

*“Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Galatian 5:16, 5:22-23*

As a Canadian, I have always looked with interest when it comes time for American Election season. We might have complained about the length of our last federal election, but the American process seems like it kicks off almost immediately following the last election, with campaigns really ramping up in the two years leading up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday in November. This year, I have watched with both curiosity and fear as Donald Trump became the Republican Party’s Nominee for President. Whether or not you are a conservative or liberal politically, Donald Trump as President of the United States is terrifying on any number of levels. His rhetoric, his hate speech, his baseless statements, his over the top personality, his lack of meaningful leadership experience all add up to the frightening possibility that someone who is severely unqualified will end up as the leader of the United States, a dire consequence for us the neighbours to the North. What is perhaps the most worrying to me, is Trump’s willingness to say and support things because they will increase his chance of being elected, terrible things like a ban on all Muslims or the murder of the families of ‘terrorists’, even though on a number of these issues he has in the past publically declared the opposite position. His life is not particularly congruent, he is saying one thing, and living another – he believes one thing and then the completely opposite thing at the same time.

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It is this sort of division between what a person says and what a person does that Paul was getting at in the passage from his letter to the Galatians that we heard read this morning. Paul was chastising the believers in Galatia for declaring themselves as followers of Jesus, identifying as part of the church by their words, but living lives that were incongruent with the Gospel and the God that they claimed to believe in and follow. Paul warns the believers in the church of Galatia against devouring one another, so that they might not be consumed by one another. Paul is warning the church against fighting and self-destruction, he is warning the church about the dangers of self-indulgence and people looking out for their own interests over others. He frames this whole exhortation around the summation of the law, the second of the ‘greatest commandments’ – the commandment to love your neighbour as yourself. Paul then lists thirteen ‘works of the flesh’ which run counter to loving your neighbour that tear apart and destroy community: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness and carousing. It’s quite the list and covers everything from sexual impropriety and infidelity to infighting and broken relationships. As you go down the list it is clear that each of these ‘works of the flesh’ can seriously negatively impact community relationships. Some of them are mighty obvious: Sleeping with someone else’s husband or wife? Well that is definitely going to break down fellowship in a community, but other things Paul mentions like anger or dissension or factions might not seem like terrible things, they might seem like things that happen in course of human relationships. Throughout your experience of being part of the Church, the Body of Christ, you have probably all witnessed or been a part of some of these acts.

In some ways this is the point Paul is making, he is saying that all of these ‘works of the flesh’ happen naturally in a world that is marked by sin and death, in a world that is marked by separation from God – but that the church is called to a higher standard, that the common life of the Church is set apart from the world by the way it lives together, by the way it lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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In contrast to the works of the flesh, Paul outlines the seven-fold fruits of the Spirit: ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.’ While I could take each one of these and spend weeks focusing on what Paul means, by each of these in the context of the Church, what is clear with each of them, that in contrast to the works of the flesh, each of these ‘fruits’ serves in fostering healthy relationships, serves in building one another up – rather than destroying and tearing each other down. The fruits of the Spirit are not self-indulgent, they are not me focused, they are not primarily concerned with ourselves but rather with the welfare of others – the fruits of the Spirit are ultimately cultivated within the life of a disciple for the sake of others. Paul’s challenge to the Church, is to live lives worthy of the freedom that Jesus won for us on the Cross and in his Resurrection, to live lives transformed by Christ, and not just merely pay lip service to the transformation that is promised through Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church is called to walk the talk so to speak, and to learn what it means to follow Jesus together.

Living lives marked by: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control might seem daunting or impossible, but the secret of the fruits of the Spirit is that it is in Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, that we together can experience the cultivation and growth of the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. While the Holy Spirit gives us the growth, we must be intentional about cultivating the fruits of the Spirit in our life – we must practice Christian virtue and fruitfulness in our lives and as we practice we will learn what it means to experience the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. Our liturgies, our common worship together is designed to engage us in practices which form us in our lives of discipleship. As we intentionally worship together we are encouraged to live lives full of joy in the presence of God amongst our brothers and sisters in Christ. As we come together in confession, we experience the peace of God in forgiveness and are invited to learn patience and kindness as we forgive others.

As a Church we are called to authentically live out our calling as disciples, striving to live a life together that is worthy of the Lord we proclaim and follow. And so I invite you to reflect for yourself, what are the ways that you engage in the “works of the flesh”? What are the ways that you might be participating in actions that destroy, rather than build up? Reflect on those and lift them up to God, lift them to God and pray for the grace to receive the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, that your lives might continue to grow in the fruitfulness of the Spirit and that our common life together as the body of Christ gathered here as Grace Church, might be enriched, enlivened and built up to glory and honour of God the Father, through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit,

Amen.