

18th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B
October 4, 2009
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
James 3:13-18
Pastor Paul Horn

Plant the fruit of peace and you will harvest peace

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

Did you know that blueberries contain an antioxidant that may protect us from cancer? Did you know that cranberries help fight bacterial infections? Did you know that one little kiwi contains a full day's recommended dietary allowance for vitamin C? Pomegranates contain antioxidants that keep your arteries healthy and my help to prevent prostate cancer. That's good news for fruit lovers.

Which of those fruits that I mentioned do you like? There may be some you do not have a taste for, they're too sour, too sweet, too much citrus, too much work to eat, too many seeds. Whatever fruit you may like, I think we'd all have to agree that it's a shame when fruit goes bad. It gets left on counter or in the refrigerator's crisper too long, or when you leave that one grocery bag in your truck and you open your trunk a week later and yuck! It doesn't look or smell so good.

The Bible is filled with references to fruit. Fruit is used as a picture to illustrate your Christian life. Jesus once said, “You can tell a tree by the kind of fruit it bears.” (Lk 6:43-45) It is no surprise then that a man who was a step-brother to Jesus and a leader of the church in Jerusalem echoes his Savior's words. James in his letter 3:17-18 wrote, “**Wisdom from heaven is full of good fruit. Peacemakers who plant the fruit of peace will raise a harvest of peace.**”

James is talking about “fruits of faith.” Faith produces fruits; that is, good works. James is not promoting works righteousness; that we can somehow earn heaven by our good works. We know from Scripture that we are justified by faith alone, declared innocent by faith in Christ alone, but faith is never alone, is it? Faith does good deeds. Faith turns around and loves Jesus because he first loved us by laying down his life in our place. Faith shows itself by loving your neighbor just as Jesus loved us and lived a perfect life so that he might cover over our unrighteousness with his righteousness.

In his letter James is writing to a specific Christian congregation, but he zeros in on their attitudes toward each other. He tells us to bear good fruit, to sow the seeds of peace and we will

reap a harvest of peace. So what does this good fruit look like? What are these seeds of peace that we sow?

In vs17 James says that good fruit is first of all **pure**; it is chaste, holy. This means that you will guard against sin in every form and hate evil. Secondly it is **peaceable**. This means that you will maintain peaceful relationships with each other. Then it is **considerate** of others, it is not quarrelsome, but thinks about the needs of others. Good fruit is **obedient**. You are willing to yield to the opinion of others, not compromising Scripture of course, but willing to accept someone else's views within the church. It means that you are eager to humbly serve other members of the congregation. Good fruit is **full of compassion**. You will have a heart goes out to those who are hurting or in need and you do something about it. Good fruit that you bear is **impartial**; it is not prejudiced, but willing to work with all and love all equally. Finally, the good fruit that we bear as a family of believers is **sincere**; it is not fake, not hypocritical, but genuine.

James encourages us to sow these seeds of peace among each other, and we in return will gather a harvest of peace.

But James knew his audience. He knew the people of the congregation he wrote to were just like him. They were men and women, teenagers, children, and elderly folks who had been baptized into Christ. by which means the Holy Spirit had created a new person who was eager to sow seeds of peace and happy to bear good fruit. But James also knew they were like him, in that they each had a sinful nature that they wore around their neck, which was stubborn, selfish and prideful and at times would not allow them to be peaceable, sincere, considerate and compassionate. James rebuked them for being full of **bitter envy and selfish ambition**. vs14,16

Have you ever heard this complaint by the unchurched, why they don't come to church, "The church is full of hypocrites!" It makes sense. Why would they want to be part of group that says one thing and turns around and does the exact opposite? You may say, "Pastor Horn, this isn't our church. That's not me. It may be true of other churches but not ours." If we say that, then we are liars. I don't know about you, but when someone who is unchurched gives the excuse to me that the church is full of hypocrites, it hits home to me, and I feel ashamed and embarrassed because at times it is true of me and my church.

What do the unchurched see and hear when they visit our church for the first time? When they step into our sanctuary do they see good fruit that is considerate? At first they see people being considerate of each other. But then they see others who are trying to prepare their hearts for worship by praying or listening to the music played by the organist. But they can't focus, they can't hear the music because it's so loud and noisy. All they hear is loud talking and laughing. They don't see consideration for each other, even the unchurched know this a house of worship, but it's being treated like the Towne Mall. Cell phones are ringing, kids are running in and out of church, adults are leaving the service, even during the sermon, the lessons and prayer. People are talking during the service. There is no consideration for each other or of the house of God.

And, by God's grace, when the unchurched return to worship and become involved in the church's ministry, what do they see? Brothers and sisters who are willing to work with each

other? Sometimes all they see is the unwillingness to compromise on church projects, folks who refuse to come to certain outings or Bible studies because “so-and-so will be there and we don’t get along.” They hear people saying, “Her personality is hard to deal with,” or “he’s hard headed.” They hear members saying, “I don’t go to meetings because they won’t listen.” They hear people complain about things not getting done, but the ones who complain don’t up and take the lead to do it.

A commentator I read this week wrote, “If people are calling themselves Christians cherish envy and selfish ambition, and are so puffed up with pride and self-emulation, and insist on always being right and boast in triumphant glee at having been proved right, then they do so at the expense of love – and they will not aid in furthering harmony within the Christian community.” That describes James’ words in vs16 doesn’t it, **“Where you find selfish ambition, envy, there you find disorder and every evil practice.”**

James says this is not good fruit that comes from heaven, but rather it is bad fruit that comes from the philosophies of this sinful world, fruit that is born of our human flesh. (vs15) James even goes so far as to say that these attitudes are demonic, they bring about conditions that are pleasing to the devil (vs15). And Satan claps his hands with glee, because he sees the destruction of the Christian congregation through internal strife and self-centered sinners who are so focused on themselves that they lose their focus on Christ and his cross.

I am ashamed at what the unchurched see and hear from me and my church. But they’re opinion is not what matters most. What’s most embarrassing and shameful is what my God sees and hears from me and my church. He does not see what he expects to see from baptized children of God, sowing seeds of discord. He tastes our “fruit” and it is bitter, as James says in vs14, bitter, like a lemon. He smells our “fruit” and it is pungent, overpowering, like rotten fruit sitting on the counter, covered with maggots and flies.

These harsher words of the Bible are meant to shake us up, like an earthquake, to the harsh reality of our disease of sin, raging out of control within us. Its purpose is to burst the bubble of our vain conceit, our sense of superiority, and to brace ourselves for what God ought to send, a tsunami wave of destruction.

Instead, he sends Jesus – who washes over our sins, who cleanses the stink and smell from our hearts and souls. The Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 3:27, **“All of you who were baptized into Christ, have clothed yourselves with Christ.”** Through holy baptism, Christ Jesus spreads his garment of righteousness over you; his flawless life, by which he fulfilled God’s demand that we always bear good fruit. Jesus always showed compassion to the sick and lonely. He was never prejudiced. He loved all people equally. He was always considerate, always willing to serve, to serve and his life as a ransom for many. That perfect life, the one you and I could not live to satisfy God’s demands, that perfect life of Jesus is yours through your baptism. And God’s wave of destruction that ought to have drowned you and me, came over Jesus, when he bore the burden of your sins and mine. The flood of baptismal waters drowned your sins and washed you clean and covered you with Christ’s life and death. You are now holy and pure in your Father’s sight.

Connected to Christ through baptism, you are now able to bear good fruit, kind of like branches that are attached to a healthy vine. The vine feeds and nourishes us through his words of forgiveness and comfort. Just as a steady diet of papayas, blackberries and cherries which are chock full of antioxidants and great for keeping you healthy, so also a steady diet of his Word and Sacraments makes you a healthy branch which bears good fruit. You are able and willing to sow the seeds of peace and in turn, you will reap a harvest of peace and harmony and love among your sisters and brothers in Christ.

Now that you have experienced Christ's love through his Word and Sacrament you will bear good fruit. And again, that fruit looks like this... first of all it is **pure**. You will guard yourself against sin in every form. Your good fruit means that you will be **peaceable**. You will maintain peaceful relationships with each other. You will mend old wounds through forgiveness and repentance. You will be **considerate** of others, especially as you enter the house of God. You will be mindful of others who are worshiping. This fruit that you bear is **obedient**; you will be willing to yield to the opinions of others and be willing to accept others' views and eager to humbly serve your family members at Faith Lutheran. Your fruit will be **full of compassion**. You will pay close attention to those who are hurting or in need, and not just pray for them, but you will do something about it. You will send a card or an email, call them on the phone or stop by their home to let them know you are praying for them. You will be **impartial**; not prejudice. Yes, there will be personality conflicts. But you will be willing to work with all. Finally, the fruit you bear will be **sincere** and genuine.

My dear friends, bear good fruit, like a sweet honeydew melon or a juicy peach or tasty pineapple. Sow seeds of fruit by loving each other, because in love God first loved you and showed it by sending his Son on your behalf. And now he promises that when you sow seeds of peace, you will reap a harvest of peace. May he grant it to us all for his sake. Amen.