

Acts 2:1-13

Galatians 5:16-26

May 23, 2021

Day of Pentecost

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

YOUR RECOMMENDED DAILY ALLOWANCE OF FRUIT

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

One January day a number of years ago, I called Nancy and asked, “What are you doing?” She said, “It’s about 30 degrees and sleeting, it’s starting to snow, and the lights are flickering, and I’m trying to stay warm with a cup of hot chocolate. What are you doing?” At that moment, I was faced with a choice — tell the whole truth or leave out some important details. You see, I was on a trip in the state of Tabasco in southeastern Mexico. It was about 80 degrees, the sun was shining, and I was standing under a large orange tree in the front yard of the church member who had hosted me overnight. He had just picked some oranges and was squeezing them for our breakfast juice. Nancy said, “That sounds nice.” And it was. Those were the best oranges I’ve ever eaten. Along with the strawberries and blueberries folks grow around here, the oranges were the most delicious fruit I’ve ever had.

Since it’s not yet lunchtime, you probably haven’t had your recommended daily allowance of fruit. But do you eat enough fruit each day? The recommendation is to eat about two cups per day. You can get enough fruit by drinking 100% fruit juice, eating fresh, frozen, or canned fruits or dried fruits, making fruit smoothies. There are numerous health benefits from eating the recommended daily allowance of fruit, including a lower calorie intake, a lower risk of heart disease, heart attack, and stroke, protection against certain kinds of cancer, and an increase in fiber and potassium consumption.

And yet, according to numerous sources, fewer than 1 in 10 Americans eat the recommended daily allowance of two cups of fruit divided into two to five servings. Even when we know the many benefits of eating enough fruit and we have access to so many different delicious fruits, we don’t get enough fruit in our diets. Just as eating enough fruit brings health benefits, not eating enough fruit brings the increased risk of heart disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes, elevated cholesterol, high blood pressure, and even cancer.¹

When it comes to the fruit of the Spirit, I could ask the same question? Do you get your recommended daily allowance of the fruit of the Spirit? The apostle Paul makes it pretty clear that not getting enough fruit results in some pretty harmful behaviors, what he calls “the works of the flesh”: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing . . . and that’s not even the whole list!

If some of Paul’s terms sound little too vague, how about this description of a life without enough fruit of the Spirit? It comes from Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*: “It is

obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on.” The key phrase is at the very beginning: “trying to get your own way all the time.” That’s what Paul means when he talks about “the works of the flesh.” It is a life-orientation, an inward looking attitude that looks out for #1 and, ultimately, leads you away from God and God’s will.

On this Day of Pentecost, hearing about the fruit of the Spirit and the benefits for our lives keeps this story about God’s Holy Spirit coming in power from being a fascinating story in the past with little or nothing to do with our everyday lives. Indeed, the same Spirit that came upon the disciples in Jerusalem with a sound like the rush of a violent wind and with divided tongues as of fire, bears fruit in our lives today. And, as our Lord Jesus Christ himself said in his Sermon on the Mount, “You will know them by their fruits.” (Matthew 7:16)

And what is the fruit of the Spirit? Paul lists nine qualities or virtues of the Spirit-filled life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23) Again, here’s how *The Message* describes “life in the Spirit” or living God’s way: “He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard — things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.”

The scriptures are full of references to God’s people bearing fruit or not:

The prophet Isaiah compares God to a landowner who planted a vineyard and did everything under the sun for his vineyard so it would produce good fruit. But, when the landowner went out to harvest the crop, instead of good grapes he found wild grapes. The prophet tells us, “For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!” (Isaiah 5:1-7) Thus you will know them by their fruits.

When John the Baptist preached his baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, he called the fine, upstanding religious leaders to “Bear fruit worthy of repentance” because “every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matthew 3:8, 10) Thus you will know them by their fruits.

Jesus told his disciples (and, by extension, us), “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.” (John 15:1-2) Thus you will know them by their fruits.

The apostle Paul hoped that the Christians in Philippi would grow in their love and knowledge “so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:10-11) Thus you will know them by their fruits.

In his second letter, the apostle Peter echoes Paul’s description of the fruit of the Spirit and the benefits for living the faithful life: “For this very reason you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:5-8)

On this Day of Pentecost, notice that Paul doesn’t write about the “fruits” of the Spirit, but the “fruit” of the Spirit. Elsewhere he does write about the “gifts” of the Spirit, and reminds us that no one person in the body of Christ has all of the gifts of the Spirit. That’s why each and everyone of us is needed to share his or her gifts. And, Paul says, the greatest of these gifts is love . . .

. . . which stands at the head of the list of the fruit (notice it is fruit, not **fruits**) of the Spirit. Love includes all of the other virtues Paul names to describe what life in the Spirit is like. Joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (and I could go on) are concrete expressions of love. These are the spiritual health benefits that come from the fruit of the Spirit, not just for you as a believer, but especially for the wider community. This is what we mean when we talk about “life in Christ” — getting your recommended daily allowance of the fruit of the Spirit.

As I was reading about the health benefits of eating enough fruit, I wondered if it is possible to eat too much fruit. Apparently the answer is No, it’s not. In studies in which participants ate four times the daily recommended allowance of fruit for a two week period and, in another study, for several months, the people showed no ill effects. The greatest obstacle seemed to be getting filled up very quickly! Researchers found there were possible health benefits from eating more than the recommended daily allowance of fruit.²

Don’t you suppose that’s what Paul means when he says that “there is no law against such things” as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? There are very few things in this life that if a little bit is good, much, much more is even better. But apparently fresh fruit is one such thing.

And the same can be said for the fruit of the Spirit. When it comes to our Christian lives, how many of us demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit day in and day out? Might it be as low as the number of folks who eat enough fresh fruit each day? Then again, as believers and followers of Jesus Christ, we shouldn’t be satisfied with just getting by on the minimum daily recommended allowance of the fruit of the Spirit. Just imagine the benefits you will receive, and also the body of Christ, if you welcome God’s gift of the Holy Spirit and show the fruit of the Spirit in everything you do!

After all, people will know us by our fruits.

Let us pray: Dear heavenly Father, let the fruit of the Spirit blossom, mature, and ripen in our lives and in our church. Let us live by the Spirit. Let us walk by the Spirit. Let us live in, through, and for Christ Jesus, as he lives in, through, and for us and his whole Church. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

NOTES

¹Information about the recommended daily allowance of fruit is taken from several sources such as the CDC, the American Heart Association, and Healthline.

²Kayla McDonell, RD, "Is It Possible to Eat Too Much Fruit?" March 25, 2017 at www.healthline.com.