

Morning Meditations on Galatians ~ Week Two

Day One

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. (Galatians 5:22-23)

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Corinthians 4:7-9)

These two passages paired together can be like weaving two pieces of yarn together. Often when an artist mixes two things together, a third thing created. This is brand new and more than simply the sum of its parts. It is not just that $2 + 2 = 4$, there is something unique, even unexpected, that comes into a living, breathing being. To begin, I believe the jar of clay Paul is talking about in the second verse is our human body. It is a reference to Genesis 2 where God crafts, creates, loves into being the human out of dirt/dust/mud. The word human literally means, 'earth being' or 'clay being.' So, if we are the jars of clay, what is the treasure?

Pause for just a moment to ponder the unique ways you inhabit the world. Just as all of us are made of DNA, bones, and flesh; humanity is not a simple equation. We are all more than $2+2=4$. What is the shape of your soul and your life?

One thought is the treasure could be Paul's list from Galatians, the fruits of the spirit. Within us we have a love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control waiting to be let loose on the world. These treasures could create, craft, love into a being a whole new way of life if only we commitment to sharing these gifts with others. But, it isn't easy. People will say you are naive or the world doesn't work that way or God-forbid you read the comment section on-line after you post something like.

Paul anticipates this when he says that we will be pressed on every side, crushed, persecuted, struck down. Reminds me of when Ernest Shackleton is said to have run an ad the newspaper to try to recruit men for his Endurance expedition: "Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in event of success." Way to sell it, Shackleton!

Perhaps Paul isn't trying to win friends and influence people. Yet, I appreciate that Paul is saying, "Following Christ is not the easy way. It won't be all chocolate rivers and pony rides." We will be challenged when you try to find a loving response that has both a strong back bone and soft heart. We will be pressed when we try to say that God's presence is woven into all of life, because we have bought into the narrative of blame

and shame. Heads will smack in disbelief when we ask people about joy during a pandemic or peace when there is so much frustration. Yet, Paul is reminding us in both passages, that the source for such a truth is not something external, but the internal presence of God that we are called embody and embrace for the sake of the world. You see, we have the order wrong when we focus on the external as the proof for the internal realities. If we say that peace can only come when all are holding hands rather than live the prayer, “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” Such reordering will take time, practice, persistence and the presence of God.

What ways might you practice these words of both Galatians and 2 Corinthians this week?

Who is your heart calling you to let these words take on your flesh and be heard in your words this week?

How might we as a people, in these clay jars, risk bearing fruit that is needed in these hungry and hurting days?

Prayer: God who delights when we live the question, help us also discern glimpses of grace that lead us toward being nourishing, nurturing fruit in such a time as this.

Day Two

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. (Galatians 5:22-23)

To be sure, Paul’s list is aspirational and even a bit daunting. It is not something I can easily do. Living these words will take a lifetime. There will constantly be new challenges, new situations where I will stumble to full bear these fruits in what I am saying and doing. There is a growing edge. This reminds me of a brilliant quote from Howard Thurman,

“Look well to the growing edge! All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born. The fruit ripens on the tree, the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth against a time when there shall be new leaves, fresh blossoms, green fruit. Such is the growing edge! It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung, the one more thing to try when all else has failed, the upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavor. This is the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and men have lost their reason, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash. The birth of the child — life’s most dramatic answer to death — this is the growing edge incarnate. Look well to the growing edge!”

To say that living Paul's words, embracing and embodying the list of nine fruits to fullest meaning, is a growing edge is helpful. It reminds me to have patience. Patience with myself. Patience with others. It is important to distinguish that patience is not permissiveness. It doesn't mean anything goes. But patience realizes that tension between God's time and mine. We live in a world of instant communication, where we often expect everything to happen in the blink of an eye. The world has sped up and we have little time for patience. We want a vaccine and we want it now. We will root out all systemic racism with a single law. We want to bounce back from the economic hardships just like that. But the most important parts of life cannot be manufactured or microwaved. They take time. It is often two steps forward, five steps back. Why would it be different with seeking to live the fruits of the spirit? I remember one of the wisest things ever said to me in ministry was to have patience and persistence. Patience to know it is not all up to me. Persistence to play my part as loving and faithful as I can. Patience to let things unfold. Persistence to keep things moving a holy pace - at God's pace. That is for me, still the growing edge.

Where is your growing edge with these words? Which one of the fruits is most difficult? Which one do you wish was not there? Which one do you over-emphasize?

Prayer: Expanding and embracing God, You continue to sow, water, and harvest the fruit of my life, let me see the truth of growing edge reflected in Your beautiful creation. God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Amen

Day Three

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. (Galatians 5:22-23)

I have often been taken by Richard Rohr's words, "The best criticism of the bad is the practice of the good." This might have been what Paul was heading toward with this list, especially including the word, "kindness". From the first day of school we are taught about kindness ~ that sharing is caring. We are taught to be careful with our words which can hurt and harm. We are taught to help each other, to take turns, and to offer compliments to one another. Then, we are thrust into the hallways of Middle School. I remember the bullies who would bump into you making you drop the books you were carrying or cruelly criticize you about what you were wearing to get others to laugh. In Middle School groups would form where there were always insiders and outsiders. I wonder how much we grow up from that mind set? Looking around the world today, the answer might be, "Not much." Here we are in election year where we continue to tear down each other in tweets, prove we are right, and rush to anger. We

give lip service to kindness, especially around children, but as adults we struggle to model this value in any meaningful, consistent, continual way.

As G.K. Chesterton once said, ““The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.” Deep down, we perhaps don’t really think that love is all you need or that peace is possible or that kindness makes a difference. After all, it doesn’t really trend on Twitter.

Like all of the words in Paul’s list of fruits, there is a shadow side. There can be a version of love that is too permissive; there can be a joy that is a denial of pain; there can be a peace that is only self-serving; or a patience that stands on the sidelines silent. The shadow will always be there. In fact, it is good that it is there. The shadow doesn’t have to be avoided, it needs to be accepted and affirmed. Too often, we lift up these practices up as ideals, as ladders that we have to climb to reach some lofty, enlightened place. So, when I fail and fall on my face trying to be kind to another, I see that stumbling and bumbling to mean I am a bad person. What if instead, we learned how to see our mistakes as the growing edge?

Often, we struggle and stumble with kindness because we are so cruel to ourselves. We judge ourselves lacking, so it is easy to see where others and the world falls so short. Today, what is one kind thing you can do for yourself? What is one kind way you can treat another? I pray those questions disrupt you in a holy way. I pray you won’t settle for easy answers, but look well to that growing edge of patience and kindness that cannot be checked off when you lay your head down to sleep, but will ask you to wake up tomorrow to keep on keeping on.

Prayer: Thank you God for Your patience persistence of loving-kindness with me, thank you that You crafted me in Your image, help me bear the light of Your presence this day. Amen.

Day Four

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. (Galatians 5:22-23)

“Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.” — John Wesley

So often our definitions of generosity center around money. We think of Bill Gates or Oprah Winfrey or Rockefeller or Lilly. To be sure, there are many wonderful examples of people who have learned the art of sharing and opened the flood gates of caring through giving financially to help others. Yet, we limit generosity when we only think about that in the framework of our checkbooks and charitable giving.

Generosity can be sharing your time with another.

Generosity can be giving your attention to the person right in front of you.

Generosity can be letting loose your talents for the sake of others.

Generosity can start by practicing kindness to yourself – because the face you turn toward yourself is the face you turn toward the world.

Generosity can continue when you smile and thank the grocery clerk and the one stocking the shelves.

Generosity can be moving the newspaper closer to the door for a neighbor.

Generosity can be planting a tree.

Generosity can be reading to a child over Zoom.

Generosity can be...insert what is surging and stirring in your soul for your specific situation.

Sometimes when we talk about people who inspire us, the shadow side of our soul starts to say, "But I'll never be like that." To be sure, I will never have LeBron James basketball talent no matter how much I practice my jump shot. However, I can share his generous passion for education by supporting children, even if it is socially distant right now. I may never have as many twitter followers as Oprah, but I can still try to care for people who I interact with every day inspired by her creative spirit. Generosity is not a game of comparison. It is a holy invitation to let loose our lives for the sake of God's realm. Your generosity will be unique to you.

In another passage, Paul says, we are the body of Christ, each individually and collectively members connected. The foot cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you." Likewise, our society is a web of interconnectivity, and we cannot say to another, "I have no need of you." To live our lives with that truth guiding us is the beginning of the generous way. We struggle right now to truly live this way.

The problem that plagues us is the same one that sat in the hardened-heart of the Pharaoh ~ we fear that there is not enough. We fear that if someone else gets something, then we cannot. To be sure, there is a limited amount of some resources in this world. There is only so much oil or old-growth trees or creation that has taken centuries to evolve. But when it comes to the fruits of the spirit – it is our own lack of cultivating these practices that limit these. These nine fruits are generative – as each is shared they are multiplied and grow. The fruits of the Spirit don't conform to the laws of supply and demand. In fact, it is the opposite. The less we share, the more we try to cling to these for ourselves, these gifts lack the oxygen needed. It is in giving that

these fruits find fullest expression and keep on growing, going, generating anew and afresh within us for the world around us.

Prayer: Create in me a generative, generous, grace-filled spirit that realizes the more I share, the more You feed and fuel my heart to offer my light to the world. Amen.

Day Five

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Pause.
Stop.
Reflect.

Over this past week, we opened our hearts to three words: “patience,” “kindness,” and “generosity”. These were added to our three words from the previous week: “love,” “joy,” and “peace”. As you hold each of these words I encourage you to find ways to engage the fullness of what each might mean for you and to the world.

Continue to ponder prayerfully your definitions of each word as well as the ways you might embrace and embody these words in such a time as this.

Next, I invite you to enter into ways that these words might interact with each other. How does joy intersect with kindness? How might love and patience hang out together? What would it mean for peace to be connected to our generosity? It is in the ways these words playfully cooperate and collaborate and conspire together that can feed and fuel our faith. I hope you would be willing in the comment section to share your thoughts on the ways these words are working in your life right now.

Pause.
Stop.
Reflect.

Let God’s wisdom inspire your imagination; let God’s presence infuse your heart; let God’s love cultivate these fruits of the spirit in such a time as this.

Prayer

How can it be, O God, that You are here in this room?
Are you woven into the woodwork of this dining room table?
Has Your love, joy, and power been absorbed into the walls?
If You are the ground of being, does that apply to the floor supporting me?

If You are the holy other, does that mean You are hovering and hanging in the air I breathe?

In this room...

Look around the room where you find yourself right now.

What stories would that room tell if it could speak?

How as the room witnessed the good...the bad...the ugly of life?

What would be the story the room would share of the time laughter wouldn't cease?

Or the time tears drenched your cheeks and your heart ached?

Or the words you said that you wish you could take back?

In this very room...

Quite enough love to hold all that.

In this very room

Quiet enough joy to sing for the amazing and abundant grace of God weaving our daily living together.

In this very room

Quiet enough power to continue to renew and reconcile us through holy ordinariness.

In your very room.

Holy ground just as Moses stood upon before the burning, blazing bush afire with God.

In your very room.

Where you find yourself right now.

In your very room.

God is.

That is more than enough.

Amen.