

Sunday June 19, 2022

First Lesson: Galatians 3: 23-29

Gospel Lesson: Luke 8: 26-39

Sermon Series: Fruits of the Spirit: Goodness Effect

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We are continuing our sermon series called Fruits of the Spirit; a sermon series that is based off of the scripture Galatians 5: 22-23, that names the fruits of the Spirit to be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control;

- Where the idea is that now that you and I have been doing weeks of spiritual pruning together in our previous sermon series, so that we might grow in our faith and spirituality; my preaching goal in this sermon series, is for us to take each spiritual fruit, and examine them weekly, so that we can ensure that they keep growing to their

fullest potential in our lives and the community that surrounds us.

- For our goal as a Church in my eyes, on both the individual and collective level, is to become effective in these fruits, so that we can achieve the kin-dom on Earth as it is in heaven.
- Therefore, this week we will examine **the bud of goodness** a little closer.
- And so I think a good place to start off with this message, is to begin with a working spiritual definition of what the **fruit of goodness** is talking about.
- So most of us have either been told by someone to “be good,” or have had someone else tell us to “be good” at least once in our lifetime.
- Typically, we would witness this phrase of “be good,” being said to a younger child, or perhaps

it is jokingly/or seriously said to someone who is known to have a feisty/spicy temperament;

- Do I have any spicy worshippers with us this morning?
- Either way when the phrase “be good” is used, we typically are hoping that a person will behave themselves, or stay out of trouble.
- Perhaps being good from this definition, looks like helping a parent with the household chores or getting good grades in school.
- However, when the Bible is talking about goodness, I don’t believe that this is all that is entailed in “being good.”
- For biblically speaking, **goodness is an action**;
- Perhaps this is why other translations will use the word generosity in place of the word goodness, **for to do or be good**, is not

something we do only for the sake of being virtuous or possessing high moral standards;

- For when you and I strive to be “good” only for our own benefit, it is not truly goodness that we possess.
- Therefore, in Greek, the word goodness, “agathosune,” means “an **uprightness of heart and life**” (Thayer & Strong, 1995).
- And **to be upright** in this sense, is the condition or quality of being honorable or honest;
- **To be upright in character means to possess** moral integrity; honesty and equity in principle or practice;
- **To be upright**, is conformity to rectitude and justice.

- Another way of saying this is that to be upright, is to possess morally correct behavior or thinking; or to be righteous.
- So you see Church, when you and I act out of the true goodness of the heart and reflect the fruit of the Spirit, our actions are coming from a place of selflessness;
- **Being good** spiritually, is placing the needs of others before our own.
- **Being good**, is doing all that we can to stand for those who cannot stand on their own.
- **Being good**, is being able to move from a mental space of self-righteousness into an upright stance of righteousness.

- **One of our class participants from the Applying the Sermon to life group that meets on Wednesday nights, thought it would also be helpful for me to take a moment to flesh out for us the difference between being self-righteous and righteous;**
- Because I stopped by to suggest that a lot of us walk that fine line, and perhaps may even cross the line without being aware of it.
- **So self-righteous people,** often feel they have a “leg up” on others, and their focal point is to make others around them feel inferior.
- **Self-righteous people,** tend to always have to feel that they know what is best.
- **Self-righteous people,** are typically quick to blame and condemn. They are habitually critical of others and judge them severely.

- **Self-righteous people**, typically like to be praised for their works...so by this definition, we all are somewhat guilty of being self-righteous from time to time I would imagine.
- **Self- righteous people**, are always ready to share a list of their good works.
- So I will say it again, there is a fine line that I believe if we are honest with ourselves, many of us have been guilty of crossing.
- On the flip side, a person who strives to **be righteous**, possesses the quality of being virtuous, honorable, or morally right.
- **Being righteous**, means in a nutshell—**doing what is right**.
- I love how Psalm 112 characterizes the attributes of a righteous person for it says in verses 6-10;

- For the righteous will never be moved;
they will be remembered forever.
- They are not afraid of evil tidings;
their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord.
- Their hearts are steady; they will not be afraid;
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.
- They have distributed freely; they have given to the
poor;
their righteousness endures forever;
their horn is exalted in honor.
- The wicked see it and are angry;
they gnash their teeth and melt away;
but the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.
- Making all of this from my perspective, some really
very tough words to take in.
- Because the reality is that none of us have
mastered the art of what it means to be righteous;

- However, if you and I wish to truly embody what it means to love one another,
- I feel like this conversation is both meaningful and timely to have.
- For I stopped by to suggest that when we choose to operate from a place of self-righteousness....**it hurts.**
- **It hurts** the one who perpetuates this type of action, because in my experience, when you or I operate from a place of self-righteousness, you never feel satisfied about seldom anything!
- **Furthermore when we choose to operate from a place of self-righteousness, it hurts** the one who is the target of it, for the impact on the targeted individual is like a crab, trying to climb out of the barrel, only to be pulled down by the other crabs;
- Hence why there is so many of us unable to fully shine our light or bear any spiritual fruit.

- Which reminds me of an old adage that many of us know; **sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me;**
- This phrase was believed to have appeared in The Christian recorder of March 1862, as a publication of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.
- It was a phrase said during a time, where slavery had reached its breaking point.
- For the world was ravaged by the devastating effects and impact of self-righteous people and systems;
- Hence why today on June 19th known to be Juneteenth, is now considered a national holiday; for it should be commemorated; the emancipation of enslaved people in the US.
- For this was a holiday first celebrated in Texas, where on that date in 1865, in the aftermath of the

Civil War, slaves were declared free under the terms of the 1862 Emancipation Proclamation.

- Hence where the sticks/stones adage contextually speaking, could make more sense, in that through all of the beatings and lashings that Black people had to endure, simply because of the color of our skin;
- The words that were used towards the African American people that would identify them to be lazy, ugly, beastly, ignorant and more, would not keep the people down.
- *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.*
- However, I think we all know better than that; for words do hurt doesn't it?
- Harmful and cruel words that stems from this place of self-righteousness do impact us!

- **For yes** as a Black woman for example, **I am still standing**, along with my community.
- **Yes**, our queer siblings in God's love and light **are still standing**...many of us got to witness this truth for we also celebrated Pride this weekend as a city.
- **Yes**, anyone who has ever been discriminated against because of education, ability, economic status, gender, race, ethnic group, age or sexual orientation....**are still standing**.
- However, similar to like Jesus who was standing before doubting Thomas, I stopped by to declare that those who have been on the receiving end of self-righteousness.... **we have wounds**;
- And so when Jesus said to Thomas, "***Put your finger here; see our hands. Reach out your hand and put it into our side. Stop doubting and believe.***" (John 20: 27)

- **This also would be the narrative from the one who has been marginalized!**
- **See the impact** from self-righteous actions; put your fingers here where our wrists have been bound;
- **See the impact** from all of the callous words thrown at us; put your fingers into our sides, but not too hard for there are bruises that are still too raw; making it difficult to breathe!
- **Stop doubting and believe so that we all can be** more intentional in being able to identify when we have crossed the line into the land of self-righteousness;
- For if you and I can be more honest in owning that this is a part of our psychological makeup that could use some spiritual pruning;
- This is when we begin to fully embody our first lesson of Galatians this morning;

- Where we are reminded as Children of the Most High of Goodness; we have been baptized into Christ and we are clothed with Christ.
- For like I preached just last week, this is why we don't need to worry about having designer clothes or shoes;
- For we are created by the fingertips of God... every last one of us; which should then inform us that our spiritual garments contain all of the fruits we have been talking about.... **including goodness.**
- Our gospel affirms that even the one who was filled with demons....even he possessed this goodness too!

- **So the million dollar question then becomes, why is it seemingly so difficult for us to possess this goodness fully?**
- Looking at our first lesson of Galatians, why as a collective people, does it still seem like we are imprisoned?
- Looking at our gospel today, why are the demons still there within us?
- Questions along these same lines that came from our class that I will paraphrase;
- Why is it that as a society we tend to not make space for people to become good?
- In light of this question, we especially raised the issue of the prison recidivism rate, that is still so high because of a lack of a clear restorative justice process.

- Another question that came from the class is how could the law, which was given by the good God, suddenly not become good?
- And so I believe that the answer to some of these questions lies somewhere in the gospel this morning, where it says that “a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. Verse 28; When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"--
- So you see Church, as I step out of this story for a moment, this man willingly came before Jesus, completely unmasked and unclothed.
- Which is a very different picture of say for instance where in the beginning in Genesis 3, the story of Adam and Eve, who also were unmasked and

unclothed; *They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.*

- Therefore, what you and I can learn between these two stories from our gospel today, and from the Genesis 3 text, **the power of confession** at its finest.
- For when you and I try to hide from God what needs to be spiritually pruned within us, like the story of Adam and Eve, **it can feel like a curse.**
- When you and I refuse to allow the Spiritual Pruner to work through our lives, **it can feel tormenting.**
- However as Caity in our class prophetically named, that **when you and I** allow ourselves to be spiritually pruned as the man with the demons

had done, (who mind you, also was just as fearful as Adam and Eve was in his nakedness); you and I witness a compassionate response from Jesus.

- You see I believe the reason why a lot of us don't want to come before God with our own demons, is because we expect God to respond to us like perhaps we may respond to one another in a similar condition.
- For **we tend to** respond to these demons with judgment;
- **We tend to** respond to these demons by avoiding them;
- **We tend to** respond to these demons by ostracizing them;
- **We tend to** respond to these demons by isolating them.
- And I'll say it again, this is **why we tend to not** show our own demons to God because we are

aware of how humanity handles the same situation.

- However I stopped by to proclaim that when you and I are willing to be spiritually pruned by the Holy Spirit, we will in fact encounter a righteous response from God.
- So you see this is why I am so drawn to this demon possessed man, because to me through his actions.... **he is strong.**
- For me as I read this story, being able to come before God in his nakedness... this man **is brave.**
- For in my biblical imagination, as soon as he saw Jesus, he was saying to himself, “I want these demons out of me.”
- **I want this demon** of self loathing out of me.
- **I want this demon of self- doubt,** out of me,
- **I want this demon** of hatred out of me.
- **I want this demon** of jealousy out of me.

- **I want this demon** of self-righteousness out of me.
- I want whatever unclean spirit and influence that is blocking my true inner light and gifts... **out of me!**
- I want to do the spiritual pruning work so that I can be the best I can be!
- And **Jesus seeing this** confession;
- **Jesus seeing his** nakedness,
- **Jesus seeing his** transparency,
- **Jesus seeing his** confession which revealed a level of righteousness,
- Said to the unclean spirit; **to the spirit** that kept seizing him;
- **to the spirit** that kept him under guard and bound with chains and shackles,
- **to the spirit** that kept him from having joy in the morning,

- **To the spirit** that kept telling him that he was not loved and loveable;
- **To the spirit** that would break the bonds and drive him to the wilds on a regular basis;

30 Jesus then asked the spirit, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him.

- Letting us know that through Jesus **we can be whole again;**
- By His grace and mercy **we can be restored again;**
- Regardless of our past and mistakes, from God's perspective, we have the potential to still do good;
- And even when we may have doubts of whether or not we are worthy enough to do God's work;
- Like the man from whom the demons had gone, begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying,

- “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.”
- I’m saying to all of the people, **return to this home** and start taking steps towards your goodness;
- **Return to this home**, because God is ready to use you!
- Don’t worry about how long you have been gone or astray or whatever has had your spirit bound up;
- **Return to this home** and come and taste and see that the Lord is Good... whose Mercy endures forever!
- So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.
- Letting us know that the potential that can come from this goodness effect is infinite!

- The hope that stems from the goodness effect is liberating!
- Oh Gracious God of unlimited Goodness, may the words from my mouth and the completely unmasked and unclothed prayers from all of our collective hearts, be transformed by your infinite grace and mercy...
- Let the Church say Amen!