

Nov. 4, 2018
Proverbs 3
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME
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Fruit of the Spirit: Faithfulness

INTRO to SCRIPTURE

Today is the conclusion of our *Fruit of the Spirit* series. Today's theme is *Faithfulness*. I had intended to use selected readings from Hebrews 11 & 12 referring to the cloud of witnesses as we remember those who have gone before us.

However, I was curious about the name of the synagogue in Pittsburgh— *Tree of Life*. We find the image of the tree of life in Genesis but it is also found in the book of Proverbs, in chapter 3, where it is connected to Wisdom. Faithfulness to God's wisdom is a theme woven into scripture. So, let us listen to Proverbs 3.

SERMON

Fifty years ago, this fall, I was sitting with my parents and brothers on wooden benches, huddling in the cold, waiting for a geothermal event. The park rangers at the gate gave us a schedule so we knew in what time frame to expect an eruption. Fifty years later they can still give you a schedule. Of course, we were at Yellowstone National Park to see Old Faithful. The name suits this geyser. You can count on it.

Throughout scripture, people of faith attest to God's faithfulness. In the Psalms we hear over and over again of God's steadfast love and faithfulness.

Faithfulness is the last word in our *Fruit of the Spirit* series, from Paul's letter to the Galatians. As we seek to live in the Spirit, we may find that instead we are centering our lives in our egos. A healthy ego is necessary, but life centered in the ego is dangerous. Someone told me earlier this fall that in AA ego is considered an acronym for "easing God out." Life in the Spirit, on the other hand, invites God in.

In Galatians Paul points out that if we are living in the Spirit, our lives will bear the fruit of love, kindness, joy, self-control, peace, patience, generosity, gentleness and faithfulness. Which of these you wish you had more of in your life?

Over these nine weeks we have considered each of these fruit and shared some thoughts about them. Today, I'm going to recall one thought for each of them.

Love

When we change ourselves in love,
then the world is changed.

Kindness

Kindness can be surprising,
especially when it comes our way.

Joy

Joy and hope are close friends,
and joy is often food for hope.

Self-Control

Self-control is self care for my future self.

Peace

St. Francis prayed it best,
Lord make me an instrument of thy peace.

Patience

God grant us patience, but please hurry.

Generosity

We have possessions,
but do our possessions have us?

Gentleness

The biblical word for gentleness means
bringing strength under control for good.

Faithfulness

You can be counted on.

These fruit are gifts from the Spirit.
But they are also spiritual practices, that call
us to tune our spirits to God's spirit are not
only gifts but also spiritual practices. We
practice

*love, kindness, joy, self-control,
peace, patience, generosity, gentleness,
faithfulness.*

This last Friday people of various faiths
showed up at synagogues around the
country to be with our Jewish neighbors in
faithfulness to their tradition and to our
own.

This afternoon at 4:30, we have been
invited to join people in Gazebo park in
Bath, across from Beth Israel Congregation,
to be faithful with one another as we stand
together against the forces of division and
violence. We are invited to bring candles,
to shine a light of hope. I invite you to join
me in this practice of love and faithfulness.

I leave us today with words from novelist,
poet and farmer Wendell Berry. When he
uses the word Thee it is capitalized.

*I know that I have life
only insofar as I have love.*

*I have no love
except it come from Thee.*

*Help me, please, to carry
this candle against the wind.*

Wendell Berry
(This Day: Collected Poems, pg. 261)