

Sunday 2nd June Reflective Worship – Fruit of the Spirit - Goodness

Galatians 5:22-25; John 15

If you were here at our last Reflective Worship in May you would have heard Kate finish her thoughts with these words ..

The fruit of the Spirit grows in us when we allow ourselves to be open to the promptings and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It's not about trying harder, being more self-disciplined, making ourselves be anything. This fruit grows as we listen to the Spirit, follow Jesus' example, allow ourselves to receive God's love and allow it to flow through us and out into the world.

In John chapter 15 (as we have just heard) Jesus talks about Vines and branches. He says he is the vine and we are the branches. We produce fruit when we abide in him. When his Holy Spirit flows through us. Like sap from a tree giving life to the branches to produce wonderful fruit.

This means having a close relationship with him. Having His life flowing through us. So one important thing to bear in mind as we talk about the fruit of the spirit is how we abide in Christ – how we stay as branches attached to the vine.

That comes through prayer - not just prayer that asks God for things – but prayer in its widest sense. Being in God's presence. Talking, listening, thinking, responding – perhaps just being

Maybe this means :

A regular routine of prayer; daily prayer; weekly worship; regular Bible reading – loads of resources

Maybe praying with others – we have talked about our Pilgrim Partners – support and encouraging each other in our faith journeys; or maybe groups – home groups; study groups (like the Lent groups)

Happy to talk with you about the how - But really that's all for another sermon.

This morning in our Parish service we were talking (amongst other things) about the gifts that God gives to each of us, and our use of those gifts to build up the church and to benefit the community. Individual gifts or skills or abilities given to each of us not for ourselves but to be used

And, unlike these gifts of the spirit which are individually given – and we won't all have all of the gifts - the fruit of the spirit is something we can and should all produce. The fruit is the characteristic of living and abiding in Christ. Fruit of the spirit is, if you like, the mark of the Christian life

And in the list of the fruit of the Spirit which we heard earlier, this evening we are looking at the word "goodness". At least that is how most versions of the Bible translate it. Some use the translation "generosity"

On one level goodness might be hard to distinguish from another of the fruits in the list – kindness. I think we would be hard pressed to explain the difference. And it seems that the two Greek words originally used have pretty similar meaning as well. But the apostle Paul wasn't one for using words without thinking about the meaning - so there must have been a good reason why two such similar words were used in the same passage.

So what might he have meant by this word "goodness" (or generosity)

I think a clue might come from looking at what The Message says (The Message is a version of the Bible that gives a paraphrase rather than a word for word translation – ie it tries to get at the meaning of the whole phrase)

We read there instead of Goodness or Generosity the phrase "a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people"

I must say I rather like that. Its not so much thinking about what we do, rather about our attitude to others.

And so perhaps the goodness / generosity conundrum can be resolved by thinking of it as a kind of generous goodness. A sort of generosity of spirit that says there is goodness in everyone if we look hard enough.

This fruit of the Spirit, in other words, is not so much about *being* good, or even of *doing* good, as it is about *believing* in good – believing that there is goodness in this world, that there is goodness in people, and that it is worth looking for, and fighting for. It is there. It's just, sometimes – maybe quite often - hiding.

If we are going to believe in the goodness of this world, if we are going to have this truly generous spirit, and see, even in when things seem very dark, that the good in this world is worth fighting for, then we must be attached to the vine. We must be connected to Jesus. We must look at things and people as he did.

When we see things and people through his eyes we begin to see this goodness – and we see it because in each of us – in everyone - there is something of the image of God because we are all made in God’s image. And even though through the mess of this world that image has been tarnished in all of us, and almost hidden in some – there is still something of it there – some goodness remains.

This doesn’t of course mean there is no evil, or that we should ignore it when it is there and not call a spade a spade. Jesus recognised evil for what it was and called it out. But it does mean we see the possibility of goodness; we see hope; we see potential. Just as Jesus did.

When God created the world he saw that it was good. This fruit of the spirit says that there is still that same goodness in the world – in all people; yes there is also evil, but the evil has not stamped out the good.

This fruit of the spirit recognises that good will triumph over evil because good is from God. This fruit of the spirit is about seeing as Jesus sees.

And I finish these few thoughts by quoting from Sam in **Lord of the Rings**

“It's like the great stories, Mr. Frodo, the ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were, and sometimes you didn't want to know the end because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad has happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing this shadow, even darkness must pass. A new day will come, and when the sun shines, it'll shine out the clearer. I know now folks in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going because they were holding on to something. That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for.”

There’s something good in this world and its worth fighting for