

THE CHURCH IS FAMILY:

I want to start this morning with a proposition: The Church, as a people of God, are a family. The word church comes from the Greek “Ekklesia” which does not mean “building” but rather “gathered body of people.” The church isn’t about the building we worship in, the denomination we are a part of, or the institution we subscribe to, although all of those things we now associate with what it means to be a church. At the heart of it, the church is the family of God, gathered together to worship God, to support one another, and to share the gospel with the world.

When we choose to make Jesus our Lord and Savior, we completely reorder our family ties. Where once we were grouped by bloodlines and last names, we are now called out to a different family, God’s family.

2 Corinthians 6:18

“I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”

Ephesians 1:4-6

⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus

Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Jesus even tells us that accepting and receiving his gospel may mean a division from our family of origin. In **Luke 12:49-55**, he says:

⁴⁹ “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹ Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. ⁵² From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. ⁵³ They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

So, what does it mean to be a part of this new family in Jesus? For those who have claimed Jesus as their Lord and Savior, do you view the church as your new family? As a congregation, have we truly embraced the fact that we all are a part of this new family of God? All of us, young and old, male and female, first service and second

service, all ethnicities and family origins, are adopted sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters in Christ.

In our mission statement “SHARE” found on the back of your bulletin, the “H” stands for “Helping each other with mutual care and support.” This morning we are going to take a look at how well we have been carrying out that part of our mission through the lens of the fruit of the Spirit: Love.

In **Galatians 5:22-23**, our theme Scripture for this series, Paul writes: “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.”

This morning we are going to answer two questions related to Church Family and the fruit of the Spirit “Love.”

- 1) What does it take to grow and bear love?
- 2) What does it take to grow and bear Love in the church family?

So first, what does it take to grow and bear love? I believe it takes two things to bear the fruit of love: patience and intentional effort.

a. Patience:

For anyone who has an orchard, or a vineyard, or who has ever attempted to grow fruit, you know that it is a fairly long process from seed to fruit. Dwarf and semidwarf apple trees will bear in **3 to 4 years**. And standard-size apple trees will bear in **5 to 8 years**. And it can take as long as three years to grow a fruit bearing grape vine from seed. You cannot grow fruit without patience.

John Drescher writes in his book on the fruit of the Spirit “Doing What Comes Spiritually”:

“Growing fruit does not suggest a lot of noise and excitement. In the spring we do not say, “we know fruit is growing in the orchard because we hear noise and because the trees are starting to jump around.” We know fruit is being produced because we see steady, silent growth of buds; fragrant flowers; and finally luscious fruit. The process is so silent yet so evident. Spiritually we are not assured that the Holy Spirit is present simply because there is shouting, speaking, singing, or jumping. We look for other evidence. The Scripture says this evidence is the fruit of the Spirit.”

b. Intentional Effort:

Love is not something that just happens, even though our culture would like us to believe so. In fact, there was a movie that came out 2009 starring Jennifer Aniston called, fittingly, *Love Happens* (I never saw it). Love does not just happen, like a fruit bearing tree, it needs watered, pruned and tended to in order to grow, and it needs continual care in order to flourish over a long period of time. Even though volunteer plants might happen without our planting them, tomatoes and pumpkins tend to grow out of our compost pile every year, they don't ever bear good, viable fruit. Love does not just happen, it takes intentional effort.

Additionally, love isn't simply an emotion or feeling, which implies passive receiving. Eighties throwback rock band The Darkness put out a song in 2003 titled "Love is Only a Feeling." Love is active engagement. Love is commitment in action. Christian ethicist Paul Ramsey writes that:

"Christian love...has nothing to do with feelings, emotions, taste, preference, temperament, or any of the qualities in other people which arouse feelings of revulsion or attraction, negative or positive preferences. Christian love depends on the direction of the will...not on stirring emotion."

True Christian love is about intentional effort. Paul gives us the ultimate list of the qualities of love in 1st Corinthians 13, and all of the characteristics are active, not passive:

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Transition: In order to grow and bear the fruit of love, we need to commit ourselves to patient, intentional effort. **So, what then must we do patiently and intentionally to grow and bear love in the Church family?** To bear love, we need all be growing as committed disciples of Jesus Christ.

John Drescher writes “...we are no more Christian than our lives are Christlike.”

How Christlike are we, as a church, and how is that evidenced in our love for one another?

Our passage today gives us **four ways** in which we can grow as committed Disciples of Christ in order to bear the fruit of love better towards one another.

i. Receiving the Spirit: v. 13 ¹³ “This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.” The Holy Spirit, the third part of the trinity, is God’s constant presence in and with us, trying to guide us towards God. It speaks to heart and attempts to guide our actions. Popular culture might call this our “conscience.” But for believers, we know that it is the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to follow God when our own spirit and actions want to do anything but. Paul tells us in **Romans 5:5** that it is through the Holy Spirit that we have received God’s love, and as we will discover later, it is because of God’s love for us that we love others. ⁵ *And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

ii. Abiding in God: v. 15 ¹⁵ “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.”

Again, when we give our lives over to God, He doesn’t leave us alone; He dwells in us through the Holy Spirit and He remains with us throughout the ups and downs of our life. In John 15:1-4, which Dick talked about last week, Jesus tells us that as fruit bearers, we have to abide or remain with Him who is the source of our life

and we have to submit, in that abiding, to God, who is the gardener.

John 15:1-4

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

iii. Becoming like Jesus: v. 17 ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.

A disciple is one who follows after Jesus. To follow after someone implicitly means that there is something about them that we are attracted to and want to become more like ourselves. The word “Christian” actually means “little Christ.” Verse 17 in 1 John tells us that God’s love is made complete in the world because we are like Jesus. It is His love that characterizes our Christ-likeness. Jesus tells us in **John 13:34-35** that the world will know we follow Him because of our love for one another.

³⁴ “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

So, If we are to love another in the same way that Jesus showed love to His disciples, what does that look like? William Barclay writes that Jesus loved his disciples selflessly, sacrificially, understandingly, forgivingly. Do we in the church love one another with those same characteristics as Jesus: selflessly, sacrificially, understandingly, and forgivingly? Have we truly learned to put others ahead of ourselves? Are we willing to sacrifice for others, not just our close friends and family, but all of those within the church body? Do we seek to understand one another, especially those with whom we disagree or don't get along? And have we learned to forgive others, no matter the sin, just as Jesus has forgiven us? These are difficult and heavy characteristics of what it means to love like Jesus, and yet remember what it takes to bear fruit: patience and intentional effort. We won't embody all of these characteristics at once. We may not bear fully formed fruit of love towards one another this day, this month, this year, or even this decade. We aren't called to perfection in this

life, but we are called to continue to grow as disciples, even if that growth is slow.

iv. Loving like God: ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Pay close attention to this last one, because the implications of not following it are pretty serious. We are told that the very reason that we even know how to love one another is because God loves us. Just a few verses earlier than this in v. 8, the author tells us that God is love. If God is love, then God is also the origin of all love. And if God is love, then God is not hate and hate towards one another is so far away from God's nature that we are told if we hate one another, then we cannot possibly love God. We have all been guilty of hating our brother or sister at one point or another in our lives, and we have certainly been guilty of mistreating our brothers and sisters, and we may have even been guilty of doing so to brothers and sisters in Christ within the church. But

hear this: if we love God, then we must also love one another; we cannot do one without the other.

The fruit of love defines not only **WHO** we are as followers of Christ, but also whether or not we **ARE** followers of Christ. James H. McConkey writes in his book “The Three-Fold Secret of the Holy Spirit”: “We are to make “love one another” the touchstone by which we test every thought, word, and deed of our daily lives, until all are brought into conformity to the law which was supreme in the life of Christ himself.”

So to recap: God created people for community, and when we choose to follow after Him, we become a new family rooted in the saving works of Jesus, brought together as a fellowship of different people in order to serve God. Our old family ties are reordered as we become the people of God. In order to fully be the family that God has called the church to be, then, we need to bear the fruit of the Spirit. This comes through patient, intentional effort, and committed discipleship to Jesus. And how do we become growing Disciples of Christ? By receiving the Spirit, abiding in God, becoming like Jesus, and loving like God. If we at Oak Grove commit ourselves to patiently and intentionally tending to our relationships with one another as we together

grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus, then and only then can we be sure that we are bearing the fruit of love.

I want to close by reading part of a hymn written by Otto Salomon for the Bruderhof community, an intentional Christian community, which poetically illustrates the importance of being a loving community of God:

“Wherefore (why) burn poor and lonely
As one needy brand?
Torches together, hand in hand!

He who feels deep within him
A fire burning bright
Must through that glow
With his brother unite.

Wherefore (why) burn poor and lonely
As one needy brand?
Torches together, hand in hand!

Let’s be torches together. Let’s pray.