

Moravian Women's Association- Devotional Paper – September 2023

Fruits of the Spirit

But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23a GNB)

I am not the best gardener but I do enjoy growing things. Mostly flowers, mostly in pots and usually I purchase healthy-looking plants from garden centres. A few years ago, I decided to try to grow some salad leaves from seed in a large pot. For a number of weeks, I was able to go into my garden and snip off a few leaves whenever I wanted them for a salad. Buoyed by this success, I bought another pack of seeds, sowed them in the pot and waited. Soon green shoots began to appear, but the shoots didn't develop into broad green leaves, these leaves were much thinner and feathery and looked suspiciously like the ends of carrots, which was in fact what they were. Somehow carrot seeds had been put into the packet rather than salad leaf seeds.

Most of us would not be able to identify from most seeds what plant it was going to grow into. It's only when the plant is in front of us, we can say with certainty what plant it is. A carrot seed can only become a carrot – no matter how much I want salad leaves, if I've planted carrot seeds, carrots are what I'm going to get. It is the carrot seed's nature or character to grow into a carrot.

Paul wrote the letter of Galatians to members of a church he had founded during his missionary journeys. After he has moved on, a group of influential Jewish Christians were telling the non-Jewish or Gentile Christians that faith in Christ was not enough for salvation – they needed to follow the Jewish law.

Paul's message to the Galatians and indeed to us is that the way we behave, the things we do or don't do are not what saves us. It is our faith in Christ which brings salvation and freedom – freedom from following all the rules and regulations which formed the basis of the Jewish relationship with God.

I can imagine that this message made the Jewish Christians feel very uncomfortable indeed and perhaps it makes some of us feel uncomfortable too. If what we do, doesn't save us – then we are totally reliant on God's goodness and mercy – salvation is completely out of our control – a scary thought for those of us who like to have control over everything in our lives. Far better by far isn't it to have a checklist of things we need to do to ensure our salvation? And if our behaviour does not save us, then perhaps we can do whatever we like – it doesn't matter! But that doesn't sit well with us either – when we look at the teachings of Jesus, when we see how he himself conducted himself – we can see that good behaviour is of great importance. Indeed the characteristics listed by Paul as "Fruits of the Spirit" echo the images of cultivation which Jesus often used to describe the type of people he wanted his followers to be.

(Read Luke 6:43-44 and if time John 15:1-5).

I think the Jewish Christians had forgotten about the Holy Spirit – and perhaps we sometimes forget the Holy Spirit too. When we came to faith in Christ, we accepted the Holy Spirit as a gift into our lives. That gift bears fruit – fruit which Paul lists in Galatians and should be evident in the lives of people declare themselves to be Christian. This fruit is not as a result of our own efforts but because the nature or character of the Holy Spirit is to be loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, humble and self-controlled. Just as a carrot seed can only become a carrot.

Points for Discussion

1. What comes into your head when you hear the words “the Holy Spirit”?
2. Bill Clinton said this of Mother Teresa – “It’s tough to argue with someone who has lived so well.” Jesus said we would be known by our “fruit” – can you think of someone who you feel has lived well and has inspired or influenced you?
3. At the end of an average day, how high would you mark yourself against the list of the fruits of the Spirit?

A thought to take away (or discuss if you wish)

Which fruit of the Spirit do you feel in particular need of right now?