

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS FAITHFULNESS

Hebrews 11:32-40

Newbegun United Methodist Church

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The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. For the past several weeks we have been seeking God's word about the nine fruit of the Spirit. I have asked each of us to come with a prepared heart. A heart that is open to the Word so that each fruit becomes a part of your life. I want each of the fruit to be carved upon your heart. I want them to be memorized in your mind. I want the people of God to say, "Yes, let's go and produce fruit, all nine of them." So far we have taken one a week starting with love, then joy, then peace, then patience, then kindness, and goodness. When we think of love as the blossom on the tree from which all the fruits are produced, then joy is love rejoicing in all things; peace is love resting in God's presence; patience is love enduring all things; kindness is love serving; and goodness is love's motivation. How did you do last week with goodness? Did you question your motivations? Did you find yourself doing goodness – just naturally? Could you say that the image of Christ was to be seen in you last week? I know, that is a lot, but do we have any personal stories?

Today we move on to faithfulness. First of all I want to make clear what faithfulness is and how the Holy Spirit produces faithfulness in our lives. There is a difference between faith and faithfulness. Let me repeat that. I would say that every person on earth has some kind of faith, but most people live their lives without

faithfulness. A simple example – I have faith that this pew will hold me up when I sit in it. I can see it is well maintained; I have had some experience in sitting in pews; I don't have any doubt that it will hold up my little body. I have faith. But I won't know for sure until I actually sit down in it and put my whole weight on it. My faith in its ability to hold me up means nothing until I prove it by sitting on it.

Let me give you another example. Two archeologists and their native guide are exploring the jungles of Brazil for an old forgotten Incan city. They come upon a gorge – very wide and very deep. To go around the gorge would take them weeks, maybe months. The only way across the gorge to the lost city is by an old bridge, built by the original inhabitants' centuries ago. The guide refuses to cross the bridge. Finally the first archeologist says, "I've seen these before. I believe that bridge will hold me up." The second archeologist said, "I believe you are right, you go first, then." So, bolstered by his faith in Incan engineering, he stepped out onto the bridge. Faithfulness proves faith. It is faith in action. Faithfulness is love proving itself.

We live in an unfaithful culture. We have faith in the ideals of our country but we don't practice them with everyone. We have faith in the institution of marriage, one man and one woman exclusively, but unfaithfulness seems to be the way so many live out their marriages. We go to any grocery store and see the tabloids trying to catch our attention by glamorizing and sensationalizing unfaithfulness. What happened to faithfulness? Having faith in something is not the same as having faithfulness.

Faithfulness is more than just saying you believe in something. Faithfulness is proving to yourself that it is real. Abraham had faith. He had faith that there was only one God, creator of heaven and earth. But if Abraham had stayed in Ur the world would

never know and God would have found someone else. Abraham not only had faith, he had faithfulness to act upon his faith and move his entire family to Canaan.

Moses had faith. He believed there was a God of the Hebrews. But his faith would have meant nothing if he had not returned to Egypt and faced Pharaoh until pharaoh let the people go. All the people mentioned in the reading from Hebrews had faith, but what set them all apart was that they proved their faith to themselves with acts of faithfulness. Faith in the grace of God through Jesus Christ will save you for heaven, and faithfulness will make you, if not a martyr, at least a witness and a disciple which is what we are called to do after we are saved and receive the Holy Spirit.

Faithfulness is nothing more than proving to yourself and to God and to the world that your trust and assurance of your faith is real. So, what can we do this week to practice our own faithfulness? I have some suggestions, of course!

First, we can hold onto the truth. Not the truth that you get from twitter, Fox News, the internet, the government, or the newspaper. When I look to those sources I don't know what the truth is. My father-in-law used to say, "Believe only half of what you see and 10% of what you read." There is, however, one truth that you can hold onto – the Word of God. Psalm 100:5 reads, "For God is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations." There is the One whose faithfulness is sure, and true, and pure, and everlasting. Even when our faith and faithfulness wanes and waxes, God still remains faithful to you. Hold on to that truth.

Another way we can practice our faithfulness is to remain in love with God through any and all adversity. This is not an easy thing to do when we experience adversity. Yet, what good is our faith unless it remains with us all the time. Faithfulness

is what the Holy Spirit gives to us for adversity. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is faithfulness. Philippians 1:6 reads, "I am convinced that God, who began a good work in you, will carry it through to completion on the day of Jesus Christ." We have to believe that, that God is still working for good in us, even during adversity. It is not our faith that proves this, it is our faithfulness that we remain in Christ; we remain in love with God; through the adversity. Romans 8:28 reads, "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." I believe this too. But it will only be our faithfulness during adversity, during times we don't understand, during pain and loss, that we prove it to ourselves. Whatever happens - practice faithfulness. Stay in love with God and others.

Lastly, we can practice faithfulness by keeping any and all commitments. Faithfulness is what gives us integrity, loyalty, fidelity. I want the fruit of faithfulness to guide me by my commitments, not my feelings. For I truly believe that when we stand before the throne of God for the judgment of the quick and the dead that God will ask me, not, was I successful, but was I faithful.

This week, practice faithfulness. See where you can prove to yourself that your faith is real. You will face temptations, challenges, disappointments, and even setbacks this week. The question is – can I remain faithful to Jesus and live my faith? Practice being a faithful witness and disciple of Jesus Christ. Amen.