

Faith and Fruit

Hebrews 5:11-14, 6:1-3, 7-12

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

6 Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And God permitting, we will do so.

7 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. 8 But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned. 9 Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation. 10 God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them. 11 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 12 We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. (NIV)

Read the "Today's English Version" 5:11 to 6:3 NRSV 6:10-12

We are talking about milk today so I am going to start with some cow jokes: What do you call cattle with a sense of humor? A: Laughing stock! Why do cows wear bells? A: Their horns don't work. What kind of milk comes from a forgetful cow? A: Milk of Amnesia. What do you call a cow with a twitch? A: Beef Jerky. And finally What is it when one cow spies on another cow? A: A steak out.

How's that for Dad jokes? A family was driving to Tampa, Florida. As far as the eye could see, orange trees were loaded with fruit. When we stopped for breakfast, I ordered orange juice with my eggs. "I'm sorry," the waitress said. "I can't bring you orange juice. Our machine is broken." We were surrounded by millions of oranges, and I knew they had oranges in the kitchen -- orange slices garnished our plates. What was the problem? No juice? Hardly. We were surrounded by thousands of gallons of juice. The problem was they had become dependent on a machine to get it.

Christians, Christ-followers, we ... are sometimes like that. We may be surrounded by Bibles in our homes, but if something should happen to the Sunday morning worship service at Doster Community Church, we would have no nourishment for our souls. Don't worry, I know I hit that one hard enough last Sunday. The problem is not a lack of spiritual food -- but that many Christians haven't grown enough in their faith, to know how to get the Bible nourishment for themselves. OR ... they know how

to get it for themselves, but they don't want to expend the effort to get it for themselves. As a human being, one of the marks of maturity is you learn how to feed yourself. This is true in spiritual growth as well. **[NOTE 1]**

Rick Warren notes the mark of spiritual maturity occurs when a believer "takes off the bib and puts on an apron." Immature children wear bibs and expect others to meet their needs. Those who don aprons have learned the joy of serving others. They prepare the food for others. Which attire are you wearing? I remember when I was a kid, seeing my mom hand feed my sister. I realize that she did the same with me as well. After a while I began to take the spoon and feed myself. At first it was a little messy (missed my mouth most of the time, how do you miss something that big?). As time and experience went on, I became more proficient and landed the spoonfuls more often than I missed. As a kid, my mom cooked for me, but I truly did feed myself clear through high school and on. Then I grew up and moved out and learned to cook for myself and feed myself. Then came marriage and children and now I rarely cook because Amy is so much better at it than me. Now we see our children going through the same process with our grandchildren. First they hand feed them, then their toddlers learn to use the spoon and soon begin to feed themselves and eventually they will grow up and move out and learn to cook and feed themselves. So you see this repeating sort of circle of life. It's kind of amazing to see it happen.

One of the things that bugs me or even, alarms me is when I hear Christian people use the phrase, "I'm not getting fed" or, "I left that church because they weren't feeding me." I think to myself, did you ever take up a spoon on your own? If you talk to me after the service or give me a call I can hook you up with what is just called the Moravian text. The Moravians are just people who cared deeply about the Bible and if you read all the texts every day for two years you will have read the whole Bible a little at a time. Please let me know if you have any questions. I will drive to your home to help you if you like. If you don't like electronics I will get you the printed daily texts on paper. In both cases they direct you toward your own Bible. **[NOTE 2]**

God expects you and me to grow up to a place where we are feeding ourselves, taking in our own nourishment. Maybe at first we miss our mouth, but we will become more proficient as we exercise it. Yes, for a time someone else will cook for us and present before us the meal. But, in time, He expects us to cook for ourselves and even to come to the place where we are cooking and feeding others, babies. We have a circle of life even in the church that parallels that in nature. God's plan is that we will come to the place where we are feeding others. We may not cook the meal, but we will do our part in helping to prepare and serve it. We may set up chairs, or run copies (helps and service). We may compel others to come in to discover their need to be fed (evangelism). We may serve up the banquet before them (prophecy, teacher or encourager). But we grow up to become a server instead of a consumer.

If you look at the text you see that the author is frustrated with the people to whom he is writing. What we read here is tough love. The author is basically saying that he has a lot more to teach the people but they have become dull in the ear. The word

used in the original Greek is “Nawthros” which refers to being sluggish, dead in the water, apathetic, almost dormant. The author is using words to wake people up. He is basically saying that at any kind of normal growth rate the people should have grown to a state of readiness to become teachers. No excuses. The goal for every Christ-follower is to become a mature Christ-follower. Growth is not optional. God loves you and accepts you as you are, but also loves you enough to not let you stay where you are. The goal is multiplication. And the people to whom the author of Hebrews is writing to are still needing to learn the basics.

I promise that I will never yell at anyone or make them feel bad because they don't understand the basics, the fundamentals of being a Christ-follower. My job as described in Ephesians is to “equip the saints for ministry, for acts of service.” So if you find yourself not understanding or with questions about the basics please set up an appointment or just stop in and I would love to talk to you about it. If there are three or four of you, we can have a Basics Bible Study. Three years ago I taught a class called the 10 Basic Steps to Christian Maturity and I had four people in the class all over the age of 55 that had gone to church their whole lives but never learned the basics. They became excited about the Bible and living it out. Linda Magee was one of those people.

How many of us have watched Trading Spaces on TLC or seen Bob Villa or one of the many other home flipping shows and became inspired to finally do something about our own tired and outdated home? It's easy to get inspired to do something. Once inspired by seeing a week's work condensed into a one hour TV show we can easily envision the lasting improvements we can make in our own homes. Yet here we sit; one month, six months, one year after starting and our weekend transformation sits half finished as we struggle to find the time to finish what we started.

This can happen in our spiritual lives too. We begin our walk with Christ full of excitement. Fully intending to do whatever it takes to make it all the way. But after a while, Christianity becomes too daily. It's the same thing over and over again. The same prayers, the same worship, the same Bible stories; we want to follow Jesus but we begin to drift. We get distracted. The excitement cools, our dedication weakens, we begin to neglect prayer and study and church. Before we know it, our faith is weak, perhaps even dead. What then ? ...Pray, start reading the Word again, join a life group which is a group of Christ-followers that provides community, encouragement, learning about being a better Christ-follower and impetus to do something about it. Join a discipleship group to dig deeper and learn the finer points of living as a disciple and how to disciple others. That is the goal according to Jesus, to do the things He did. If there is no new group starting we will start a new one.

The author of Hebrews is comparing the people to infants drinking milk from the bottle or the breast. It is natural to do that when you are an infant, a newborn. But it is un-natural and will stunt your growth if you continue to only take in milk after you get to be over 2 or three years old. He is trying to wake up these people and exhort them to grow spiritually. Do you have a spiritual growth plan? If you aim at nothing you will hit it EVERY time. What is your plan to grow spiritually? If you have no plan, then this

text was written for you and for me. I haven't thought through and put a plan on paper in way too long. That is my "I will ..." statement for this week. I am going to put my personal spiritual growth plan for 2023 on paper this week. **[NOTE 3]**

The author is alarmed because the people to whom he is writing have treated carelessly the call to holiness, becoming fully separated for God. Do you set apart time in your life for God? Do you set apart time to read the Word? Do you set apart your talents, your thoughts, your actions for God and His use, His service? The goal is mature followers of Jesus that produce fruit. The author is agitated, angry, and concerned because these people who should be ready to be teachers are needing to be taught again the basics. The author defines the basics as repentance, confession, faith toward God, trust, baptism, being filled with the Holy Spirit, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and judgment or eternal life. The goal of the Christian life is to become a mature follower of Jesus. Solid food is putting into practice the Word of God. Solid food produces fruit like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But please listen to this, please hear this next point: Maturity in Christ is never simply a matter of personal attributes. Maturity in Christ is Faith that leads to fruit in attitudes and abilities accomplishing the mandate Christ gave the church. Go we see in Matthew chapter 10 that he sends out the 12 disciples, in Luke chapter 10 Jesus sends out the 72, in Matthew 28 Jesus gives the Great Commission to go and make disciples, and in Acts 1:8 Jesus tells the disciples that they will be witnesses. What does Jesus tell them to do?: cast out demons, heal the sick, preach the nearness of the Kingdom of God, feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the imprisoned, preach, baptize, teach and witness. **[NOTE 4]**

Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 10 tells us that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Maturity in Christ requires commitment, effort, practice, sweat, sacrifice, the agony of perseverance, and experience through involvement. Do you see those things in your life?

The preacher Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said, "Men and women no longer exercise in sport as they used to. Instead, people tend to sit in crowds and just watch other people play. And I fear that the tendency is even presenting itself in the Church. More and more we see people are just sitting back in crowds while one or two people are expected to be doing everything. Now that, of course, is a complete denial of the New Testament doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ, where every single member has responsibility, and has a function, and matters." People of Doster, church is not meant to be a spectator sport. A faithful follower of Jesus should want to be more than a spectator, a disciple of Jesus should want to experience the blessing of following and serving their God. **[NOTE 5]**

--We are called to be the church together, serving God and each other. It's more than a feeling of belonging - it's willing participation.

--It's more than just saying we care - it's actually helping, doing.

--It's more than just saying we believe, it's faith in action, putting into practice what God has taught us.

--It's more than just being served by others - it's having a servant heart, a kind heart, a generous heart.

--Being a Christ-follower is more than just saying you forgive - it's forgiving others as Christ has already forgiven you.

--It's more than just dreaming about reaching the lost - it's actually doing something to reach them.

--It's more than just being taught by the preacher - it's about inspiring others to learn and grow and make disciples.

--It's more than just living for Christ, it's about growing spiritually in Him.

--Being a mature Christ-follower is more than just giving what you feel like - it's about sacrificial living for the Glory of God. It's all about following Jesus as Saviour and as Lord, learning how to live and serve. It's about daring to be different, daring to be an active faithful follower, daring to be a participant, not just a passenger. Being a faithful follower is about dying to ourselves: our wants, our needs, our desires

--To be a faithful follower we need to give our lives completely to Jesus.

--To be a faithful follower we need to let God work in us and through us to accomplish His purposes. To be a faithful follower we need to faithfully follow Jesus and walk as He walked. To be a faithful follower we need to love and serve others as Jesus was willing to love and serve. My hope, my prayer is that the evidence of faith will be present in all our lives and that each day we will grow in our spiritual maturity.

May God help each of us to be faithful followers functioning together for His honor and glory! **[NOTE 6]**

In chapter 6 the author changes tactics. In chapter 5:11-14 and the first verses of chapter 6 he is trying to wake them up and get them to see where they are at and where they should be. Now in verses 7-12 the author shifts tactics. He realizes people need hope. When you challenge people and get in their face they sometimes want to throw up their hands and quit. So, the author says even though we are coming down hard on you we are confident that you will not stay where you are at. We are confident that you will not stay in your baby/infant state and you will grow. People of God you are beloved and fully and freely adopted as God's kids, His children. God sees you. He does not forget when you feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give water to the thirsty, because when you do it unto the least of God's people you do it unto Him, it tells us that in (Matthew 25:39-20). **[NOTE 7]** Michael O'Brien tells a haunting story in his fictional book, entitled *Sophia House: In the Middle Ages*, a famous young painter was hired to create a mural above the high altar of a great church in Paris. The subject was the life of Christ. The artist labored with persistence for many years, and his mural became known as the marvel of its time. Yet it remained incomplete. The artist, try as he might, could not complete two of the faces: the Christ Child and Judas Iscariot. Whenever he attempted to fill in these empty spaces, the results were out of harmony with the rest of the work.

The artist was greatly dissatisfied with the situation and could not understand why, despite his talents, he was unable to bring the mural to completion. He prayed for inspiration daily, and not long afterward, while walking on the streets of the city, he happened upon a group of children playing. Among them was a boy who had the face of an angel and who radiated goodness. The artist invited him to sit as a model of the Christ Child. With his parents' permission the child did, and the finished image was considered a masterpiece. Yet the painter could still find no model for the face of Judas Iscariot.

The story of the artist's quandary spread far and wide throughout the country, and many people, considering themselves the possessors of wicked, deformed, or corrupt faces, offered to pose as the betrayer. But to the artist, none of them seemed quite right for the part. He wanted a face so twisted and ruined by its surrender to depravity that all who gazed upon it would see sin incarnate. Years passed, and the artist would often go to the church to pray for inspiration. He longed to complete the mural, yet in his heart he hoped that the face of Judas would forever elude him, that no human soul would ever be so deeply sunk in sin that it would provide the perfect model.

Then one afternoon as he sat in the church, a beggar staggered down the aisle and knelt at the steps of the altar. He reeked and his clothing hung in rags from his haggard figure. He was not an old man, but he was hunched over, as if weighted by an immense burden of dark memories. His face was exactly what the artist had been looking for. He took the broken man home with him, fed him, washed his diseased flesh, clothed him, and spoke to him warmly, as if with a friend. He instructed his children to treat the visitor with the greatest respect. His wife, a kind and devout woman, prepared fine meals for him. But the poor man dwelt in their midst as if he were made of stone. He was completely unable to speak.

He was, however, willing to sit as the artist's model. Weeks went by, and as the work progressed, the beggar would look from time to time at the image of himself materializing on the canvas. A curious grief and horror would fill his eyes. One day, seeing the model's distress, the artist paused in his labor, laying down his brush.

"My friend," he said, "your heart is troubled. What is it?"

The man buried his face in his hands and burst into tears. After a long moment he lifted his eyes to the old painter. "Do you not remember me?" he said, "Years ago I was your model for the Christ Child." (Michael D. O'Brien, Sophia House, Ignatius Press, 2005; www.PreachingToday.com)

My reaction to this story is, there but by the grace of God, go I. If we continue to pay no attention to our spiritual growth, if we do not take steps to arm ourselves against the evil one, it is not impossible that our lives might become grotesque and miserable as well.

God has granted His salvation, eternal life, forgiveness and mercy by sheer grace. None of us deserves any of it. Growth to maturity flows forth as a result of continually turning to Jesus. Now pursue faith-growth-maturity-spiritual growth. Hope must continue so we don't lose our zeal our excitement and become sluggish or lazy. What is your spiritual growth plan for this year? I know God laughs when we tell him our plans. But that happens mainly when we haven't spent time in prayer and fasting, seeking to know His will. We need to practice our faith, read the Word, and serve so we can better

discern between good and evil. Think about it. Pray about it. What is God calling you to do to grow? Then write it down ... “I will _____ this week to get back on the path toward maturity and start growing and producing fruit again.” Write out some kind of plan for growing in your faith, becoming more spiritually mature this year. No one is going to ask you to hand this in, unless the person discipling you decides it might be a good thing to do, to go over one another’s personal spiritual growth plan so that you can hold one another accountable.

Let’s pray ...

Fruit = Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Sermon Notes for “Faith and Fruit” based on Hebrews 5:11-14, 6:1-3, 7-12
given in Doster October 13, 2019... January 22, 2023 in Doster also

- I. It is natural for babies (newborns) to crave milk.
- II. It is unnatural for growing children to live on milk, if they do their growth will be stunted.
- III. There is no shortcut to maturity. Just as fruit that is artificially ripened does not taste very good, so do disciples who try short cuts, fall short of true maturity.
- IV. Maturity takes practice. It takes commitment and sacrifice to grow. We need to learn to feed ourselves.
- V. Don’t let your faith become stagnant. Don’t be satisfied with staying the same as a Christ-follower.
- VI. It is absolutely necessary to keep on growing in your faith and producing fruit. Are you producing fruit? What kind of fruit is your life producing?
- VII. What is God saying to you this morning? What changes might God be asking you to make to get you on the path to maturity?? I am asking you, please, write an “I will ...” statement about what you will do this week to plant some seeds and produce some fruit.