

Follow Me: There and Back Again A Journey through Luke and Acts

Luke 6:43-45

February 7, 2010

Focus: If you are a tree in the KIUMC orchard... and Jesus says that a good tree can't produce bad fruit... and Jesus says that a tree is identified by its fruit... how would a fruit inspector grade you?

I am looking out of my study window at home and cannot see a thing. It faces south and that is the side of the house where the drifts of snow are piling up. Drifts are a foot or so up the window and the rest of the window is plastered with the white stuff. Weather.com says we should not expect it to let up for another 8 hours or so. So I've got a nice fire, and family and pets are safe... I hope you are as well.

I thought I would write my sermon in a conversational style... just in case we don't have church tomorrow. If you are reading it, it means that church was cancelled. I pray that this message will help you keep focus in the coming week. (Brad, thanks for posting it.)

We are continuing our look at the Gospel of Luke so FOLLOW ME THERE, into the text. I hope you took time to read the 6th chapter this past week. What a chapter! Jesus begins with a discussion of the Sabbath before choosing his twelve apostles¹. He then begins to teach them. This discourse is often described as the *Sermon on the Plain* to distinguish it from the *Sermon on the Mount*. There are great similarities between the two... but differences as well. Many people don't realize that when they hear a well known speaker share a sermon and she does so with such precision and passion, it is because she probably has preached it many, many times. This is not bad or wrong. If it is a message for the masses... it should be preached to the masses. There is no reason to think that Jesus did not share this same important message at different times and at different places. Hence the similarities between the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain.

What was the message from this sermon that Luke captured in his gospel?

First are the beatitudes and sorrows... a list of blessing and woes. How can they be summed up? My study bible does so in this way... *"God blesses those who acknowledge their inadequacy and weakness and turn to God for strength. The value system of God's Kingdom is radically different from the world's value system, in which power and strength represent success."*²

Regarding the woes that are mentioned... *“Promises of blessing for the poor and oppressed are balanced in Luke with predictions of sorrow for the rich and powerful. Those who trust in themselves will be humbled, while those who depend on God will be blessed.”*³

Jesus then continues with a mini-sermon on the importance of loving your enemies. Yes, you heard me correctly... love your enemies.

If they curse you, bless them.

If they slap your cheek, offer them your other cheek.

If someone demands your coat, give them your shirt as well.

If someone steals from you, don't try to get it back.

This is the reason that Christians are often labeled as wimpy. Let me ask you... is it easier to strike back at someone... or to turn the other cheek? (For those of you having a difficult time being honest, let me offer two words. Road rage.) Our natural response is to strike back, to curse back, to take back.

So is there a benefit to loving your enemies? I would offer two, based solely upon what Jesus says. First, when we love our enemies we grow as disciples. Jesus says, “If you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much!”⁴ Second, there is a reward for us. “Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked.”⁵

Jesus then continues speaking about how we treat one another.

1. Don't judge others.
2. Don't condemn others.
3. Forgive others.
4. Give.

For each, there is a benefit for you.

1. You won't be judged.
2. Condemnation won't come back on you.
3. You will be forgiven.
4. You will receive... pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap.

I know I haven't yet asked you to FOLLOW ME BACK AGAIN to 2010... but I need to speak to this judgment part. Judgment and accountability are different. When you judge another person... you condemn them. Accountability takes place when you go to a Christian brother or sister and warn them of sin in their lives. Many of us do not have relationships, based in Christ, that are healthy enough to allow such

exhortation to take place. It is easier to react with that all too familiar phrase... “Who are you to judge me?” That is usually a sign of spiritual immaturity.

Back to the text...

We finally we find ourselves at the passage I want us to consider this snowy Sunday.

“A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit. A tree is identified by its fruit. Figs are never gathered from thorn bushes, and grapes are not picked from bramble bushes. A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.”

Luke 6:43-45 (NLT)

Jesus uses an illustration that the people could understand. Jesus talked to them in common language. Sometimes we place so much on our understanding of the grammar and context of a passage that we miss the simple truth. Jesus was a master of using the common and ordinary to help those listening understand these significant, life altering truths.

“A good tree can’t produce bad fruit and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit.”

Jesus, concerned that not everyone would understand, says the same thing in another way... a different, more direct way.

“Figs are never gathered from thornbushes, and grapes are not picked from bramble bushes.” Figs and grapes are good. Thornbushes and bramble bushes are bad. Good fruit does not come from bad trees.

To make it unmistakable... “A tree is identified by its fruit.”

I’m not a farmer. I don’t grow fruit. But, I do eat it and therefore feel I know good fruit. I know when I don’t like the taste and when I don’t like the texture. Because of this, I believe I understand what Jesus had to say without any explanation. Jesus, however, wanted to be sure. So he explains himself so we don’t get the wrong idea that his message had anything to do with pomology⁶.

“A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.”

Luke 6:45 (NLT)

That, my friend, is pretty straightforward.

So FOLLOW ME BACK AGAIN to 2010...

In the focus I asked you this question. “If you are a tree in the KIUMC orchard... and Jesus says that a good tree can’t produce bad fruit... and Jesus says that a tree is identified by its fruit... how would a fruit inspector grade you?”

I did a little research. The United States standards for apples include four grades.

- U.S. Extra Fancy
- U.S. Fancy
- U.S. No. 1
- U.S. Utility

There are a couple of basic expectations for all grades... they are to be mature and not overripe. After that... there are several distinctions that cause an apple to “make the grade.”

Color, cleanliness, bruising, scabs and decay all make a difference. Most apples outside of U.S. Extra Fancy have some problems... so it becomes an issue of how severe the problem.

How would a fruit inspector grade you?

The bible gives us the expectations of a “U.S. Extra Fancy” Christian. They are found in Galatians 5:22-23.

“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!”

Galatians 5:22-23(NLT)

How would a Christian fruit inspector grade you?

You have heard a lot about our new discipleship process. I am so excited that session six of the study, *Follow Jesus: Steps to a Passionate Faith*, is all about the fruit of the spirit that should be evident in every Christian’s life. You will study all nine fruit and consider if and how evident they are in your life. Actually... at the end of session five you will do a Spiritual Fruit Inventory to help you evaluate your “fruitiness”.

(Actually, I guess I mean fruitfulness. 😊)

This is yet another reason why I hope **everyone** sees the benefit of participating in this new discipleship process... **regardless** of where you are in your Christian journey.

So let me end with this thought.

You can know the bible in and out. You can quote scripture for every occasion. But if your words are negative and critical, your knowledge falls on deaf ears.

You can work hard for the church. You can use your talents for God. But if you do not serve all people, your service is in vain.

You can attend worship each week. You can live by the letter of the law. But if you do not love your neighbor, you do more harm than good.

So, take a look at your fruit. As not to miss the point... don't look at the works you do. Instead... look at the attitude or approach you bring. That is the greater indicator of a heart that truly loves God... a "U.S. Extra Fancy" Christian.

Enjoy the snow and be safe!

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¹ See my blog at www.theyearofourlord.blogspot.com for a little more on this topic.

² Note on Luke 6:20-23 in NLT Study Bible, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

³ Note on Luke 6:24-26 in NLT Study Bible, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

⁴ Luke 6:33 (NLT)

⁵ Luke 6:35b (NLT)

⁶ Pomology is a branch of horticulture which focuses on the cultivation, production, harvest, and storage of fruit, especially tree fruits.