

Good Fruit  
June 30, 2019  
Trinity Lime Rock

Luke 9:51-62  
Galatians 5:13-25  
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When you hear the word good, what does it make you think of? Dinner last night, a piece of music, the person who helped you out of a tight spot...many times we use the phrase that he or she is/was a good person. What does it mean to be good? Why are we good or at least strive to be good?

A recent study came up with some duh concepts, such as; if we see people as good, we will be less protective of ourselves and therefore better toward others, I.e. good. But what is good in light of our Christian walk?

When Martin Luther was a monk he wanted to be good enough to be accepted by God and he was taught that to be that good and to enter Heaven he had to be perfect. The way to that perfection was to have no unconfessed sin, this led him to spend hours in the confessional as he sought to remember every iota of sin in his life. He wrote that he would spend hours in the confessional and as he walked away, some item would come to mind and he would turn sorrowfully toward the confessional. I would doubt it was as sorrowfully as the brother hearing confession seeing him returning!

We all know how Dr Luther overcame this conundrum. As he was in hiding to avoid certain execution, to fill his time he translated the Bible into the German of the people so everyone could read and understand. But what he came to understand was salvation had nothing to do with however desperately he strove to be perfect, it was by Grace alone - he could never be good, he was accepted because of what God had done through Christ, His death, resurrection and ascension. Martin's life changed, he did not become perfect or good, but he realized that he was made perfect through what Christ had done, not what he did.

Many years ago I worked in the same office as a woman who did not like me. I do not know why, it was a case of simply not liking someone. We did not work together and had very little contact. What I did know was that she professed a strong Roman Catholic faith. I was confused by her proclamation of faith and treatment of others. At the end of one workday I was sitting in my box and she walked by and wished me a good evening. I was able to respond as I struggled not to fall out of my chair. I never spoke

to her again as she was killed the next morning. To this day I believe that she was struggling and wanted to be a good Christian and made the effort to speak to me.

To this day her simple comment humbles me.

Think about the Gospel reading today. They are following Jesus to Jerusalem and pass through a Samaritan village and are basically ignored. Now James and John want to call down fire to destroy the village. Jesus must have had a moment that every parent has when they cannot believe what their ears have just heard. He pauses, turns and rebukes them. Then they go on. They were reacting out of anger, not grace. They were not reacting as a good person. But Jesus was not only leading them to Jerusalem, he was leading them to a life of faith.

But here is the amazing thing, we are free from all that. As Martin realized, it all comes from God's grace, not our striving to be perfect. To me one of the fundamental differences between Christianity and other religions, is that acceptance is not based on accomplishment, following certain rules, rather than what God has done. As the reading from Galatians begins, we are set free by Christ, not by anything we do. And this freedom is not to indulge ourselves, but to love one another.

Galatians has two lists, the fruit of the flesh or self-indulgence and the fruit of the spirit or love for one another. In my own Christian walk, I see these as guidance in a sense. What do I mean, well, when I look at my life what do I see? Is my life and actions indicative of the fruit of the flesh or the fruit of the spirit? Are my actions impelled by self-indulgence or love for others? Do I wish that someone who has treated me badly falls down some stairs or do I pray for them?

When Garrison Keillor lived in New York City, he carried a lot of quarters and when asked for "spare change" he would give that person change. He was asked why, because the person was probably not going to use it for good. He replied that as a Christian he was told to give, not to ask the person to fill out a questionnaire.

Paul writes that the fruit, and let me point out right here, this is not a plural word, it is fruit singular, are the outgrowth of how one is living their life. The fruit of the spirit come from the Holy Spirit because we are walking in the

spirit. The fruit comes not from my attempts to be good, but are the outgrowth of my maturing in my Christian walk.

Paul ends by saying that if we live by the Spirit, let us be guided by the Spirit. This, as he writes above, is real freedom. Now, we are not perfect, Martin certainly had his issues and I have mine which I will not go into right now. We are in process, but my own experience of the fruit of the spirit is certainly more of freedom than the fruit of the flesh.

So, to me this is the good. It is not suffering from trying, but walking with Christ and seeing the freedom that come from the fruit of the spirit. It may be struggling with ones feelings about someone and beginning by saying goodnight, leaving the last deviled egg, praying for someone who has hurt you or standing still and asking God what is good. The fruit of the spirit is seen in how we live our lives.

Let me close with a quote from JW Hackett. He was a British General in World War II who ended up behind enemy lines late in the war in Holland. He was hidden by a family for almost three months, at great peril, until he could be smuggled to safety. In speaking of the family their Christian faith, and goodness in the face of such terror he wrote;

I was leaving behind me a rare and beautiful thing. It was a structure of kindness and courage, of steadfast devotion and quiet selflessness, which it was a high privilege to have known. I had been witness to an act of faith, simple, unobtrusive and imperishable. I had often seen bravery in battle. I now also knew the unconquerable strength of the gentle and good.