



Roanoke, Virginia

October 9, 2022

“The Fruits of Faith”

Philippians 2:12-13, Galatians 5:22-23

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Philippians 2:12-13:

¹² Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence but much more now in my absence, work on your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Galatians 5:22-23

²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

A few days ago, I read a rough draft of Treva Richter’s obituary. I read it with great interest because Treva was a remarkable woman, well-loved in this church. But I also read the obituary with a new perspective. The day before, I listened to an episode of Kate Bowler’s podcast, *Everything Happens*. Her guest was Thomas Lynch, a funeral director. In the twilight of his life and career; Lynch works part time and is never on call. (He says, “**I’m not retired, but I’m not required.**”).

Lynch is not only a funeral director but also a poet. With great eloquence, he reflects on the meaning of death and life, and on the significance of what he does in helping families navigate the logistics of funerals and grief.

Lynch loves a good obituary. What he means by a “good obituary” is one that manages within the boundaries of a word limit to say something that is unique and true. He sees a good obituary as the “*first draft of a biography.*”



That got me thinking. I often have the sacred responsibility of giving the Opening Remarks at memorial services where I speak of the person being remembered. When I am able to say something that speaks to the unique essence of someone now lost, maybe what I am doing is giving a *second draft* of a biography.

That got me thinking some more. If we are living thoughtful and purposeful lives, are we not writing a draft of our autobiography? Maybe those who live only for themselves, who don't much care what others think, but care only for what works for them, don't give much thought to how they will be remembered. Their quality of life is more important than the quality of the impact their lives make on others. But most people I think—and certainly most people who are joining us for worship—want to tell a story with our lives... a story that will mean something. We hope to make some kind of positive and meaningful impact so that when our story is told with tears and laughter, it will bear some message that others' lives were gifted because we lived.

- Treva worked with students to help them understand their gifts and what they could offer the world.
- Marilyn brought beauty into rooms with her flowers and beauty into lives with her grace.
- Many remember how Bob coached them not only to succeed on the playing field but also in life.
- Jay's passion was to make sure that those who could not afford counsel got the best representation they could receive, especially those on death row.

These are four members lost to us within the past couple of years who came immediately to my mind. All of them cared about the difference they would make. I imagine that all of them, being human, cared how they would be remembered. With what they said and did, they were trying to write a narrative in the world so that, someday, others might say that they bore fruit that nourished others.

Not that others will get it all or get it *all right*. The legacy of our lives, for good or ill, is not going to be fully known or appreciated by anyone else. Memories are rough drafts needing fact-checking and editing..., and they fade over time. We see Bill Klein's picture in Heritage Hall and there are still many in the church who can tell their own stories of the impact his ministry had on them. But we also see the picture of Arthur Rowbotham and we have to read the chapter in *Second Century* to know something of the impact that he made; a chapter, by the way, written by Geoffrey Seamans who himself had to rely on documents and sources. Yet an impact Rowbotham made. And an impact the congregation he served made. If we are in this church, our life together as a congregation is better because of lines of influence that go back to that Scotsman who once preached in this sanctuary, and the members of this church who built the foundation and traditions of our worship, programs, and missions. But none of us today can draw those lines.



Yet, there is another audience for the autobiography we are writing and that is the one who sees and knows us for who we really are. God is the audience the Apostle Paul cares most about while he writes the autobiography of his life. And God is the audience he wants the followers of Jesus in Philippi and Galatia to care most about.

Paul cares deeply about the legacy of his life. He cares deeply about his legacy even saying what he does about grace and works. In his letter to the Galatian church, he says, “[Saved by grace are we, not by works.](#)” And he means it. We can’t earn God’s love, and we don’t have to. Last Sunday, in the late service after we collected the offering, Bob Martin came to the front of the church to offer the Prayer of Dedication. In his prayer, he incorporated what I know is one of his favorite quotes. I know this because I remember when, over two decades ago, he told me how this quote hit him straight between the eyes when he read it in Phillip Yancy’s book, *What’s So Amazing About Grace*. Because we are saved by grace, Yancy wrote, “[there is nothing we can do to make God love us more or make God love us less.](#)”

Paul believes and proclaims that truth. And yet Paul wants to live a life that bears fruit. He wants his readers to live lives that bear fruit. And he wants us to live lives that bear fruit—specifically the fruits of “[love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.](#)”

Now if your life is all about you and not about others, then this jump from grace to bearing fruit isn’t very motivating. If I am not saved by what I do, then why is it all that important how I live? If I don’t owe God, then what do I owe the world?

Paul has plenty to say to those who think like that, but he is not writing to them. He is writing to people like you, folks who genuinely care about the difference you can make in the lives of others. Having spoken to our anxiety about losing God’s love, he now is speaking to the desire to share God’s love. If we have an identity grounded in God’s love and grace than we naturally would want to live out that identity in how we live. Don’t we?

Don’t we, *collectively*? Paul is not writing to individuals but to bodies of believers. Considering the fruits of the Spirit that he listed, he would want us as a body of believers that is Second Presbyterian Church to consider the impact we can make if you would bear the fruit that comes of knowing that we are loved by God and saved by grace. We can look for the best in each other while seeing with grace the worst in each other. We can be forgiving. We can be patient and kind. We can be generous and giving. We can show some self-control as we place a priority over what benefits us all over what benefits just ourselves.

Then, Paul would ask us what fruits of the spirit this body of believers can offer Roanoke and beyond. In today’s touchy and argumentative culture, it is popular for people to seek out and find instances where churches have done more harm than good. When that’s been the case, it is a story that needs to be told. But, when the



truth is that a body of believers actually is making a witness that bears the kind of fruit that Paul describes,
that offers grace and hope,
that knits a community of caring,
and that attends to the hurting places in people's hearts and in the world,
than *that* story needs to be told—
not to bring glory to the church
but to reveal the glory of God's transforming love.

It is up to us—each and every one of us—to write the next chapter of the autobiography of this body of believers that is Second Presbyterian Church. Next Sunday is Commitment Sunday when we will be asked to make a financial commitment to go with the other commitments we make to support the work and witness of this congregation. I think in considering what that commitment will be, we need to know as much as we can what story we are helping to tell through our giving.

During the Call to Discipleship, we are going to watch a video that tells the story of our budget. It will not be listing figures or budget items, but rather a story of the *impact* that is made because we give.

When we watch the video, I guess we'll be the audience. But let's watch it knowing that God is our audience too. God, who loves us, wants us to bear fruit that comes of God loving others through us.

