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September 16, 2007
16th Sunday after Pentecost
Galatians 5: 16 – 25
John 15: 4 – 11

“Fruitful Lives”

Consider the honey bee: its whole life is devoted to collecting nectar from all kinds of flowering plants—squash blossoms, corn silk, fruit and nut trees, garden flowers, wild flowers. And as the bee goes about its work what is the result? (wait for response).

Yes, honey in the hive –and (what else?) fruits and veggies and nuts of all kinds! The fruit of their labor!

We could say the vocation of honey bees is collecting nectar for making honey for the hive to provide for more bees BUT the result is the pollination that is necessary for a cherry tree to provide cherries, an almond tree to provide almonds or a squash plant to provide pumpkins!

This is the way the Holy Spirit works in our lives as well. Did you know that? God gives us good work to do as Jesus’ disciples. Each of us. God gifts each one of us with gifts that are good for building up the body of Christ.

There are lists of these gifts in scripture. Turn in your pew bible in the New Testament, past the gospels to I Corinthians, chapter 12. (Wait for people to locate the passage.)

Beginning with verse 1 Paul says to us, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.” And continuing with verse 4, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord and there are varieties of services, but the same God who activates all of them in everyone.” And in verse 7 we read, “To each is given the Spirit for the common good.”

To each is given the Spirit for the common good.

In other words, the Spirit is at work in all of us as believers to give us gifts that contribute to the common good—the well being of ourselves,

those within our community and others beyond our community.

What are some of these gifts? Can you name them? Look at verses 7 -10. What gifts are listed here? (Wait for response): Wisdom, knowledge, faith, miracles, prophecy, speaking and interpreting various kinds of tongues.

Different gifts for different people. Not everyone has the same gift. But the same Spirit is the giver of the gifts.

Do you know what your gifts are?

God wants us to know what our gifts are. And to use them. Because it is in using our gifts that our lives bear fruit.

Like the bees who labor to collect nectar from various kinds of plants, when we use our spiritual gifts the result is fruitfulness—not just for us but for everyone.

Still other gifts are listed in various roles or offices verse 28: The role or office of apostles, prophets, teachers, with the gifts of power, healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership....

The gift of a role or office within the community such as teacher is the result of a combination of gifts—not only the gift of teaching, but perhaps the gift of encouragement, the gift of knowledge, or the gift of faith.

Combined with these gifts goes a deep, heartfelt desire. A passion of our heart. Maybe that passion is adult education. Maybe that passion is specifically adult abused women who need a job but know nothing about business. And your teaching and encouragement and faith gifts are combined in coaching and mentoring these women.

Maybe passion is for the poor and foreign born and is expressed in teaching them English. Maybe that passion is for imparting the word of God and is expressed in teaching bible study.

Do you see how this works? As Paul says, I say to you: I do not want you to be uninformed: Our gifts are not only Spirit given, but they are also Spirit driven.

How do we know what our passion is? John Wesley teaches us to listen to the nudges of the Holy Spirit. When you feel a sudden quickening within—a flash perhaps of intensity such as a feeling of injustice, or compassion, or excitement, or curiosity so intense it’s like an itch you have to scratch! –

---or a nagging awareness that keeps popping up in your mind no matter how often you try to ignore it—or a sense of indignation or a conviction like, “I want to do something about this!” or a wish—follow it. Follow that bumble bee buzzing of the Holy Spirit and see where it leads you. Because wherever it leads you—that is the Spirit’s guidance.

And age is not important. You may be 13 and feeling some true curiosity about the ultimate questions of life—why God does the things that God does, why bad things happen to good people. What Jesus was all about? What does scripture mean?

Listen! Because that is the work of the Holy Spirit calling you. Calling you to serve as a pastor. Or maybe your calling is beyond the walls of the church as a Deacon extending the work of the gospel. Ask me. I would love to talk with you.

The important thing is to pay attention to your heart: where is it bursting? Where is it breaking? And why. When you know you will receive an abundance far beyond imagining!

Yes, Serving lives are fruitful lives that not only give but that RECEIVE.

God, being God—desires all good things for us. Jesus tells us so in John’s gospel today. He says to us in verse 11 of the 15th chapter of John, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that YOUR joy may be complete.” The joy of Jesus is in the fruit.

The fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians describes the fruit of the Spirit. Turn in the scriptures to Galatians to chapter 5 verse 22. Galatians is after 2nd Corinthians. This is the

scripture we read this morning---Gal. 22, beginning with verse 5.

Here it tells us, the fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and—as a result—self-control.

The other things listed above in verse 20 such as strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, envy etc. These things deprive of us of God’s presence. They leave us wanting and self-focused. Needy, insecure and led, as it says here, by the desires of the flesh rather than the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The desires of the flesh leave us disconnected from the ground of our being. The source of all wholeness and fulfillment. Connected we are guided, directed and nourished by Jesus love.

In our gospel lesson, Jesus describes himself as the vine. He says to us, “I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and, I in them, bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

Whoever does not abide in me ...withers.
(John 15: 5ff)

God, Jesus teaches us here, is glorified when as Jesus’ disciples, we bear much fruit. Fruit for others lives, which results in the fruit of the Spirit in our own lives.

Discipleship is all about being grounded in the self-giving love of Jesus. Getting our egos out of the way, listening for the Spirit’s nudgings and warnings, and permitting ourselves to be guided to where the nectar of the Spirit is to be found. When we do this, everyone wins! Like the honey bee—there is nectar for our nourishment and fruit for the world.

Have you ever noticed how Bees know their way from the hive to wherever it is that the nectar may be? Miles and miles away but the bees find their way there and back again. That “way” is their vocation in life. God gives it to them.

I love the word vocation. Because its not about a job or a task or a career—its all about a way of living and being in the world—we call it

ministry: Policing or teaching, selling or servicing, counting the offering or cans of juice on the food pantry shelves, or working as a teller in a bank, when we do what we do in connection with the True Vine of Jesus Christ, we serve God. This is what discipleship is all about: because we do it for the glory of God empowered by the love of Christ for the sake of the world he came to save.