

**“Good Fruit”
Galatians 5:16 – 23**

“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

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.”

So I think I’ve asked this question before, but when you think back on your conversion experience, back to your coming into a relationship with Jesus as your King and forgiver, what was it like?

Was it like an alarm clock moment.

One moment you’re in a deep spiritual slumber – the things of God and the person of God don’t interest you.

The next moment you’re wide awake and the world has changed!

“Rangi had a wretched background: 20 bitter years of rejection, drugs, gangs, prostitution and fractured relationships. Rangi came into our lives as a neighbour, then a friend, at a point when he was re-assessing his life. There appeared to be a spiritual openness. He was lonely, and most days wanted to talk. Over the weeks, the Word was gently seeded into his life. He was lent a New Testament, and he began to devour it. The Spirit prompted some to pray for him. One night, on his own, Rangi prayed to become a Christian.

The next day he asked “Does God somehow speak into our thoughts? Today I was sitting in the car at the lights and I was about to yell and curse at a woman – but suddenly I felt like God was telling me not to. Does that happen?”

“What did you do?”

“I said ‘sorry’ to God. Is that the right thing to do?”

Rangi then interrupted himself, and asked: “these flowers in this garden, how long have they been there?”

“The whole time you have lived here.”

“No, I have never seen them before. They’re beautiful.”

For the next few days, as he drove around on his Harley, Rangi saw the beauty of the world like he had not seen it for a long time.

A few days later, Rangi unilaterally decided to come to church. He was too shy to come in. A young man spotted him hanging around outside, and coaxed him in. Many in the congregation enfolded Rangi in their love, and the church became his whanau.

A few months on, Rangi very movingly gave account of faith in Christ. I had neglected to brief him on the appropriate responses to the baptismal vows: to the three questions he answered “for sure”, “sweet as”, “no sweat”.

Later, Rangi’s past caught up with him, and he went to prison. The congregation prayed for him, visited him weekly, and eventually welcomed him back.”¹

So some are alarm clock Christians.

It’s like black and white, night and day.

Who can relate?

For others it was like waking up on a sleepy lockdown morning...

It’s slow process, half asleep and half awake, until eventually you know another day has begun.

The morning light gradually poked in through the curtains and then the curtains are pulled across to reveal a bright sunny morning.

Anyone here like that?

That is the story of many people who have grown up in Christian families.

Eventual though a decision was made to that this is no longer my parents faith or even my grandparents faith, but my own.

For some that happens in the bedroom.

For many it happens at camps.

However it happens, what has happened in those moments, we come into this beautiful relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We are made children of our Father in heaven.

We receive pardon through His Son and come under His kingship, his good rule.

We receive love, acceptance and grace like we’ve never experienced before.

And something else happens as well – we receive new life.

Another life can comes to live in our lives and that life is the Holy Spirit.

¹ Stuart Lange, “Does Christian Conversion Still Occur”, *Candour Magazine* 4 (2006), 21.

Last week was Pentecost – which is described in Acts 2 – where the Holy Spirit was poured out on everyone who believed in Jesus, not just one or two.

So we looked at how, perhaps what many of us need is a fresh encounter with the Holy Spirit, this life that has come to live in our lives.

I mentioned too in passing that when the Spirit is at active in our lives He does a multi-dimensional work.

We receive enabling to give witness to our faith.

We are given gifts, not natural abilities that arise out of who we are but out of who He is.

We can also experience radical life-change, like Rangi.

It's one of the key ways the Christian life is described, whether you had an alarm clock experience or a slow waking up.

And that's what our passage picks up on this morning.

There is fruit of a changed life that the Spirit produces in us.

These virtues, these attributes - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – are evidence of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit comes into our lives to bring about the good, to bring about the best. He doesn't want to extinguish your personality – some people really fear that – He wants infuse these your personality and character with Himself.

And who wouldn't want to say "Yes!" to that.

But we know simply from experience that's not always easy.

And Paul gives an honest assessment of the human predicament.

“For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other...”

There is a conflict in your life and in my life.

Now, when Paul's is talking about the “flesh” he is *not* talking about our human physicality.

I mean, Jesus himself we're told in John chapter 1 became flesh and blood and dwelt among us.²

² John 1:14

And when he rose from the dead, Jesus wasn't just a spirit; he had a body. You can read about that at the end of Luke chapter 24.

Then when he ascended to his Father, again it was as a person with a human body.

Your body matters and what you do with your body matters.

So here, when Paul is talking about the 'flesh', it's a term that refers to our fallen condition, our lower nature, that is in rebellion to God.

Another way of putting it is this: there are some people who are living a *self*-referencing lives, where they call the shots. It's all about the self.

The acts of the sinful nature is to have a self-referencing life where it's about pleasing yourself.

So we find areas that we people in our world today would struggle with.

Sexual immorality. There *is* something, for example, called "sexual immorality" among consenting adults. There is a line, and we could debate where that line is, but the line is there.

There's debauchery, which it's like someone has thrown off any restraint, anything goes, especially in the sexual area.

There's idolatry; taking the good things of life and making them ultimate things.

But it's not just the 'big' stuff.

I mean, it talks about areas that some people don't even blink an eyelid at: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness... and the like.

In another letter he talks about bitterness and greed and slander and anger.

And these come with a warning:

"I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Now, at this point, some Christians get concerned.

They say, you know there are times when I have not been at my best self.

They worry that their lives are

When you live self-referencing life, these traits can become *fixed* in our lives.

It's like someone has jealousy, but then because they haven't dealt with it, they become jealousy.

It becomes ingrained in who they are and how they operate.

So that's the bad news.

There is good news.

Paul reassures us that when the Spirit of God resides in us – when we live Christ-referencing life - there will be these virtues, these attributes that make your life beautiful.

“How do you tell if the fruit of the Spirit is growing in your life?”

What’s the measure?

Where do you look?

One is by doing some navel gazing.

“I’ll spend some time reflecting on the state of my life, and I’ll pick up on them”

There is some value in that with the Spirit’s help.

But the fruit that the Holy Spirit intends for lives is contrast with ‘acts’ of the flesh.

In other words, these character qualities, these virtues, ethical traits, these divine attributes have to have legs on them.

So what I’ve found is that that true test for whether the fruit of the Spirit is in your life is found in community – with others.

Take patience - older versions use the word ‘longsuffering’.

I had this last weekend. I was heading to the Super Rugby match in Hamilton and headed through the Karangaheke Gorge when the traffic came to a standstill.

There had been a serious accident and cars were turning around, and as they came past they said there would be at least a two hour wait.

So I had to turn around and go back through Katikati and go over the Kaimai.

You suddenly notice how slow other drivers are! 60 in a 70 Km zone. 70 in an 80 km area.

(If that’s you, please don’t do it – I don’t know how much more patience I can grow 😊).

For you it might be at... the supermarket.

We’ve all been there.

You come to check out time and, if you have more than 12 items, you look to see which row is going fastest.

Come on, confession time! 😊.

So you pick a queue and you watch the other queues...

Then you that a person that would have been behind you is on you way!

Then another. And you then you notice the person and the check-out operator are having a grand catch up about Aunty Mertle.

It's found in the significant relationships.

If you want to know where there are growth areas, if you have a significant other, ask them. Your response will be revealing.

Or if you have a child or an parent.

The fruit of the Spirit community – with others – and especially this community called the church.

It doesn't take long to be in a church community and find yourself disappointed.

And it's not even the grievous stuff that reaches the media.

It's people who've been saved by sheer grace trying to walk the road of life following Jesus.

Sometimes it's a group of people you want to be done with and then you're reminded that the fruit of the Spirit is... love and faithfulness.

It's also when we have those difficult people in our lives.

I mean, it's easy to be kind until someone is unkind to you.

It's easy to think you're peaceful presence until someone until someone in antagonistic in your life.

And you might be that difficult person.

I'm a competitive person by nature and in the Summer months, touch rugby was my game of choice.

If my teammates stuffed up, I let them know! I didn't sweat at them, but I didn't hold back either. I was not kind, I was in fact very unkind and actually quite harsh.

I say that to my shame.

What about in your worst moments.

In your best moments it is easy to breeze along.

It the tough, terrible moments, stuff rises to the surface.

So what do you do?

The fruit are not the fruit of trying hard.

They are the fruit of *the Spirit*.

If you "walk by the Spirit... you will not gratify the desires of flesh"

You have to ask, what is Jesus drawing your attention to through His Spirit, even this morning?

When it came apparent that I was not a good, patient, kind person on the sports field, I had to pay attention.

I had to go to Jesus for pardon, for forgiveness – and actually to some others – and ask forgiveness.

Alongside that I had open up those areas to the Holy Spirit and ask Him to do His in me.

Now I am a more patient, kind person on the sports field (find out today at 2 pm at Moore Park😊).

To put it another way, you've got to become a gardener.

You've got to nurture the good with the help of the Holy Spirit.

It's means being attentive; it's means asking this other Life to bring His life to the areas where need you to grow. It's doing that which you need to do to see the fruit grow.

I'll finish with this: what season are you in?

Most fruit are seasonal and so there are certain times of the year when you look forward to say, apricots or nectarines or peaches or plums.

And though for us the fruit are every day and all year round, I do think there are some times in our life's – some seasons – when certain fruit of the Spirit are to come to the fore or the Spirit wants to grow a greater amount in that area.

Is a season where there's a relationship in your life where a fruit of the Spirit needs to come to the fore?

Is it season of struggling through with a difficult person in your life, or if you are honest you're the difficult person the moment.

The Lord, the Spirit, hasn't finished with you, He hasn't finished with you.

He wants to make you into a beautiful person, and if you are a beautiful person, He wants to make you even more beautiful.

So what is the Spirit saying to you this morning?