

"Fruit of the Spirit"
Galatians 5:1, 13-26
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The Fruit of the Spirit overcomes the hubris of the flesh

White house scandal. Late night internet. Today's headlines. Some think that by the word flesh, Paul writes exclusively of those private, individual, things that harm us.

But some say this only part of what Paul is talking about. After all, Paul is not writing to an individual, but to the churches of Galatia. And Paul writes about immorality only in passing. He does not focus exclusively on things which destroy individuals. Instead, he focuses on things which destroy community. Enmity, strife, and jealousy. Anger, quarrels, and dissensions. Factions, competition, and envy. In a word, hubris. All of us have succumbed to hubris. You, me, all of us. We cannot help ourselves. An attitude of hubris that is the product of our hormones, the way we are raised, and what we see on TV. I believe the "desires of the flesh" to which Paul refers is not just sexual immorality. It is also that which destroys relationship. Hubris.

And the Fruit of the Spirit overcomes the hubris of the flesh. Paul writes that God's Spirit influences us to respond to conflict with the fruit of peace of the Spirit. Not tit for tat, but with the fruit of gentleness of Spirit. Not eye for an eye, but with the fruit of self control. Even in the face of revenge, scorn, and spite, fruit of the Spirit. Not hubris. Fruit of the Spirit. This is hard for any of us to do by ourselves. But God sends his Son to show us how.

Jesus gives us freedom to live in a new community

A boy, frustrated with all the rules at his house, asks his father, "Dad, how soon will I be old enough to do as I please?" His father answered, "I don't know. Nobody has lived that long yet." This is the Sunday before Independence Day, but Paul's letter is not a 4th of July speech. Yes, our country won its freedom from tyranny, at the price of the lives of our ancestors. But today, I believe Paul speaks of a

different kind of freedom, at the price of the life of Jesus. A different kind of freedom. I believe Paul speaks here neither of rugged individualism nor of inner liberty.

Paul speaks of our freedom to form a new community. Not freedom to "do as I please." Freedom to think outside the box. Freedom to form a new community. A community where demographic disparity is overcome by reaching out and bringing in outsiders to communion at one table. A community that reaches out and touches the people who live nearby. Of building a community that is the body of Jesus in the here and now. A community of people from all demographics. Of baby-boomers, and generation X ers. Of generation Y ers. Of empty nesters. Of retirees. And of young children. Yes, of young children.

Risk and responsibility are dirty words. They require commitment to a cause other than one's own household. Pastor Joanna Adams says, "To be free really means to be liberated from the prison of 'me, myself, and I.'" To be truly free is to take risks and move beyond the self. To stretch. To stretch out into the surrounding community and provide services they need. As someone once said, "To move into the risk of love and to move into sacrifice." To think beyond my own demographic, and think of those in other life stages. To be free FOR responsibility, not free FROM responsibility. To be free FOR risk, not free FROM risk. Free for taking risk in service to God and humanity. Service in Guatemala. Service at Downtown Presbyterian. And service in our own neighborhood. I think of Jesus, who had everything in the world going for him - power, status, safety - how he chose, freely chose, to empty himself and take on the form of a servant for the sake of the world. Now that is freedom of choice.

Jesus gives us freedom to live in a new community. In gratitude for Jesus setting us free from fear, shame, and bitterness, it is our pleasure to continue Jesus' ministry in our world today. The body of Jesus which brings good news to the poor, proclaims release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, lets the oppressed go free, and proclaims the year of the Lord's favor. The Lord's favor for all, those who walk with canes, and those who are so young they have never walked. The year of the Lord's favor for all. Jesus gives us freedom to live in a new community. But this is hard. So we look to God's Spirit for strength to take risk and take on extra responsibility.

The strength needed to courageously put on the clothes of Jesus' ministry to others.

Spirit living is sufficient

Christian freedom is not self-indulgence. Instead, Jesus set us free to love and to serve. We are never so free as when we are serving Jesus by serving others. When we don't use our freedom for love and service, we behave in ways that destroy community. Biting, devouring, and consuming each other through quarrels, jealousy, divisions, anger, and envy. Our Christian freedom means love and service for the entire community, which means taking risk.

Pastor Michael Davis tells the story of a troubled church which fights like cats and dogs from April to September. But in October, when the cold weather sets in, and they open their church to Nashville's Room in the Inn for the homeless, they focus outside themselves. When focusing outside themselves, when taking risk in service to others, they find true joy and are at peace.

In every age, then in Galatia, and now in Brentwood, we are called to live by the Spirit. When we live by the Spirit, we do not restrict our Christian freedom. Remembering the Spirit "goes where it wills", we are open to risk and imagination. We do not narrow the definition of what it means to be a Christian but expand it, so that our love and service--our freedom--extends to more and more people. Maybe even to the children of Guatemala. Maybe even to the homeless in Downtown Presbyterian's soup kitchen. And who knows, maybe even to the children of our own neighborhood.

Conclusion

Hubris, pride of ownership, financial security, exclusion, and self-indulgence destroy community. But self-emptying, sacrificial, risk-taking, and inclusive love builds community. Through such risk taking love we form community. Through such risk taking love we build up a church. Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and the people say

I am going to ask you to turn in your hymnal to # 564, and stand and sing with me.