

God's Walking Song

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Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

3rd Sunday after Pentecost - June 26, 2022

Texts: Galatians 5:1, 13-17, 22-25

SCRIPTURE READING Galatians 5:1, 13-17, 22-25

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh.... By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Luke 9:51-62

Jesus has an appointment in Jerusalem, an appointment known only to himself, where he will meet what we all meet eventually: his death. How does he respond?

When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

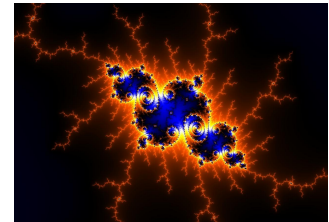
Your word, our light; your grace, our hope; your love, our life. Thanks be to God.



Every season is my favorite season, but I think my favorite *food* season is fruit season. And that's now. There's something about fruit that's so magical. Fruit is so sweet. So juicy. And it just happens: ready to eat, right off the vine or the tree, like a little carry-over from the Garden of Eden. Who but God would have thought of this? *And* fruit is loaded with nutrition. Did you know vitamins were only discovered about a century ago? The guy who discovered them in the early 20th century called them "accessory nutrient factors." He got a Nobel prize. But of course, they'd been there all along. It's their nature. The "vita" in their name comes from the word for life.

Do you suppose that vitamins were *offended* that they'd been overlooked for so long? Or did they just go on doing what they did? Silly question! Fruits and vegetables and vitamins don't feel offended that way. It's us people who get upset when we feel neglected, insulted, or ignored.

James and John were offended on Jesus' behalf when the Samaritans in the village rejected him. They wanted to call down fire from heaven and destroy them. They were not at their best that day. Jesus nixed that notion! He's on a journey to Jerusalem. He's got an appointment to keep: with the people who will try to stop him. He's pretty sure that his appointment is with death, too, but he sets his face toward Jerusalem anyway. He keeps walking, he keeps teaching, he keeps healing, he keeps loving, he keeps moving, singing God's walking song. Spreading life and love.



Jesus told his disciples, "Forget that whole retribution idea. I don't have time to be offended - and neither do you!" We all have the same appointment with death, though maybe not death on a cross. But how we walk the road matters. One saying I keep in mind comes from writer Ursula LeGuin: "It's good to have an end to journey toward, but it's the journey that matters in the end." As we walk this road, we really don't have time to waste being offended.

I think of Teresa, Vera's daughter and Karen's sister. We've been praying for her for almost a year now. Do you remember why? She was diagnosed with cancer last fall; they predicted her appointment with death would be in three months. Obviously, she's gone well beyond that with the help of good doctors and a good attitude. I don't know for sure, but I guess she would say she doesn't have time to be offended. What she does have time for is walking: 10, 12, 15,000 steps a day, chemo or no chemo. Wow! This is her journey, and her journey matters, not just to her. Vera says, "She inspires all of us." Singing God's walking song. Spreading life and love.

I think about the water carrier who carried two buckets from the well to the field every day, one balanced on each end of the pole across her shoulders. Turns out one bucket had a slow leak. Every day she wondered why one bucket had less water when she arrived. How did



she finally figure it out? All along the side of the path where the bucket had leaked, flowers had sprung up and blossomed. Maybe she lost a little along the way, but gave back more for the next person to enjoy along the road. Spreading life and love. Singing God's walking song.

We humans spend so much time and energy feeding the offended parts of ourselves, the righteously indignant. Me, too. It's human nature. One of my guides, Richard Rohr, says, ""The next time you are offended, consider it a 'teachable moment.' Ask yourself what part of you is actually upset."¹ Usually it's not my best self, whether I'm offended on my own account, or on someone else's behalf. Ask yourself, "Am I genuinely grieved over some real injury, or do I just feel slighted? Put down? Ignored or neglected?" No one can do that to your, when you're singing God's walking song. Like Jesus, set your face toward the goal, keep your eyes on the prize. When that's the case, you might be leaking blessings you're totally unaware of, like the water carrier with the leaky bucket.

Another guide. Steve Garnaas-Holmes, summed up the message of today like this:

Don't you just want to slap James and John
for being such idiots?
In fact, why stop there?
Why not command fire to come down and consume them?
Funny how
(a) we want to destroy people who disagree with us,
(b) we imagine we can do so, even if just by insulting them, and
(c) we assume Jesus likes that.
Wrong all three times.

(When fire actually does come down from heaven, as at Pentecost,
it doesn't destroy people; it destroys our divisions, connects us,
and helps us communicate when previously we hadn't.)

So when people won't listen to us or even won't accept us,
what do we do? Instead of calling down fire,
call up the fruits the Spirit has given you:
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Practice this among your enemies and see how you are blessed!²

¹ Richard Rohr, *Daily Meditation*, June 24, 2022.
<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/responding-instead-of-reacting-2022-06-24>

² Steve Garnaas-Holmes, *unfolding light*, June 22, 2022.

Fruit just happens, whether on the tree, on the vine, or in our lives, full of sweetness and nutrients and vitamins for anyone to enjoy. Fruit happens when we're rooted in Spirit and grounded in love and walking with Jesus toward our appointment with whatever lies ahead. We don't leave a barren trail; we feed those who travel with us, and those who travel after us. And they feed us.

I think of this especially today as we all - Freya's family members, sponsors, and community of faith - witness her baptism. We are more than kindly bystanders; baptism isn't just about the one being baptized. All of us here today solemnly promise before God to live lives full of Spirit, lives full of fruit that will feed her and all children who need to learn how to live in this crazy world.



Every good parent tries to give their child all the nutrition they can, in fruits and vegetables and milk and protein. Kids need those things to thrive. This world needs the fruits of the Spirit to flourish, as well. Our world is perishing for lack of those fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. People, we are called to bear the fruits that nourish the world as we walk this road together. Thanks be to God! Amen

Prayers

Mysterious Love, your Spirit is our breath; the fruit of your Spirit is our life. We breathe, in and out, and breathe in and out your love, joy and peace. Our blood flows through our body, and through our body flows your patience, kindness and generosity. We look upon the world and through our eyes shines your faithfulness, generosity and self-control.

Your Spirit lives in us; and the fruit of that Spirit is life; and we give thanks.

From this place of security, we can look upon your world and its struggling people, ravaged by sickness, shaken by earthquakes burying whole villages, eroded by the effects of climate change, where events move faster than we can comprehend. Help us not take offense but ground ourselves in you and walk in your love.

We pray for the people of Ukraine, Yemen, Afghanistan; for all people everywhere whose lives are uprooted, disrupted, destroyed. And we pray for those near our hearts.

And we give thanks for the blessing of baptism, your promise to hold your children in your love forever. We give thanks for strong and loving parents, family and friends who promise today to lead Freya to know and embrace that love. Be with each of us as we go forward in your name, and teach us to pray, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...