

“Harvest the Fruit”- John 15:5, Galatians 5:22-25

Thursday January 15 was just another ordinary day in New York City. Or so it seemed. Flight 1549 a regular U.S. Air flight from LaGuardia to Charlotte took off with Captain “Sully” Sullenberger at the controls. Two minutes after take-off, the Airbus 320 ran straight into a flock of Canadian geese. Sully and his co-pilot had to make some major decisions instantly if they were going to survive this incident. Do they put the plane down at a small local airport nearby? Do they put the plane down on the New Jersey Turnpike? Neither seemed like a good option, so the only option left: The Hudson River.

After making the decision to land there, they had three minutes before landing to do the following: Shut down the engines, get the nose down to maintain speed, disconnect the autopilot and override the flight management system, activate the “ditch” system that seals the vents and valves, they had to turn the plane so it was facing south to land going with the flow of the river, they had to straighten the plane so that it would be level side to side, finally they had to get the nose back up again, but not too far, and land straight and flat on the water. And they did it. Everyone got off the plane safely.

“Sully” was not born with the ability to fly a plane, let alone the skills he had shown in those vital 3 minutes. None of the skills required, and certainly none of the courage, restraint, and judgment, and concern for others which he displayed is a part of the package we humans possess from birth. Flying that plane as skillfully as “Sully” did seemed very natural to those around him, like “second nature”. But it was years of training, rehearsed action, ingrained action, and experience that did the trick. Sully could make it look natural. This describes the Fruit of the Spirit better than anything else. It is trained, rehearsed, and ingrained action that makes this fruit possible in our lives.

We have been looking at God’s bucket-list for our lives and this morning I want us to look at what Paul calls the “fruit of the spirit” because it is this “fruit” that God wants found actively working in our lives. Paul writes a letter to a group of churches in the region of Galatia in modern day Turkey. In Chapter 5 and 6 of this letter we call the Book of Galatians he describes some practical implications

of living out the gospel. Paul contrasts in Chapter 5 the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. Paul asks the question: What will we allow to dominate? Flesh or Spirit? Because there is going to be a conflict between the two. We struggle everyday with living out our lives in the flesh or living them out in the Spirit.

In verses 16- 21 Paul lists a whole lot of descriptive words that describe a life of living in the flesh. Over against these words, Paul contrasts “the fruit of the spirit”. Let’s look at each of these nine characteristics that make up this fruit. They paint a complete picture of a man or a woman living in harmony with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Guided by the Holy Spirit, pursuing a life as modeled by Christ, and giving glory to God the Father.

Love leads the list-naturally. Love sums up all the true spiritual life. We talk about love in many ways and with many means. Through words, cards, gifts, and actions. Jesus describes love the best by how he describes God’s love through pictures of a lost son coming back to the father; a shepherd braving the wilds to look for that one lost sheep. Jesus illustrated, demonstrated it on the cross. Love means for us living with an open heart, fully engaged, and equipped to love and be loved.

The second characteristic is joy. Joy is two-faceted in its expression, Joy cannot be self-created. We might generate excitement on the surface, but joy is something else. Joy comes as we are obedient to God’s plan for our life. Joy comes as we live out our life for God and for others.

The third characteristic is peace. Peace has a variety of meanings. Peace is not necessary the absence of conflict or of suffering. Peace is knowing that we are not alone in life. Christ lives within us. In biblical times, it meant harmony; and shalom which meant “total well-being. Paul takes it even further when he uses the word peace. Paul’s peace was with God. God is the source of peace. Peace is knowing that we have a right relationship with God. Peace is trusting God with our today as well as our future.

The fourth characteristic is patience or longsuffering. Get me out on Route 3 or I-95 and this fruit of the spirit goes right out the window. The Holy Spirit gives

us the tools to find the strength and endurance for all things. Patience is God's attitude towards us. Someone once said that if God were a man he would have wiped out the world long ago. Look again at the Bible. How many times does God exercise patience with humanity over and over again. He suffers long, bears with us in all our sinning and rebellion, in all our apathy and unconcern. He does not draw back when we spurn his love.

The fifth characteristic is kindness. We are kind when we serve others with gentleness and showing respect for people no matter where they are or who they are. Kindness is having a friendly feeling towards others. It also means loving acts for people.

The sixth characteristic of the fruit of the spirit is goodness. Another way of looking at this is truthfulness, integrity, and holiness. There is a set-apartness about people who show the fruit of goodness. They tell the truth in all instances. They see the goodness in all people. People who show goodness are people of high integrity. They are honest in all their doings. People who show goodness are there for others and offer them comfort in times of great distress. A person showing goodness is not afraid to stand up for what is right even if it is unpopular.

The seventh characteristic of the fruit of the spirit is faithfulness. Being faithful to God means we trust him with our life no matter what. We are faithful to God and find ways to serve him no matter what. When we are faithful, we are reliable to be counted on to serve God and to serve others. When we are faithful, we seek out God's will for our lives and believe that no matter what his will is the best for our lives.

The eighth characteristic is gentleness. Someone who is gentle is not someone who is weak. Rather this is a person who has the God-given strength to persevere against all kinds of adversity. Those who are gentle are teachable. They are humble enough to know both their strengths and their weaknesses thus they are open to God and others to perfecting those areas that need growing. Those who are gentle are those who the love of Christ grows in them and they treat others with gentleness, tenderness, and with respect.

The last characteristic is self-control. The mastery of self. A person with this characteristic is the refusal to give free reign to impulse and desire. I am convinced after almost 65 years of life that all of us have some obsessive-compulsive behavior in us. For me it is buying books, for others it's gadgets, for others it is hoarding, for others it is more serious with drugs and alcohol. If we allow the Spirit to work in our lives then we have God's help in controlling things that may hurt us.

God wants on our bucket-list: our allowing and trusting the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit is our advocate who helps us recognize right and wrong, convicts us when we fall short, and empowers us to act boldly and live fulfilled lives for God. God invites us to follow the counsel of the Holy Spirit.