

Sunday 10th July 2016 – Obey God's commandments

Col 1:1- 12 + Luke 10:25-37

LOVE IS COSTLY, SOMETIMES PAINFUL, OFTEN SACRIFICIAL BUT ALWAYS BEARS MUCH FRUIT

My apple tree 20 years ago had years of bearing no fruit and then when it did it was abundant.

Maybe if we thought of ourselves as that apple tree we can identify times in our lives where we have borne much fruit and times where we stand majestic but fruitless.

What sort of fruit are we talking about?

Well in Galatians 5:22-23

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

In other words there are no rules on how much fruit can be produced – it's not limited to our thoughts and actions if we rely on God.

In answer to the question the lawyer poses to Jesus in Luke: what must I do to inherit eternal life – Jesus answers- Obey the Law: Love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with your mind; and you neighbour as yourself.

And in the Colossians reading we hear that we must be filled with all spiritual wisdom and understanding: lead lives worthy of the Lord; and then we will bear fruit in every good work.

The title of this sermon is that 'we will bear much fruit if we obey God's commandments'. And my question is: do we want to bear much fruit so that we are changed for the better (we become more like Jesus) and that we help others to also bear fruit as they come to know Jesus?

If the answer is yes – then we now know how to do just that – obey God's commandments – love Him and love our neighbour. The new church in Colossae has been doing just that and now fruit is beginning to be seen. In this letter to them Paul is thanking God for their work but is also telling them how to nurture the church so that it can bear even more fruit – love is the key.

In 2 John 1:6 Love means following His commandments, and His underlying commandment is that you conduct your lives in love. A heart that fully loves Christ produces a life that is marked by obedience to His word.

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1. Love obeys Christ's commands WHOLEHEARTEDLY.

Those who love Christ will obey His commands simply because it is Christ's word spoken to them. Whether it is the spoken commandment of Christ in scripture, His teachings, the Old or New Testament scriptures inspired by His Spirit, or the still small voice of His spirit speaking to the heart those who love Him will obey Him. In Luke 11:28 [Jesus said], "Blessed . . . are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

2. Love obeys Christ's commands WITHOUT QUESTION.

Because I love Christ I will do whatever He asks whenever He asks me to do it. I am not free to pick and choose what or when I want to obey. It's like we tell our kids, "delayed obedience is disobedience."

The scriptures tell us that God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are different from ours (Isaiah 55:8). We may not always understand the path Christ wants us to walk; we may think we know a better way. If only God would consider what we think would be best, or direct us at a different time. Love for Christ keeps us walking in obedience to the direction He tells us to go. Love makes His way our way even when we don't understand it. We obey Christ without question.

3. Love obeys Christ's commands CHEERFULLY.

Love never obeys begrudgingly or with remorse. Love obeys willingly. Loves desire is to please the one it loves through glad and joyful obedience.

Psalm 119:165 Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble. (NIV)

4. Love obeys Christ's commands CONSISTENTLY.

Love never fails. Because I love Christ I will always continue to love Him, therefore, I will continually obey Him.

+ Psalm 119:44 I will always obey your law, for ever and ever. (NIV)

The OT reading today is from Deuteronomy 30:14 No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

Our heart has been transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It's the Holy Spirit that enables us to have a consistent love for Jesus that never fails. And it is the Spirit that enables us to be obedient to Him and bear much fruit.

So let's look at one example of how love and obedience to God plays out in the story that Jesus told in Luke. A lawyer has asked Jesus about the Law and how he might inherit eternal life. Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, which we know really well – so I'm not going to tell it again per se.

I want to look at the characters involved.

1. The traveller_ reckless and foolhardy – travelling alone on a very dangerous route. He's no one to blame but himself for the trouble he finds himself in.

2. The priest – Following the Jewish Law – not wanting to become unclean by touching the beaten up man – he might be dead.

3. The Levite – he was the same race as the injured man but he was afraid that this might be a trap so he moved on.

4. The Good Samaritan – the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans and vice versa – there were great divisions and animosity. Yet this Samaritan stopped to help the Jew. He didn't think of his safety or that he may be unclean or even that this man was the enemy. He alone was prepared to help.

So going back to our apple tree – which of these produced fruit?

The priest remained upright and majestic but no fruit was produced

The second man was also upright but maybe his branches were a little limp – the leaves dying a bit

But the Samaritan what fruit did he produce?

Well we don't know what happened to the traveller other than he recovered>
But surely he would never forget the kindness shown to him by a stranger – the enemy. Might he go away and evaluate how he treated people especially those who were different to him?

What about the inn keeper – he must surely have marvelled that a complete stranger would pay him to look after the stranger. Might he rethink what he thought of Samaritans – might he be more generous to those in trouble?

We don't know but I think it's very clear that much fruit would have come from this story. The Lawyer who asked the question would have marvelled at the story. He was told by Jesus to go and do the same – Love God and love his neighbour whoever that may be.

It's a challenge to us all-

1. We must help even when a person has bought trouble upon himself
2. Anyone is our neighbour – even someone who is completely different to us – race, religion or none. Our neighbour is anyone in need.
3. Our help must be practical – not just a matter of feeling sorry for a person in trouble.

Tom Wright says this:

No church, no Christian can remain content with easy definitions which allow us to watch most of the world lying half dead in the road. ..we must find ways of telling the story of God's love which inspires all to rethink who our neighbour is and how we can help those in need.

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Let me end with this true story from America:

The church's pastor slowly stood up, walked over to the pulpit and briefly introduced a guest minister who was in the service that evening. In the introduction, the pastor told the congregation that the guest minister was one of his dearest childhood friends and that he wanted him to have a few

moments to greet the church and share whatever he felt would be appropriate for the service.

With that, an elderly man stepped up to the pulpit and began to speak, "A father, his son, and a friend of his son were sailing off the Pacific Coast," he began, "when a fast approaching storm blocked any attempt to get back to shore. The waves were so high, that even though the father was an experienced sailor, he could not keep the boat upright, and the three were swept into the ocean as the boat capsized."

The old man hesitated for a moment, making eye contact with two teenagers who were, for the first time since the service began, looking somewhat interested in his story. The aged minister continued with his story, "Grabbing a rescue line, the father had to make the most excruciating decision of his life: to which boy he would throw the other end of the life line. He only had seconds to make the decision. The father knew that his son was a Christian and he also knew that his son's friend was not. The agony of his decision could not be matched by the torrent of waves.

"As the father yelled out, 'I love you, son!' he threw out the life line to his son's friend. By the time the father had pulled the friend back to the capsized boat, his son had disappeared beneath the raging swells into the black of night. His body was never recovered."

By this time, the two teenagers were sitting up straight in the pew, anxiously waiting for the next words to come out of the old minister's mouth. "The father," he continued, "knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus, and he could not bear the thought of his son's friend stepping into an eternity without Jesus. Therefore, he sacrificed his son to save the son's friend. How great is the love of God that He should do the same for us. Our heavenly Father sacrificed His only begotten Son that we could be saved. I urge you to accept His offer to rescue you and take a hold of the life line He is throwing out to you in His service." With that, the old man turned and sat back down in his chair as silence filled the room.

The pastor again walked slowly to the pulpit and delivered a brief sermon with an invitation at the end. Within minutes after the service ended, the two

teenagers were at the old man's side. "That was a nice story," politely started one of the boys, "but I don't think it was very realistic for a father to give up his only son's life in hopes that the other boy would become a Christian."

"Well, you've got a point there," the old man replied, glancing down at his worn Bible. A big smile broadened his sorrowed face, and he once again looked up at the boys and said, "It sure isn't very realistic, is it? But I'm standing here today to tell you that story gives me a glimpse of what it must have been like for God to give up His Son for me. You see..... I was that father and your pastor is my son's friend."

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