

**Christ Presbyterian Church**  
**Edina, Minnesota**  
**July 7 & 8, 2012**  
**John Crosby**  
**Fruit of the Spirit: Faithfulness**  
**Galatians 5:22-25**

We are in the middle of a series that lasts much of the summer. Kari began it today by talking about the idea of fruit. I am a little like Kari, neither a farmer nor a gardener. I am an eater. It's my spiritual gift and I exercise it all the time. I remember the idea that the corn I love to eat is supposed to be knee high by the Fourth of July. So far, in spite of the heat, it is a good year, but it is a reminder to me that what Rich [Pastor Rich Phenow] and Lee [Lee Hanssen, Director of Commitment Class] and James [Pastor James Madsen] have been saying about the fruit of the Spirit is so true. The farmer cannot make the corn grow. We cannot make the vine produce grapes. That is the work of God alone. We can make sure that it does not happen. We can do such terrible things that it never grows, but we cannot make it happen, and that is particularly true of the fruit that we would like to eat today. Paul says to the Galatian church, chapter 5,

*<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
<sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus...*

Not those who are Christians, those who belong to Christ Jesus.

*...have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

And the fruit of the Spirit will come to us, in particular today, the fruit of faithfulness. Some of you feel like you are not very faithful even if you have been Christians a long time. Some of you are not sure what faith or faithfulness is. According to the writer of the Hebrews,

*11 ...faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

Faith is different from belief. I saw an example of that just last month. There was a man who was trying something that had not been done for over a hundred years. He was going to walk across Niagara Falls. Many of the people watching believed because of his record that he could do it, but the insurance company was not as confident. They put a little harness on him. But he went right over the lowest part of the falls. Nik Wallenda followed in the steps of his great-grandfather, one of the other Wallendas who went over the falls much higher up. When his grandfather did it, he was the best in his time. He got so good that it became commonplace that he could go across the falls like this. One day he got out a wheelbarrow and pushed it across the falls, and people were amazed. He got all the way to the other side and said, "Do you think I

can do it again?" They said, "Yes." He said, "Get in the wheelbarrow." They said, "No!" That's the difference between belief and faith.

Faith is trusting somebody enough to get into the wheelbarrow. Do you have faith or do you just believe? Faith is trusting in God enough to act on what you say you believe. Now that is a very important question. You should not have faith in everything that is said to you. Our culture pushes us over and over to have faith in the wrong things. It makes promises all the time. You probably should not have faith in everything that comes out of a politician's mouth. Often the rhetoric is promises without fulfillment. In the same way, in our society faith is often like diet soda--lots of fizz, no nutrition. You have lived long enough to know that what is promised doesn't always hold firm. What people say is not always what people do.

Building your life by faith in something is always a risk, so what do you have faith in? It is a risk. C. S. Lewis says, "Sand is good for a lot of things, but don't try building a real house with it." His point is that when you depend on people, when you put your faith in people, they'll let you down. When we put our faith in the wrong things we get hurt, so instead we talk about faith in God, being faithful to trust God. We sing *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*, but what does that mean?

The apostle Paul says something like, "If you live by the Holy Spirit, if you keep in step with the Holy Spirit, your life is different." Faith fills people. People with the gift of faithfulness, faithful people, trust in God and in the process they become trustworthy. People who trust in God become trustworthy people. They are slightly different from the people around them. Faithful people start to live differently from the people who don't trust in our God the way we do. Faith-filled people begin to forgive their enemies, even to bless the ones who curse them. Faithful people start to remain pure in a culture that goes the other way. Faithful people face death square in the face instead of pretending that they are going to be young forever. Faithful people bring hope and joy into anxiety and doom. Most of all, under it all, people with faith, people with trust in God, faithful people, have a sense that they are not alone, but also that they are not home. There is a sense that what they have at their very best is just a taste of what lies ahead. That is faith.

Now I don't think that living by faith is supposed to be like a tightrope act over Niagara Falls where, if you make one wrong step, if you've missed the will of God, boom, it is done! I also don't think faith is supposed to be like walking on the water and you are the only one who knows where the rocks in the lake are. I don't think that it is a secret handshake or language. For Paul, faith is learning whom you can trust and following them. Paul risked his life on that. I believe with Paul that God can support whatever you are carrying today, what promises in life you worry about that might give way, that might crumble, that might not be trustworthy. Do you have faith in those promises? What about the promises you made when you were married and you keep messing up? Your faith in the promise of a friend to keep a secret that embarrasses you? You've got faith in the promise of a new job or a promotion. Do you have confidence, trust, that this surgery will make you good as new? Do you have faith to hold firm in a season of pain that seems endless, and you feel so alone?

Sometimes I feel like faith becomes another word for "C'mon, God, let's get going!" Sometimes, we think we need to speed things up for God to have God really show up. Henri Nouwen says, "God is way out ahead of us, reaching back to draw us forward." Could we just start with the idea that faith is often waiting instead of doing something. How do you wait? How do you be

faithful? When I think of faithfulness, I think of the greats, right? Faith is Moses stretching out his staff over the sea and watching it split in half. Faith is Billy Graham coming to preach and two million Koreans showing up. Faith is Mother Teresa stooping over a dying beggar and reassuring him that he will be in heaven today. Those are the people of faith.

I have faith when things are going well. I have faith when the seas are calm, but faith is what is needed in the storm. I learned something this year from a book. The founder of the Methodist Church in England and America was a man named John Wesley, a preacher and an evangelist. Wesley went around the world. He married later in his life, fairly impulsively, and it was a terrible mistake. He not only married the wrong woman, but their marriage hurt them both, over and over and over. Wesley was repeatedly encouraged by people to admit that he had made a mistake and to leave the woman behind. For decades he remained faithful, waiting for God to do something different; but, as far as we know, God never did anything different in her life. It is easy to be faithful when the sea splits, but what happens when you are like Wesley, and you are just called to wait until tomorrow? That is faithfulness.

It says the *fruit* of faithfulness because it is supposed to taste like something. What does faithfulness taste like? I got a couple of pictures yesterday as I was thinking about this. The first one was of a young man who got engaged and had a beautiful fiancée. They came in together for their first pre-marital meeting and at the end of the time as they walked out, I was excited for them. The young man comes back into the office in a couple days and says, "Could we talk?" I said, "Of course." He said, "Dude, she is smoking hot, isn't she?" And I vaguely understood what he meant. I said, "Yes, she is beautiful." He goes, "I am trying so hard to be sexually pure but it is so hard. I want to be that kind of man for her but it is so hard. Would you pray that I am faithful to her?" I just did that wedding earlier this summer. I admire that young man. That is what faithfulness tastes like.

For years she sat over there. Her name was Nancy Putnam. Nancy and her second husband, Charlie, had been on the committee that brought me here. Charlie died. And then some years ago, Nancy got sick. I went to see her when she knew that it was past the time when she would get better. She turned to me and said in her Nancy Putnam way, "Getting old stinks. Don't do it." She said, "Getting old stinks, but God will get me through dying like everything else." That is what faithfulness tastes like.

Now we have been saying all summer that you don't grow the fruit. At best, you weed the garden and you water the plants and you put fertilizer in the ground. How do we cultivate "I want that kind of faithfulness"? I want "Getting old stinks but God is going to get me through it" faithfulness. I want to be able to say, "In a culture that is impure, I am going to try to stay pure." I want that taste in my mouth. How do you get it?

Let me give you three thoughts I've had about how you might be more faithful, how you might cultivate that fruit of faithfulness in your life. The first one really comes out of the idea that faithfulness is not how you feel. Faithfulness is not an emotion. So I think the place to start is to examine your soul. You will never know if you are faithful or not till you know where you are not faithful. I think you need to start there examining your life, saying, "This is where I am not faithful. I don't trust God for this. I am afraid to give this to God." You would be like the man who came to Jesus because his son was sick and Jesus asked, "Do you believe I can heal him?" I believe. Help my unbelief." That is all of us. Where are you lacking in faith? Only when you say you need faith can God help you.

We had a friend of ours, Mark Batterson from Washington, D.C., preach here about prayer earlier this year. Mark talked about faithfulness this way. He said, "Faithfulness is learning two words. You describe the situation you are in, and you add two more words. You describe the situation saying, "I lack faith here. Help me." And you add two words. See if you can pick out the two words. The floodwaters covered the earth for 150 days, destroying everything, **but God** remembered Noah and brought them to safety. God restores His creation and marks his promise with a rainbow in the sky. Joseph's brothers intended to harm him, **but God** intended it all along for good. God has an agenda for you, different from any plans or circumstances. Saul, the wicked king, hunted David every day, **but God** didn't let Saul find him. God sees us no matter where we are quivering in fear. The psalmist declared,

*<sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

Paul wrote,

*<sup>39</sup> ...They killed him by hanging him on a cross, <sup>40</sup> but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.*

"God, I'm running out of money, but God...." "God, I'm not sure if I'm going to get better or if this is my deathbed, but God...." "She says she doesn't love me any more, but God...." "It has been so long since I've had a good job, but God...." All of those people we looked at, Noah, Joseph, David, the heroes of the faith, they are just like you and me but they heard two more words "but God...." one time and that kept them going. They held onto those two words. They said, "I don't know where this is going, but God...." So, first of all you have to say, "Where is it I don't believe there is a 'but God....'?"

The second part of becoming a more faith-filled person in seeing the fruit develop, I believe, comes when you start to find places where you can actually hear God, when you can hear God speak of His faithfulness to you. For some of you, the summer is a perfect time because you see God in nature. You hear God's voice speak to you more clearly when you are outside. For others of you, you hear God speak when you are with friends who follow Christ in ways that you admire. For some of you, it is in here where you hear God more clearly. For many of us it is as Kari said in the children's sermon, "God's voice speaks to us best in the Scriptures." You need to hear Scriptures to *hear* God being faithful to you.

Let me give you some easy promises. Paul in his letter to the Romans, chapter 8,

*<sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Or how about this one. Psalm 103,

*<sup>12</sup> ...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

And Jeremiah 31,

<sup>34</sup> ...*“I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”*

Wouldn't you like to hear that some days? Or how about this one in Romans 8,

<sup>28</sup> *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

That doesn't mean God makes everything that is bad happen to you. That means, in everything that happens to you, God is at work. But God.... I believe faithful people are those people who clutch the faithfulness of God. They get closer to how faithful God is and the more they trust God, the more God trusts them, the more they become trustworthy, faithful people.

Examine where you are not faithful, see where God can speak to you, and the third thing is, wait in faith. Remember, we said a lot of faith is just waiting. As you wait in faith, see what you can do now. A lot of you are waiting for life to start. You need to say, what does God want me to do today that I am afraid to do? What is God calling me to do today before circumstances get better? One of my friends who has preached here, Wayne Gordon, leads a black inner city church in Chicago. They were doing a capital campaign. For them, a capital campaign was \$40,000 to fix the roof, and they were doing it in an African-American way where people come forward with their money and their pledges. A woman comes forward, and Gordy stops her and says, “Oh, Alma. Alma, you can't give. C'mon, honey. You can't give. You've got nothing.” And this little black lady turns to Gordy and says, “Don't you take this away from me. Don't you take away the privilege of me helping God help those poor people.” She had nothing. “Don't you take this away from me.”

I saw a picture of what faithfulness looks like. Let me put it up on the screen. (*Slide shown.*) This is a young man just out of college. He goes and gets a job in the inner city school system. As a coach, he becomes friends with a young black man and encourages him to invite a girl to the prom for the first time. He shows him how to tie a tie for the first time, and since the young man had never taken a girl to a restaurant before, he got a date and took the kids and his girl to a restaurant for the first time before they went to the prom. You and I have the privilege in tiny, tiny ways of being the hands and feet of Jesus. We get to see God at work. That helps us be faithful.

I did two weddings yesterday. Late last night at the end of the second wedding, they were giving the toasts, you know, there is no such thing as a free meal. The toasts at weddings are where you know that. They go on and on and on and on and on, don't they? The third of 17 toasts was by one of the best men--they had two best men. One of best men, an Iranian, who met the groom at Pepperdine, gets up. He gives him a hard time for the first 20 minutes of the toast—no, for the first 2 minutes he gives his friend a hard time. He says, “Before I do the toast, I just want you to know, dude, I came to college, and I didn't know much about God. I've got no church, but when I saw you living the way that you lived,” he said, “Friend, you are my church.” He said, “I may go to a brick-and-mortar church some day but for now, you are my church.” He saw in that young man the fruit of faithfulness, and it drew him to the living God.

Lord Jesus, I thank You for these sisters and brothers here, all of us who are struggling to be faithful, all of us who believe and ask you to help our unbelief, all of us who would love to taste the sweetness of Your faithfulness and trust You enough to wait for it, trust You enough to step out and do today the one thing that You call us to do for Him. Bless us. In Your great and Holy Name, bless us. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*