

**Message for May 20, 2012**

**Galatians 5:16-26**

*Fruit*

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God is not done with you yet... God will never be done with you...

Cathy Rigby was a gymnast in the 1972 Olympic Games. She had one goal in mind to win a gold medal to be the best gymnast in the world. She did really well. But she didn't win the gold. She was crushed. She went over to her parents in the stands and cried. Through her tears she said, "Mom, I'm so sorry. I really wanted to win. I prayed that I would win. But I didn't."

Her mom said, "Cathy! Listen to me! You did your best! And we love you just the same. We are so proud of you no matter what." And then her mom said ten words that changed Cathy's life forever. Here they are (show them)... "Doing your best is more important than being the best." That is so true. Do your best and then leave God the rest.

We need not worry about being the best person, or the best parent, or the best husband, or the best wife, or the best student, or the best teacher, or the best neighbor, or even the best (*you fill in the blank*). We have enough challenges in life without the pressures of feeling bad about ourselves because someone else can do something better than we can. Be yourself! Be the best you, you can be because...

God is not done with you yet... God never will be done with you...

I say those words because today is Confirmation Sunday. Today family and friends have gathered in this place to hear our seven young men and women answer a key question for their lives. And that question is this – *who do you say Jesus is?*

Each one of us must answer that question for ourselves every day. Who do *you* say Jesus is? How we answer that question is reflected in the way we live our lives both in the church and outside of the church.

All 7 young people answered that question saying (in essence) -- *Jesus is Lord of my life*. They may not fully realize what that means but hopefully someday they will. They have confirmed their faith in Jesus that he saves them from sin, death, and the devil. *Jesus is Lord of my life and now I'm set free...*

Let's say that together... *Jesus is Lord of my life and now I'm set free...*

Some of our Confirmands may see that freedom and go running from this place hoping never to return. Skipping and shouting as they go - "I'm done... I'm free..." That often happens. But that is not the done-ness or the freedom we are talking about.

As a matter of fact these 7 young people now share in the right and responsibility of what it means to say "yes" to Jesus. Together we all have the right and responsibility to help them grow in the faith to live into what it means to say that *Jesus is Lord of my life and now I'm free*. It means that we will do our part. We will do our best to produce the fruit of faith in this place and in the world.

Imagine that you've decided to plant an apple orchard. You prepare the soil. You plant the seeds. You water, you fertilize, you tend to the weeds, you watch and you wait. To your delight, those seeds germinate and sprout. A little sunshine and a little rain leads to a lot of growth. Before you know it, a grove of trees stand where there was once a barren field. The branches of those trees reach up to the warmth and the power of the sun. It's a beautiful sight!

But you didn't plant this orchard for its beauty. You planted this orchard for its fruit. Your vision is for those branches to be filled with sweet, ripe, juicy fruit. That's the purpose of an orchard to produce fruit.

The Bible says that we are God's orchard, sometimes called God's vineyard. That's God's vision for us. God has invested in us and continues to bless us so that we grow and produce. The Bible also says that God longs for a return on his investment in us. God desires "fruit" from us. I believe we want to be fruitful. We long to be faithful and yet... we... well... we'll get to that in a minute.

Our 7 Confirmands are watching you and me to learn from us to see if we are being faithful, fruitful, disciples of Jesus? They will follow our lead. Are you? Are you fruitful? Are you faithful? Are you doing the best you can when it comes to being a disciple of Jesus? Before you answer those questions remember this...

God is not done with you yet... God will never be done with you...

St. Paul says in our reading from Galatians that *it's* God's love within us. *It's* the Holy Spirit at work within us that produces the fruit God is looking for. On our own without God's love, without the Holy Spirit at work in us (often because we are not open to the work of the Spirit in us) we are bound to produce the works of the flesh, naturally. And we can't help it.

The works of the flesh are obvious, Paul says. And I've found them really easy to do. I've even tried some of them myself. I won't tell you which ones. Truth is, we've probably all tried some of them, maybe all of them, at one time or another. Paul offers this list of things (these sins) that we ought not do because they have nothing to do with the kingdom of God. They are not the fruits we should be producing in God's orchard.

Now for me it's easy to see why some of these are on the list. But for some of the others I wonder why – why they're on this list... Fornication yeah, impurity okay, licentiousness (I had to look that up it means - *lacking legal or moral restraint*) yeah that should be on there, idolatry yeah, there is only one true God that we worship, sorcery yeah, again we worship the God of all gods, enmities (I forgot what that means so I had to look that one up too. It means *a feeling or condition of hatred or hostility*) yeah it should be on the list. Strife – now why is that on the list, jealousy too, and anger, and quarrels, and dissensions, and factions, and envy. Now I can see why drunkenness and carousing finish out this list... but... Why are strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, and envy on the list?

Paul says there is no place for any of these things in our lives. I wonder why? Why are they so harmful... I then realized that all of these things are focused on the self and they produce a self-centered, self-gratifying lifestyle. This is a list of self-serving things. They are the sour fruits of our self-centeredness.

When we say that Jesus is Lord of our lives then we strive to do our best to serve others. When we say Jesus is Lord of our lives we discipline ourselves holding ourselves accountable to living life the way Jesus taught. Now, if we want to know what Jesus meant by what he taught, then we need to look at what Jesus did. We need to watch how Jesus lived.

Jesus said “sin is sin.” And then he paid the price for our sin on the cross. From the cross Jesus declares – to you and to me saying – “you are not condemned.” And then he said “quit sinning.” “And if you don't” – Jesus said, “I love you! God's grace is yours!” “And if you don't think you can quit sinning” – Jesus said, “I love you! God's grace is yours!” “And if your sin has caused brokenness in your life or in someone's life... or if someone's sin has caused brokenness in your life and if you're not sure you'll ever be able to escape it then understand this,” Jesus says, “I love you! God's grace is yours!”

There is a tension here that we need to live into. Many of us don't like tension. We want it resolved ASAP. But when it comes to faith, we live within the tension of *sin* and *grace*. And if we try to resolve this tension we lose something. We live within this tension because sin always has a gotcha. And God doesn't want sin to get us.

That's why we need grace because in so many ways – sin has already got us. And grace is our way out. Grace is God's cure for our sins. Grace is the only way to live life faithfully according to Jesus. He taught it and he lived it.

As grace flows freely into our lives from God through the Holy Spirit, the fruit we naturally produce is sweet and ripe and juicy in the form of: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-control.

On the one hand, we are sinners and we always will be. On the other hand, God's grace is ours because of Jesus. We are set free from our sin. I believe the church is at its best when we embrace both *grace* and *truth*. That's why...

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We bear fruit not to *earn* God's love or favor. We bear fruit in *response* to God's love and favor – freely given through Jesus and his cross. We are his disciples. And Jesus says to his disciples, “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”

When it comes to discipleship “Doing your best is more important than being the best.” In this orchard may we do our best and leave God the rest. Amen.