



“Living A Fruitful Life”

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday & Sunday, July 13-14, 2019

All Services

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Deuteronomy 30:9-14; Psalm 25:1-10;

Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

A few years ago, there was an article in *Psychology Today* entitled *Five Simple Secrets to a Happier Life*. The first secret was to create small pleasures in your life. For me at the end of the day nothing is more pleasurable than a bowl of ice cream. The second simple secret was to make exercise fun. For me there's nothing more fun than having ice cream after exercising. The third one was to develop three significant relationships. I think this recognizes that life is better done together with family and friends in relationship. The fourth simple secret was to nourish your body, to eat well, and for me, you know where I am going with that one. The fifth secret was to live with an attitude of gratitude. I think that's a good one, to be thankful for the people and the places and the things that are in your life, and to give thanks to God for that every single day.

I like the way poet Maya Angelou put it, she said, “This is a wonderful day. I've never seen this one before.” – isn't that beautiful?

We all want to strive for a happier, more fulfilling life, don't we? I wonder if that's what Paul was trying to do in the beginning of his letter to the Colossians. Now Paul didn't actually found that community, but it was probably one of his disciples that went there to found that congregation. But he was concerned that they were in danger from a false philosophy that was undermining their faith, their Christian faith that had been shared with them. They were mixing some pagan ritual and pagan belief with their Christian belief. And so, he writes to them out of a place of love because he wants them to understand that it is Christ that will truly make a fruitful life for them, rather than these pagan beliefs. He wants them to have a fruitful life in Christ. And if you think about it, don't we wish the same thing, to have a life of significance, a life of impact, a life of purpose in our Christian faith?

So, these are Paul's five steps to living a fruitful life from this first chapter of Colossians. First, Paul says that we should **know yourselves**. It's important for us to know who we are and where we come from. To know our identity. We each have many characteristics, many gifts that make us uniquely us. What are those for yourself?

When I think about myself, I am a father, and I am a husband, I am a pastor, and I am a Steelers fan. But none of those, none of those is as important than being a follower of

Jesus Christ. Being a Christ follower informs all of the other characteristics and identities that I have.

But I realize that I am not perfect. No one is perfect, no matter what has happened in your past or the mistakes that you made that cause you to doubt yourself. None of them matter because you are loved by God and you live with that knowledge of being loved by God!

The way Paul puts it is, and he says it not only in Colossians but many other places. You are a saint. Your meaning is found in Christ.

Secondly, we should **know God**. Paul puts it this way, "We have heard of your **faith** in Christ Jesus and of the **love** that you have for all of the saints, because of the **hope** laid up for us in heaven."

Now there are three words in that sentence from Paul that I think are really important, **faith, love** and **hope**. Our faith is in Christ, Jesus is the word of life and it is through his life, death and resurrection that we have purpose and we have faith. Because Jesus bridges that gap between death and life, between sin and perfection. And we are connected intimately to our Lord. The word that we even use to describe that in the context of faith is *religion*. That's a word that comes from two Latin words *Re* first meaning again; and *ligare* from which we use the English word ligament. Your ligaments are what holds your bones and your muscles and your organs all together in place.

A religion is that connection that binding which holds us not only to each other, but also to Jesus. We have that connection through **love**. Through loving the saints and we use words for our church like community, or family, or a people, a holy tribe of believers.

And this community has **hope**. Hope that has been laid up for us because of Jesus. Hope that is laid up for us in heaven and because of that you and I have a future.

The third step for living a fruitful life according to Paul is to **receive the gifts that God gives**. God gives us so many gifts and talents and passions. We are given grace and peace. We can receive the prayers of a community of faith. Jesus himself gives us a Great Commandment to love God and to love people, and as Pastor Liz said in her sermon last week, we can offer God's peace rather than judgment to the people that we come in contact with.

And we are to **bear fruit**. Of course, we should bear fruit for a fruitful life. Now the word that's used in the Bible in English is *to live lives*. This is actually translated from a single Greek word – *peripatesail* which literally means to walk. Living a life depicts a journey that is life, and because it's a journey it is going someplace. It hasn't an outward focus, of striving beyond the boundaries of pushing ourselves to the edges. To "live lives worthy of the Lord" means to live a life that matches with the Lord Jesus has done for us and who he is to us.

There is no such thing as an inactive Christian, that is an oxymoron. Everything we do, we are to please God, who created us, who saves us, who gives us his Spirit.

Christian life is a life of imitation, following Jesus, sitting at his feet, listening and learning from him, and then doing the work of God in Christ.

It has been that way from the very beginning from when God's Spirit first swept over the earth and put it into the lives of people. Life in God is about bearing fruit and our behavior should match our status as God's holy people.

I like the way Martin Luther put it, that we are to be "little Christ's" to one other. And Jesus of course gave the example of the Samaritan man who through his actions of mercy, kindness, compassion and love, he is a friend and a neighbor to those who are in need, whatever their status or identity is.

Roman Catholic Christian writer Henri Nouwen put it this way:

"Did I offer peace today?

Did I bring mercy?

Did I bring a smile to a stranger?

Did I say words of healing?

Did I let go of my anger and resentment?

Did I forgive?

Did I love? (Nouwan continues)

These are the real questions and I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow now will bear many fruits, here in this world and in the life to come."

The final step to a fruitful life according to Paul is to **give thanks**. That of course is the same as in the article of the *Psychology Today*. Paul writes "**Give thanks** to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

To live with an attitude of gratitude and thankfulness, to give of yourselves and your resources for the work of God's kingdom on earth.

Being a Christian after all is not just a lifestyle choice. It's a complete surrendering of our heart and our choices, our life and our will to the God who loves us and who gives us strength to love and to serve Him, neighbor, and his creation.

Living intimately connected to God, God's people and all of the creation!

Don't just say it. Live it with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind. I pray that we may all live fruitful lives in Christ! Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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