanding.

Prayer is the answer

- Have you noticed that prayer keeps showing up each time we talk about the fruit of the Spirit?
 - If we’re paying attention, we can see the strong connection between prayer and the Spirit bearing fruit in us.
 - And that’s because in prayer, we stop “worrying” about things around us and start focusing on the Spirit at work within us.
 - It’s that Spirit that shows us peace and helps us gain perspective of our lives.
- And so, I’ll echo Sandra and encourage you to pray every day, seeking to allow the Holy Spirit to work through you, to produce good fruit.
 - How might your perspective change, if each morning, before your feet even touch the floor, you were to simply pray
 - “Holy Spirit, I want to love as you love.”
 - “I want to experience joy in whatever life brings my way.”
 - “I want peace that passes understanding.”
 - “And I need you in the center of my life.”
 - How might that simple prayer change your life?
- This past week, I was talking with a friend of mine, who was having a rough week.

- She'd received some rather discouraging news.
- And as we were talking, she said "I'm so thankful that God brought me to my church. I truly believe that God led me to that place."
- "Because there is where we find peace and I have the love and support which will see me through life's challenges."
- Now, she had plenty to worry about, but there was no fear in her voice. She wasn't overwhelmed with worry.
- And that's the way it is when the Spirit works in you and gives you peace.
- When we face life's challenges, it the confidence that God walks with us, that gives us peace.

Wrap it up

- That kind of peace, is the fruit which comes from the Spirit at work in us.
 - The Spirit helps us, not by changing our circumstances, but by changing our perspective about our circumstances, to give us peace.
- We can find a million things to worry about and yet, in the end, God says "Will you just trust me?"
 - "I called you by name and you are mine."
 - "And when you pass through the waters- even in the worst of circumstances."
 - "I'm holding on to you, and I won't let go of you."
- GOD HAS YOU AND WON'T LET GO.
 - The fruit of that Spirit is peace which says, "God is in charge of my life, and I trust God, no matter what."
- When we allow the Spirit to work through us and transform us:
 - Our prayers turn from trouble to thanksgiving.
 - Our fear turns to faith.
 - And we receive peace which surpasses all understanding.
- Amen