

“Fruit of the Spirit: Self-control”
June 26, 2011
Grove Presbyterian Church

We come now to summarize the last nine Sundays, the series on the Fruit of the Spirit begun on Easter Day.

Fruit rather than Fruits. Singular. Nine Sundays but only one Fruit. Each one a variation on the same theme. The whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts. A gestalt. A unified whole.

After all, how can you have love without goodness, or kindness without patience, or inner peace without faithfulness?

A gestalt:

- ▲ Like a Seurat painting – all those paintbrush dots forming the images
- ▲ Like the human body, for who you are is decidedly more than the collection of your individual cells
- ▲ Like a tasty goulash
- ▲ Like a sports team
- ▲ Or a congregation

A gestalt: the whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

Fruit of the Spirit – singular, and particular too; not a universal principle or rule, but specific actions rising to meet special moments.

Fruit of the Spirit -- all nine in Greek are feminine words, which makes sense because throughout the Old Testament the Holy Spirit (aka: wisdom, sophia) is feminine. Now, I've never read anyone suggesting this before, but, in Greek mythology there were the nine Muses, sister goddesses, the source for a spiritually full and happy life. I'm speculating that Paul, a Greek scholar, alludes to the **Nine Sister Fruit** as the Christian version of the Nine Sister Muses. The divine source for the spiritually full and happy life.

Fruit of the Spirit – if you are on the vine, you cannot be fruitless. We wither when cut off, separated from the source, this spiritual umbilical cord. You are what you tap into, what feeds you.

Oh, yes, as we review the list of the fruit, please note (as Michael Yaconelli wrote in his book Messy Spirituality) that **competence** fortunately is not one of the fruit of the spirit. We aren't called to be competent, just in relationship with Jesus, our **in**competent selves connected to him.

1. Love: *agape* this, unconditional self-giving love (as opposed to the gimme love), cherishing the other as more important than you – and thrilling when mutual
2. Joy: *chara* -- more than cheap thrills, this is delight, a transcendent moment received within the magic of the here and now, exultation at something simply wonderful
3. Peace: *eirene* -- harmony, positive wholeness, which brings prosperity, for we sure know how war, strife, anger, conflict bankrupts us
4. Patience: *makrothumia* -- long-tempered instead of short-tempered, delayed gratification, patience proving hope
5. Kindness: *chrestotes* -- goodness of heart, graciously unzipping your skin and stepping out of yourself
6. Goodness: *agathosune* -- honorable, doing moral goodness
7. Faithfulness: *pistos* -- a conviction based upon what you have heard, never a possession, always a verb
8. Gentleness: *prautes* -- a humble fairness, a sweet reasonableness which makes a gentle-man a gentleman
9. Now. last in our pearls on a string: self-control

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Both of today's Bible texts (Acts 22: 1-5 and II Samuel 18: 8-11) supply us two examples of lack of self control, one by the High Priest himself who disgraces himself when dealing with Paul, and the other with David's General who, despite orders from King David, lets his rash emotions justify his scheming and decides to assassinate David's rebellious son.

Now, to the High Priest:

**While Paul was looking intently at the council he said, "Brothers, up to this day I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God." Then the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near him to strike him on the mouth. At this Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting there to judge me according to the law, and yet in violation of the law you order me to be struck?" Those standing nearby said, "Do you dare to insult God's high priest?" And Paul said, "I did not realize, brothers, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a leader of your people.'"**

The high priest sure lacked self-control; in Greek: *egkrateia*.

Slapping. Its what's behind "turn the other cheek." I get to slap you for blasphemy. Jesus, ever defiant, says, "Go ahead because I'm not going to stop talking – slap me again."

Sadly, the High Priest justified himself for slapping – he was a good religious monitor of all things religious.

Love the irony.

Paul then pointing out the irony because a real High Priest wouldn't have behaved so boorishly, so rude. You really don't expect the Pope to have his cardinals slapping a guy out for saying something which he finds irreligious.

Thank you, O' guardians of right religion. You are so very good at slapping.

"I'm sorry," scolds Paul. "Judging by the behavior here, I didn't realize the High Priest was present."

Other anti-examples? By the dozen!

- ▲ Road rage, supermarket line rage, airplane passenger rage, phone rage...
- ▲ Sending rude photos of yourself and other such stupid tweets, twitters, and hasty emails that you really should have waited to review before sending
- ▲ My teammate who took offense at the other players chipping him, bumping him, dis-respecting him, till he finally exploded and shoved a guy to the ground. And promptly got kicked out of the game.

The epitome of being preoccupied with yourself. Judging others by the sorry measure of your self-opinion. The distortion from self-centeredness. The sorry thinking of you as more important than them. There's tapping into a source that gets us into trouble again and again.

This self-preoccupation can quickly escalate our accusations.

Stop taking things personally. You're really not that important.

That many argue gay marriage shouldn't be legalized, doesn't make them hostile to homosexuals.

No more than those who want Nationalized Health Care deserve being called un-American.

That I may disagree with you doesn't automatically equate into: "I'm phobic about you." Name-calling gives a pretty quick indication of both shallow thinking and myopic self-absorption.

Self-discipline, they say, is doing what you have to when you don't want to.

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Once upon a time (wrote a rabbi writing modern day fables) there was a man born with all his nerve endings on the outside, his ganglia growing outside his skin, eventually trailing about him as he walked. Super-sensitive. Easily injured. Defensive and ever ready to be offended.

Everyone around him, of course, wanted to be sensitive to his feelings so they always avoided stepping on his feelings. Those who weren't familiar with his condition, he made a point of educating them to be careful and sensitive.

Soon he met a woman. She at first pitied him but, as often happens, pity turned to love and they married. She was always very careful and patient with him and his exposed nerve endings, lest she offend him. He would look wounded and she would politely give way. Strangely enough, after years of shaping her existence to fit his needs, she began to lose weight, suffer headaches, even a tic started in her eye.

Until one day when she couldn't take it anymore. She raised a foot, and STOMP, with all her might she came down hard on one of his trailing nerve endings. He screeched, either from pain or shock. Again she stomped. He screeched again pleading with her to be careful and not hurt him. Stomp, stomp, stomp. She chased him about the room stomping on his ganglia from room to room. Exhausted they both feel asleep. Hours later she awoke to discover his ganglia no longer curled around him on the floor, his nerve endings were all gone, recoiled inside his skin.

*"Beware the insensitivities of the sensitive."
-- Edwin Friedman, Friedman's Fables*

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The big secret that really isn't a secret is that it really isn't a matter of **self**-control. It is a matter of God control. I know too well what happens when only the **self** is in control.

It does come suddenly very clear. Everything comes from someplace. Every effect has a cause.

- ▲ Light from the sun
- ▲ The soybean, rose, and Elm tree are but extensions of earth
- ▲ This pen is a complex composed of minerals, chemicals, and petroleum

Everything comes from someplace. Must. Why not spiritual things? Where do these Muses come from, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. It is a matter of tapping into the true source. God-centeredness rather than self-centeredness.

You are so filled with goodwill – Godly will -- that you avoid being controlled by the rashness of your self. So filled with goodwill you rise above the fray.