

Today we begin a new sermon series. It is entitled, "Rooting and Fruiting: Tending the Wild Garden." It's all about growing in the fruit of the Spirit. There are nine fruit of the Spirit which we'll explore week to week but before we jump in with a fruit, we need to first do an introduction. We need to talk about the Holy Spirit's role and then our role, as we look to be fruitful as a community of faith. Paul wrote a letter to the churches in Galatia, not to one person. He wrote the letter because these churches were in a bit of a crisis, and Paul was concerned for their welfare. These churches were struggling to define their mission and identity in Christ, and there were some missionaries leading them astray by keeping Jewish laws such as making Gentiles- non-Jewish people- be circumcised as a sign of their inclusion in God's covenant. Paul defends and defines his apostleship while insisting that Christ came to set people free from the Law and that Gentiles did NOT need to be circumcised. He argues this because they were already in a right relationship with God due to their faith in Christ. "While Paul welcomed Gentiles, some in the Galatian church feared that if Gentiles were allowed to be Christians it would somehow negate God's covenant with the people of Israel. Therefore, the Jewish Christians said that Christ (grace) and circumcision (law-keeping) gave one right standing before God. Paul maintained that Christ alone does that" (*Tending The Wild Garden*, Eugenia Anne Gamble). According to Paul, a person is made right before God based on what God has done in the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ rather doing the works of Moses' Law. In other words, salvation is God's gift; it cannot be earned (*The CEB Study Bible*). That's what grace is all about. For Paul, baptism into Christ and receiving the gift of the Holy

Spirit replaces circumcision (and thus includes not only Gentiles but also women in God's covenant)- making them free from the Law. Yet Paul reminds them not to take advantage of this freedom saying, "You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only don't let this freedom be an opportunity to indulge your selfish impulses, but serve each other through love" (5:13). For Paul says there are two different ways of living: being guided by the Spirit or not. Paul concludes his letter by arguing that even though the Galatians are not under the Law's authority, they fulfill the Law through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. "Paul gives his beautiful description of Spirit-filled life. He paints a picture of life without Christ as center and what the fruit of the Spirit brings about in a Christ-centered believer and in the beloved community. He is very much concerned about the judgmental and fractious spirit that has grown up in the church. People are taking sides and talking badly about each other, and Paul will have no more of it! The Christian life is to be marked by certain qualities, and nothing more or less will do" (Gamble). Before we turn to God's word for us this day, first let us **PRAY. READ.**

One of my favorite things is asking a child say what they want to be when they grow up. I love it because it gives me insight into that child, and I also get to hear the wide range of possibilities given. Yet, I realize that in answering most respond instead with what they want to do: a role they want to play. When we are grown ups and meet new people, at some point in the conversation someone usually asks, "What do you do?" But what if, instead, we committed more time to thinking about the being instead of

the doing? In this sermon series, I hope we can become more aware of and explore the “being” part of us in relationship with the Holy Spirit who lives within us. Growing up as a Presbyterian flavored Christian, we didn’t talk much about the Holy Spirit- only on Pentecost, really. Maybe it was because the Holy Spirit made us uncomfortable? Or perhaps there is so much mystery surrounding the Holy Spirit that we don’t want really know what to say? Speaking of the Holy Spirit can be very difficult. There’s a reason all we say about the Spirit in the Apostle’s Creed is “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” All we really need to know is that the Holy Spirit moves in mysterious ways. Both the Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) words for Spirit are the same words for wind, air, breath, breeze. I’m reminded of the late Congressman John Lewis, who entitled his memoir, *Walking With The Wind*. It was a reminder to him and to all of us that no matter the trials and tribulations that come, we walk with the Spirit and the Spirit walks with us. Like in the opening verses in Genesis when we see the Spirit of God moving over the waters of chaos. And in Ezekiel (37) when we see Israel’s inability to live as God intended, and there is no hope in their dry bones- only death. “Yet even now when the worst happens, the prophet tells us that the Spirit never gives up. God’s Spirit needs nothing from us, not potential, no goodness, not even hope. For God brings life from death; the Spirit’s very breath is the life force of all creation” (Gamble). For the bones came to life! In the New Testament, we understand the presence of the Spirit in Jesus’ words and the early believers’ experiences. Like in John 14:15-31 when Jesus says to his disciples that he will ask the Father to send the Spirit to help them after he

is gone. He first describes the Spirit as an “Advocate” (v. 16), translated as “Helper or Encourager.” In Greek, this was also the word for legal adviser, one who pleads another’s case or acts as a proxy. “This helps us to see that the Spirit is One who will continue the same awakening, loving, redeeming work of Jesus’ earthly ministry. We are not left orphaned or alone! God’s Spirit is always with us...within us. So even though we may not be able to fully articulate who the Holy Spirit is, maybe we can all pray “to discover anew what it means to *be* a Spirit-indwelt, deeply loved child in whom God makes God’s home? Everything we’re going to explore in this sermon series is already inside us. It is not something we have to search high and low for. The Spirit and its fruit are already working away, feeding and flourishing, whether we are aware of that work or not. The fruit is within us whether we cooperate with it or not. The fruit of the Spirit is what God *does* in us, because that is who God *is* in us” (Gamble).

Have you ever thought about the Holy Spirit dwelling within you? To engage with the fruit of the Spirit is not just to understand or to better recognize that fruit. Rather, it is “to deepen our relationship with our Source, the wild untamed Spirit of God. When we recognize ourselves as dwelling places of the divine Spirit, we realize that we do not acquire the fruit of the Spirit like a trophy at a soccer match. Our task is to tend the Spirit’s garden, ripen in the Spirit’s ways, taste the fruit, get to know its richness, and create an environment for the Spirit to express herself in and through us. The more aware we become of the Spirit’s presence and fruit, the better we can live out their beauty” (Gamble).

Paul is clear that if we choose not to be guided by the Holy Spirit, we will not inherit God's kingdom. This is a part we don't want to hear or maybe we shrug our shoulders or roll our eyes at it, as we have already given up or are guilty of such things. Or maybe we have forgotten God and the power of God's ways? So remember the dry bones in Ezekiel! Even when the Israelites were at their lowest and had turned from God, the Holy Spirit breathed new life into those old, broken bones. "It is the Spirit who opens our eyes to truth and teaches us the meaning and implications of God's ways and how we are to live them out in this world" (Gamble).

Notice that Paul mentions fruit of the Spirit but not fruits. It's because all that Paul mentions are part of one whole. While the fruit of the Spirit is Paul's vision of wholeness, tending our wild gardens is a process; a life-long journey. When Dean and I got married, I made this list of the fruit of the Spirit, as this was the Scripture read and proclaimed at our wedding. I didn't make this list for us to check off everyday because that would not work- believe me! I did it to remind Dean and me that we and our marriage are a work in progress, and we MUST fully rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our marriage and in our lives. This is why it hangs in our kitchen by the sink for us to remember. Yes, we all must pay attention to that which is most deeply planted within our souls; however, the fruit of the Spirit are not an action plan for us to master nor are they a set of beliefs to memorize nor are they a cosmic to-do list "destined to leave us feeling shamed, discouraged, or self-righteous about our own spiritual maturity" (Gamble). Let's use a different lens for the next few months. Let's give

ourselves permission to explore the work of the Spirit in us. Let's acknowledge for a moment that the Spirit "is already bringing to fruit every possible good thing in, and through, us" (Gamble). Our role begins by "considering the Spirit who raises a garden within us and invites us to welcome and tend it" (Gamble). In order to tend the garden, we first have to enter the garden. That means we must create the space in which to enter. We've got to clear the ground. My granddad, who was a farmer/gardner, did this every spring and fall preparing the soil for the crops. Occasionally he'd come across big rocks, sticks or weeds that needed tending. He also would have to treat for bugs so that they wouldn't eat the crops. Trevor shared this week that his grandfather grew over 14 tons of tomatoes over on Hudson Rd. in East Greenville. And every year Trevor would be ready to throw a damaged tomato away, but his grandfather would take that one tomato and rub it gently with aloe, cover it with duct tape and baling wire, so that it could continue to ripen. Tending a garden can be a lot of work, and it's also very rewarding, especially that delicious silver queen corn and homegrown tomatoes. Once we've tilled the ground, so to speak, through prayer and reading God's Word, we'll discover that "obstacles need to be addressed; weeds need to be pulled. We have to deal with the pests, smell the fragrance of the blooms, and, above all else, refuse to give up" (Gamble). Yes, this is the part where many of us want to give up and run away because there's pain there or it's just too much work. As with all gardening, there is always work, and then you begin to see the fruition in time. Paul is well aware that "every day our egos trip us up, our habits make us tired, and our blinders and expectations lead us far away from the

mark of a fruitful spiritual life” (Gamble). We’ve got some work to do to clear the ground of our souls so that what we learn won’t get choked out. Know that all is redeemable and that rooting and fruiting is a process. And let us not confuse the fruit of the Spirit with spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are bestowed on particular people for particular purposes. The ‘fruit’ of the Spirit is a different concept altogether. Fruit is the product or the result of something- the evidence. In Matthew 7:15-20, in a short teaching about discernment, Jesus tells us that we will know the truth of people by the fruit of their lives. Thus, the fruit of the Spirit is the image of God most apparent in us- the ‘imago dei’- for us to discover, recover, and live out” (Gamble). Are we, as a congregation, looking like the image of God? Every week we greet one another with the words on our bulletin: “You’re God’s child, and you’re welcome in this place.” When we claim we’re children of God, we hopefully begin to claim that we’re God’s beloved. Because if we forget our own identity as God’s beloved children, we don’t treat ourselves or others as sacred vessels in which God dwells. Yet, once we begin to receive God’s grace, we can believe, with the Spirit’s help, that we’re God’s beloved and thus capable of bearing fruit and sharing the image of God with others. In other words, “tending the wild garden is not about being a better person or a better Christian. It is about being a better expression of the One who dwells within us and even prays within us for our own needs and the needs of a ‘fruit-hungry’ world. The fruit of the Spirit is grace in skin” (Gamble). When we are guided by the wild Spirit, we live life in technicolor. Thanks be to God. Amen.