

Fruits of the Spirit

Love

Joy

Peace

Patience

Kindness

Goodness

Faithfulness

Gentleness

Self control

In the Manse garden we have a beautiful apple tree, and at this time of year it is bearing wonderful fruit.

We have been collecting the apples from it, and Susan has been passing them on to the coffee shop for apple pies! Mmm!

As you can see there are still apples to get from the top of the tree!

Today we start a series of sermons on the *Fruits of the Spirit*. This is the series of harvest so it's good for us to consider the fruits that we should display as Christians.

These fruits were first highlighted by the Apostle Paul to the Church in Galatia.

Firstly, he speaks of the lowest base of human nature, and then he speaks of the highest point that we can reach. From the depths to the heights.

For most of us we are somewhere in between in the scale, but the Apostle Paul would want us to step up and be the best we can and demonstrate the best of God's fruits.

Today we need to be people who demonstrate the fruits of the spirit in our lives, and especially over these next few months as we live in such uncertain times.

As Christians, let us be fruitful in our actions and in our words, and so today we begin this amazing journey over the next nine weeks of discovering who we can be, who should be, and will be, through the life of Jesus Christ.

No-one was ever more conscious of the dichotomy that exists in human beings than the Apostle Paul, and what I've realised in life is that the longer you live, the more you become aware of this dichotomy.

As the soldier in Stuart Kennedy's poem once said

*I'm a man and a man's a mixture
 Right down from his very birth
 For part of him comes from heaven
 And part of him comes from earth.*

The earthly side of our nature.

The Apostle writes, *this is*

Immorality

Filthy and indecent actions

Worship of idols and witchcraft

Fighting

Jealousy

Anger

Selfish ambitions

Cliques

Abuse of our bodies and our relationships, through self gratification.

Paul is very strong in condemning those actions. Those who do these things will not possess the Kingdom of heaven.

Why?

Because they are not living with Christ in their hearts. Remember he is not simply addressing the world at large but he is addressing the Church in Corinth.

Those who live this way are serving a different master, the god of this world.

But the true Christian is serving, and living for, Christ. Christ sets the standards and the bench mark for us all to follow.

The first three fruits of the spirit are love, joy and peace...a beautiful triad of general Christian virtues.

All three point towards God.

The fruits of the spirit begin with our relationship with God.

There is a story in the Gospel of a woman who came to Jesus in the house of a Pharisee called Simon. **Luke 7:47**, *and she kneels before Jesus and pours perfume over his feet much to the annoyance of the religious teacher.*

⁴⁰ Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

⁴¹ "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii,^[a] and the other fifty. ⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

⁴⁴ Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

The woman had experienced God's love through Jesus, and now she was prepared to demonstrate how much Jesus meant to her. She was filled with his love. Simon should have known better, his life was filled with rules and so he limits his love for Jesus.

This is where the fruit of the spirit begins.

How much do we love Jesus?

Do we know what he has done for us?

Have we known his forgiveness?

Have we known release from guilt?

Do we know that we have been accepted into God's family through his grace?

Do we know that he has paid the price for all our debts?

When we do then we will want to bear fruit.

To become like him and demonstrate in our lives...something of his love to others.

When we experience God's love in our hearts, we will want to love God with all our heart and strength and mind, and love our neighbour, then we will be filled with joy and we will live a life of peace.

So our first fruit begins with Love, and that is our theme this morning.

The New Testament word for love is the Greek word *agape*. In Greek there are four different words for love, - *eros*, *philia*, *storge* and *agape*.

Agape is a beautiful word, and it means unconquerable benevolence. It means that no matter what people may do to us, through insult or injury or humiliation, we will never seek anything but their highest good.

This fruit is at the top of the tree. This is summit of the mountain – the highest and best fruit to have, for when we have love we have everything.

It describes the deliberate effort never to seek anything but the best for those who seek the worst in us.

John Stott comments that *It is amazing to think that this Greek word agape was not previously in common use but was taken into the Greek of the NT, specifically because of the love of God seen in Jesus of Nazareth.*

This speaks volumes for the impact that Jesus made on his world. *Agape* is what Christ looks like.

The word was introduced into common use to describe the actions of Jesus Christ, there were no actual words to describe the sacrificial life that Jesus lived.

God's love completely transcends all human ideas or expressions of love. It is a love for the utterly unworthy, a love which proceeds from a God who is love. It is a love lavished on others without a thought of whether they are worthy to receive it or not. It proceeds rather from the nature of the lover, than from any merit in the beloved. “ Morris.

Story of Les Mis.

Love changes us.

1 Cor 13 is the chapter all about love and I would like us think about this for a few moments.

The words in **1 Cor 13** humble us as Christians, they cut us down to size because we begin to see what really matters to God. The previous chapter was about spiritual gifts and powerful individuals but this chapter brings the church to its knees and addresses what a church should be like.

Paul is basically saying, in chapter 13, that all the spiritual gifts that we think that we might possess are useless and a waste of time without love.

Love is to be the hallmark and the stamp of every Christian congregation... *without love* writes Paul *we are nothing*...

Of course Paul's letter is written to a specific people at a specific time, and in Corinth there were many devotees of Greek mystery cults and they would march through the streets chanting and beating a drum and clashing cymbals. Paul is challenging this super spiritual church to realise that all their spiritual gifts, without love, are just like the

godless devotees of the false religions of their day, making a loud noise but at the end of the day there is no substance to their faith, because there is no love.

He also challenges those who speak in tongues, if they are using this for their own benefit and not for the purpose of building people up in love, then it's worthless.

Paul gets into the heart of his thoughts in v 4-7 where he describes what love looks like.

Yes, love is a fruit of the spirit but what does this mean?

Paul uses verbs to describe love. A loving person will behave in a certain way and do a certain thing because of the kind of person that they are becoming, through the love of God shed abroad in her heart through the holy spirit.

These qualities that Paul described need to be at the heart of every Christian community and especially at this time of national crisis.

The church should shine.

Where else are we going to hear these values promoted openly today – who else is going to guide us in the ways of *agape* love?

These verbs are in the present continuous tense, writes John Stott, denoting actions and attitudes which have become habitual, ingrained gradually by constant repetition. He writes that they sound ordinary, obvious, almost banal; but they are probably the most difficult to cultivate.

It is not coincidental that these verbs describe Jesus himself. Substitute Jesus for the word love and you will get a picture of him, substitute your name and hopefully you will catch a vision of who you are becoming in Christ.

Paul describes love by telling us that it is patient and kind and then he tells us what love is not. It is not jealous or conceited or proud. Love is not ill mannered or irritable or keeps a record of wrongs. It is not happy with evil.

So, we get to know what love is not, and Paul is describing the situation that he sees in the Church in Corinth. Doesn't sound like a very happy church.

What could be their problem? Where have they gone wrong?

Well, they have become self centred...it's all about them and what they want.

They had become complicit in all the things that love was not, and Paul gently reminds them that love is simply two things...patience and kindness.

These are the fruits of a follower of Christ.

These are the fruits that are important to God in his church. Where are the people of Corinth now, what has lasted of their legacy – nothing...they are long gone but you see in the words of Shakespeare that we learned at school, the good lives on.

That's what we will be remembered for when we are gone...not *did we win this argument*, or *did we shout louder than our neighbour*...no we will be remembered for our patience and kindness...those who have passed from our midst will be remembered fondly for the quality of lives they lived amongst us.

When I come to do a eulogy for a member, what I will speak about at the end of the day is the type of person that they were, and of the fruit that they exhibited in their lives.

So we as Christians are in a spiritual battle against the earthly side of our nature that would continually pull us away from God, with disputes and envy and keeping score of everyone's wrongs – no said Paul, there is another way for God's people and that is to be patient and kind, because love will never fail, love will always triumph, and that's good news for us as Christians, because at the end of the day, when God calls in his kingdom, what is going to last? One thing.... and that is love and it's a special love, it is the love of Jesus.... *agape* – a love that goes to the cross for others.

Every church needs the love of Christ and without this love at the heart of all that we are doing, we will fail. But if we have love at the centre of our church, then we will go forward because Paul said, *love never fails*....

Love accepts people for who they are; doesn't make judgements on them, because who are we to judge?..... only a righteous God can do that. This type of love needs to be cultivated in our souls. It is an act of will.

We have to seek to place God's love into our lives and into our hearts and this takes work; it takes prayer, it takes reading God's word, it takes putting the message of Jesus at the forefronts of our loves; it is about taking up our cross and prioritising Jesus as the way, truth and life.

It may take hard work but it is the way of eternal blessing.

For love is eternal, it will never end, and this one sentence is arguably one of the greatest in the bible, love is eternal or as the psalmist puts it, love is deeper than the deepest sea and higher than the heavens – God's forgiveness is beyond our comprehension – his forgiveness is wider than east from west - limitless and available to us all.

Come to Christ and know your sins are forgiven, be refreshed by his love and receive into your hearts Christ's love, so that you might go and share this love with all whom you meet, and bear his fruit.

So, the first fruit of a Christian is love – Love of God and love of your neighbour...oh and your enemy, but Willy Barclay said that when you love your enemy, he no longer stays your enemy because he becomes your friend.

Amen.