

Date: May 17, 2009

Title: In Celebration of the Fruit

Scripture:

Colossians 1:3-14 (NRSV) ³In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel ⁶that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. ⁷This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit. ⁹For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. ¹¹May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Our scripture comes from a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Colossi. Paul is writing to the Colossians to encourage them to stay in the path of Christ. He is, in this letter, responding to a heresy that was threatening the church, but he begins this letter with words of encouragement thereby emphasizing the positive while also addressing the negative.

I have chosen the particular passage of this letter because the encouraging part seems to fit with what we are hoping to accomplish with God in our church these days.

Paul is speaking of a church that has been touched by the Spirit of the Lord. They have experienced the love of Christ in their midst and Paul is telling them that he is also praying that the love they feel for and from Christ will expand from something they are feeling to a deeper wisdom and understanding.

When you think about it, this is the natural course of most relationships isn't it? I mean when two people are falling in love with each other, often times the first thing they experience is an emotional feeling of attraction or infatuation and once a bond has been formed the relationship moves into another phase where the two people begin to learn about the other person and try to find out how best to further develop the relationship.

Paul is telling the Colossians that they have experienced the love of Christ and now his prayer is that they will be able to move to the next phase of their relationship which includes knowing and understanding God's will more completely.

Now, it doesn't stop there either, the process continues. Once the Colossians have the love and begin to grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding, the next step comes in the form of a life that is lived pleasing to God bearing fruit in all that one does. As the individual lives a life pleasing to God that individual grows in the strength of God. The way I see this is that it is a big circle that spirals upward as we go:

Love God
 Grow in knowledge and wisdom
 Bear fruit
 Grow stronger.

Love God more
 Grow further in knowledge and wisdom
 Bear more fruit
 Grow even stronger.

And the overwhelming thread that runs through all of this is an internal peace that allows us to endure all things with a mature patience in all circumstances. And when we have that peace, we are able to put our lives more clearly into perspective. We see all that God has done for us including rescuing us from our sins, including guiding us and helping us to make critical decisions, including inviting us to participate in the process of bearing fruit, and we cannot help but feel grateful and want to celebrate all that God has done in our lives.

This is a very good description of the path an individual takes in their lives, but in order for this process to continue to its full possibilities, we must be engaged in the process with other people. So, the same process that helps us to grow and mature in Christ as individuals is at work corporately in our church. When we gather and work together with other people we find that we are better able to move through our own personal process and the group of people with whom we join, becomes Christ's church.

We are a local church existing here in Fountain, but we are also a part of the greater United Methodist Church that is connected through our Rocky Mountain Conference and through our General Conference. This makes us a part of a group of Christians over 8 million strong here in the United States but this group is only the tip of the iceberg. When we consider all of the other protestant and Roman Catholic churches throughout the world, we begin to see that the collective potential to bear fruit for God is enormous.

Of course, we also know that many of our Christian brothers and sisters down through the ages have done things and even today do things that cast a shadow on the church. Sometimes the very people we mean to help are served fruit that is either bitter or rotten. Regrettably, when this happens the process gets interrupted.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul means to protect the church from seeking things other than Christ. He goes on to further instruct and encourage the church in Colossi with some specific instructions and some more general instructions, but, Paul seems to return to the theme he started with. Listen to how he touches on similar points in chapter 2: vs. 6, 7:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Paul continues to talk about wisdom and knowledge, but this time in verses 8,9 he tells the Colossians what to avoid:

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have come to fullness in him, Col 2:6-10 (NRSV)

I think that Paul is talking to us just as he was talking to the Colossians. He is telling us to keep up the good work. He is telling us to continue to sink the roots of our faith into the love of Jesus, and to water and nourish our faith with study and prayer so that we might continue to grow in knowledge and wisdom. He's telling us to avoid false wisdom so that we can "come to fullness in Him," and continue to bear fruit where ever we are.

And ever-so-often, it is important for us to take some time to look back at what God has accomplished through us and it's important to **celebrate** it! We must remember and not forget to go right to the source and give God thanks. For, indeed it is God who has been at work in our lives and in our church. It is God who has rescued us from the powers of darkness and empowered us to move forward with our lives in ministry to all the world.

Today as we have made our pledges to support this church with our finances and with our time and talents, let us celebrate the fruit that God has empowered us to bear and let our commitment to the stewardship of this church be part of our celebration; a gesture of gratitude for all that God continues to do in and through our lives and our church.

Let's keep up the good work:

Keep loving God
Keep growing in knowledge and wisdom
 And by all means **keep** bearing fruit for God.

It will make us stronger. It will make us better disciples. It will make us a better church. For the glory of God, Let's keep it going! Amen.