

14th Sunday after Trinity: September 5, 2021
“Desirable Fruits”

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text for this morning is our Epistle lesson, Galatians 5, especially these words, “**Galatians 5:16-17, 24.**”

The dictionary defines desire as wishing, longing for, or wanting. Desire does not necessarily mean bad. We begin a race with the desire to win. We start to speak with a desire to be heard. We go to the doctor with a desire to be made physically well. The ultimate problem with desire is the entity behind it. The Holy Spirit speaks in Galatians of what the desire of Christians ought to be, what Christian desire looks like.

The Christian life is one of trial, warfare, and struggle. It is a constant daily battle of flesh and spirit, between the flesh and the spirit; not only in what you desire, but also in how that desire is filled. What is your desire? For what do you long? I know if I asked you to answer me, right here, right now, you would give a great confessional answer. They would be wonderful words contained in Scripture. Here, you are actively reminded of God, as you are in His gracious presence. Here stands the font before your eyes. The altar recalls Christ’s sacrifice. The cross, the very symbol of Jesus’ payment for your sin is prominently displayed. So, of course you would long for forgiveness, life, and salvation.

What would be your answer if I asked you Monday morning, Wednesday afternoon, or Friday night? In our text, the Holy Spirit wonderfully enumerates both sides of this daily battle with eternal consequences. There is only one road, either you are walking towards the way of life, or you are walking the opposite direction in the way of death. The Bible uses the word repentance, which means a turning around 180 degrees, to stop walking the way of death and instead walk the way of the Spirit.

Looking at the list detailed in Galatians, a clear common theme shines forth: the works of the flesh serve the god of the “I;” whereas the fruits of the Spirit flow out of the right and proper fear, love, and trust in the One True God, glorifying God and serving the good of the neighbor.

The works of the flesh are very self-serving. Sexual immorality, or fornication, is known well enough. Anything outside the marriage bond of husband and wife is included. It is not difficult to quickly observe a list of acts promoted in our world, or even posited as “normal.” Pre-marital and extra-marital acts are passed over as not only ok, but healthy and an area for practice and stress relief. Divorce is easily and readily obtained for pretty much any reason. In our throwaway society, the world has turned marriage into something that is not to be fixed, but discarded.

Satan hates everything about marriage as God has designed it, so he attacks it from every direction. He works endlessly to divide the one-flesh union established by marriage, and to upset the basic building block of the family. He wants people to be seen simply as objects to please myself. My spouse, my children, my neighbor are all objects to be used, and as long as I get what I feel or what I want, then the ends justify the means. Included here also belong impurity and sensuality. Thoughts, words, and deeds all aimed at abnormal and unspeakable pleasures. The world aims to normalize obscene morals, and popularize obscene gestures and speech. Sadly, how quick are we to flash tall-man by himself, or laugh at crude jokes. All of these things cut down and denigrate a child of God, for my own feelings of self-worth, or entertainment, or enjoyment.

Next is idolatry, which again is known well enough. The book store has an ever growing section on wiccan and witchcraft. You can go to Chicago and worship the Greek gods, and you can easily buy, not too far from here, tarot cards and crystals. Movies, books, T.V. and video games all aide in the heavy push towards paganism. These mediums of visual and auditory consumption are saturated with pagan, godless, or multi-god components, leading the watcher, the hearer, down a logical road that questions the truth of One God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

While these are easy to identify, there are less overt forms idolatry. How easy and normal has it become to leave someone’s day up to gods of fate, or luck? How easy to say, “Good luck,” as though, there is no God, just a random set of circumstances that fate or karma can put you on the right side of things. How easy is it for us to serve the god of the belly, and food is not just an instrument for calories and survival, but a god whom we love, worship, and adore? We serve the gods of money, and work, and time, and school, and popularity, and you name it, anything we can to glory in ourselves, or another person.

Connected to idolatry is sorcery, which the Greek word means poison or medicine. Sorcerers are called poisonous for this reason. Here includes magicians, wizards, enchanters, and any others who by means of compacts with devils, deceive their neighbors, harm them, or steal from them. How many hurts, pains, deception, and theft come from poison of alcohol and drugs. To drink is ok, but drunkenness, the point that changes the state of one's mind, is a very dangerous serving of the flesh. How easy has it become to worship or see medication as a god. It can be good and useful, but that is not all there is. How high as the view of medicine become so that it is seen not only as helpful, but the only thing that is helpful?

These works of the flesh alone bear bad fruit. It causes enmity, that is grudges and secret hatred against one another. There is strife, controversy and quarreling, jealousy and anger. This is easily seen by taking delight in someone else being upset, so you pick and pick and pick just to irritate and provoke. So when they lose it and fly off the handle, you can say, "Did you see how mad they are? I must be right, or they wouldn't be so defensive."

These works divide and seek sides. Are you with me or against me? Who are you going to believe? Are you a republican or a democrat, and be careful how you answer, because I might not talk to you then.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, in all of these works of the flesh, the goal is the same, "How can I better be served?" The aim is me. You are here for me. You are here to please me and do what I want. The world owes me, and you, of course, owe me.

Jesus was tempted to do all of these works. He was tempted to serve Himself. He was tested to fear the world, love its enticements, and trust in its promises of vainglory; but He was disciplined. He remained true to only One God. He feared the Lord, loved His Heavenly Father, and trusted in His Holy Word above all things. He bore these temptations, He carried all your works of the flesh, and He was nailed with them on the tree at Calvary. Your dead works of self-serving the flesh, were fixed and secured on the Lamb of God, the living sacrifice. Galatians 5:16 says, "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify (and that word is telos, complete) the desires of the flesh."

Jesus from the cross declared with the same word, "It is finished." Your works of the flesh are nailed, dead, and buried. Through Your baptism, you are given the Holy Spirit, and He makes your body His temple. He dwells in you. With you He resides. You are a child of the Most High God.

The victory over death and the grave is already yours. As you are reborn through the font you pray, “***The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?***”¹

The Kingdom of Heaven is yours. You have been clothed in the robe of Christ’s righteousness that covers all your sin. You fear the wrath of God’s just judgment, you love only One Heavenly Father, and you trust in His Holy Word who has taken the wrath of God’s punishment against sin for you. You fear your sin, you love His word, and you trust in Christ’s death, His body and blood, as the only means of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Brothers and sisters, Christ has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. In your daily battle of sin, your daily struggle with temptation, and daily warfare with the devil and his evil horde, you already have the victory. You have the only weapon Jesus used against Satan: God’s Word. With all of these eternally blessed gifts given to you, He gives you the peace beyond all understanding and the strength to live disciplined lives in the faith. He grafts you as branches into the vine, where look at the fruit you bear.

Love – this is not a hidden quality. This is a verb. This is not a self-satisfying or a purely emotional character; it is an action word. You live in love, true Bible proclaiming, Law and Gospel declaration, love. It is love that speaks THE one and only truth: God’s Word. It is a love that seeks the welfare of the neighbor. It is a love that calls sinners to repentance. It is a love that uses God’s name properly at all times, clings to His Word, delights in preaching, cherishes all those whom God has put in authority, protects all human life, honors the marriage bed, protects possessions, puts the best construction on everything, and lives in contentment and satisfaction. It is by these works, everyone can see with great certainty, that you are different; that you have the love of Christ.

In Christ, you have joy. This is not simply the emotion of happiness. Happiness is fleeting, joy is everlasting. Joy allows you to rejoice in the Lord always. You are glad because of His divine mercy, and even in the midst of the world’s storms, you praise and bless the Lord. Joy allows you not to be envious of your neighbor’s goods; rather, you wish your neighbor joy in them as though they were your own. Joy allows you to praise the gifts of God given to your neighbor, as well as your own.

¹ Psalm 27:1

By God's grace, you also have peace; not just any peace, but peace that passes all understanding—peace beyond understanding is often how we experience it. In trial and times of testing, peace is seemed to be removed, and where do you turn? The Christian is constantly reminded of and given one peace, peace that comes from above. That is the beauty of the sacraments. The peace of God's wrath is delivered to the sinner in water, bread and wine. Baptism joins us together. Living together we receive peace as the heavenly word of grace is spoken in absolution. Sinners eat the crucified and risen body and blood of Christ together. Here we proclaim the Lord's death. His desire is to forgive, and He died to win for you forgiveness. Upon this altar, Christ brings heaven to earth, and through His death—you feast on life.

There is a great importance in the Rite of the Christian funeral. Before the body is laid to rest, it is one last time brought past the baptismal font, through the brothers and sisters, and rests one more time at the foot of the altar. It is designed to be clear proclamation in the face of death and the midst of sorrow, that death is defeated. This Christian brother or sister feasted on Christ, received the victory over death, and now rests in Christ. We feast with them on the same Christ. I know we are accustomed to seeing the loss, and focus on the fleshly life of the loved one, but this brother or sister in Christ in the casket in the funeral rite is proclaiming the Lord's death. They have cried, "Lord, have mercy." They have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, and have now returned to the Lord and fallen at His feet. They rest and await the resurrection, where they will hear, "***Rise...your faith has saved you.***"²

All of this shapes how the Christian lives in this life. This allows the Christian to live in peace with the neighbor. Peace cannot exist among men when each man seeks only to justify himself, protect their own interests, and seek their own advantages. Christians are in fellowship, with God and with each other. You bear fruit like Jesus. You get to look not out for yourself, but you get to you look out for your neighbor. What a blessing! Instead of only one person looking out for me, I get to have a countless multitude, as many as the stars in the sky.

Following along with these fruits are patience, or long-suffering. That is you suffer at the hands of the wicked, and you look forward to their improvement. You desire their repentance, and unity in the body of Christ under the word of God. There is kindness and goodness. The Spirit causes the Christian to be cordial, kind, friendly, able to listen to others, and speak kindly towards them, always putting the best construction on everything.

² Luke 17:19

The Spirit bears in the Christian faith, which means we believe in God's promises. It also means that towards our neighbors we keep our promises. A Christian is faithful to their word. Yes means yes, and no means no.

The Christian is also gentle and has self-control. That means you are not provoked to anger, and you do not take vengeance. "***Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.***"³ That is not your calling. You teach, exhort, and love like a brother or sister. You have control of your words and your body. You cannot control your neighbor. You cannot control how they act, but you can control how you act and react.

The Spirit causes the Christian to live a life of self-discipline, so we confess with St. Paul, "***Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.***"⁴

The believer is given the Spirit to combat fleshly desire. The daily battle of the Christian is to begin the Spirit, and in danger of ending in the flesh. The Christian is given the Spirit, so the flesh can be foiled in what it desires. The Christian always looks forward. The gaze is always directed up, with one foot in front of the other, "***Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.***"⁵

The desire is heaven. The desire is the resurrection and eternal life. You belong to Christ Jesus. He has crucified the flesh and its passions and desires. He has given you His Holy Spirit; these things are yours, now and even forevermore. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

³ Romans 12:19

⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:24–27

⁵ Hebrews 12:1–3

Prayer of the Church—Responsive Form
Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity
5 September 2021

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Heavenly Father, You have had mercy upon us by sending Your only begotten Son to atone for our sins on the cross. Grant that we may receive Your forgiveness, life and salvation with thanksgiving. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of justice, You teach that those who engage in the sins of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God. Crucify our flesh with its passions and desires. Grant that we may be led by the Spirit in repentance, trusting that we are forgiven of our past sins and cleansed of all unrighteousness. Bless us that we may love Your truth, sing praises to Your name and walk in Your ways. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of truth, You reveal Your will and ways in Holy Scripture. Bless all Your children, that they may grow in knowledge and understanding. Bless especially the children in our Sunday school and catechism classes, that they may rejoice in Your truth and receive Your Word with joy and faithfulness. Grant that all teachers may faithfully lead Your lambs to their Savior. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Tammy*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided for all who celebrate another year of earthly life, especially *Jordan*. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, grant Your protection upon our land and people. Deliver all nations from violence and discord. Grant safety to all who work to bring peace, especially those in law enforcement and members in the armed forces. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of life, You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. The lepers came to Your Son for mercy. Send Your merciful hand upon the sick and sorrowing, the lonely, downtrodden, and all in need especially *Carmen, Susan, Zoey, Donna, Floyd, Tricia, David Teggatz and those we name in our hearts*. Grant that their sicknesses would be turned to health and their troubles to joy. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Good Lord, Your Son instituted the salutary gift of the Lord's Supper. Send Your blessing upon all who receive the body and blood of Jesus for their forgiveness. Grant thankful hearts that praise Your name to all who receive the Sacrament this day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**