

## Waiting

“...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...” (Galatians 5:22-23)

They are all good things to have, and they’re all also good things to do. We should note that Paul says. “the fruit of the spirit is”, not “the fruits of the spirit are.” Because they’re all part of the deal.

All of us receive the fruit of the spirit.

Some of us might seem to be better than others at showing some of those parts of the fruit of the spirit in our lives, but we all have all those things. Our friend Reverend Trevor Lunney often says that the various aspects of the fruit of the spirit are like muscles – if we want to develop them, we need to use them: just like a bodybuilder who wants to build his arm muscles lifts weights, if we want to be more faithful, then we have to practice faithfulness.

If we want to develop our self-control, then we need to practice controlling ourselves. Hold in that outburst for a little bit longer than you did last time... and so on.

Do you know what the easiest part of the fruit of the spirit to build up is?

It’s patience.

And do you know why patience is the easiest part of the fruit of the spirit?

You don’t need to do anything.

Just wait. Do nothing. And voila, you’re being patient.

How difficult is that? Do nothing. Just wait.

I’ve said before that I think joy is the most neglected of the fruit of the spirit among Christians – being faithful followers of Jesus is very serious business, after all. But being a Christian should be a joyful thing, so let’s spend some time being joyful – singing music we like, having a sausage sizzle and a glass of wine after church sometimes. It was a happy – a joyful – time, last week, wasn’t it?

As we travel through the season of Advent, there is plenty of joy around in our society, isn’t there? The parties, the food, the presents, the time off work, and the catching up with friends and family. As Christians we also have the joy of celebrating our saviour’s birth – but the rest of it is pretty good too.

But the part of the fruit most missing in our society at this time of year, I think, is patience. Christmas is only 25 shopping days away! We don’t have time to get everything done. We have to get in and out of the shops quickly, but finding a parking spot takes forever. And then the shops are crowded, and the parking is only free for so long, and you can’t find a staff member to help you and then the queue at the checkout is so long – and then you realise that you left the shopping bags at home because you were in a rush to the shops. And then the carpark is crowded and it takes forever to get

out, but then you're on the busy road and all the other drivers are so impatient! Why are all the other drivers so impatient?

And of course you have to prepare for Christmas day, and the turkey takes the best part of three days to defrost in the fridge – and who has that long to wait? Or that much space in the fridge at this time of year. And the presents need to be wrapped, and you still need to find one or two things so it's back to the shops you go.

Who has time to practice patience?

And that's if you're an adult! What if you're a child?

You get dragged to the shops, and it's crowded and noisy, and it's still 25 days 'till Christmas. And you don't want to have your photo taken on Santa's knee – let alone queue up for the photo! And if you do get to the toy department, you certainly can't get anything, because you have to wait for Santa.

If you're lucky, though, you get given an Advent Calendar, but even then you have to wait! Imagine being given twenty-four presents (or criminally small pieces of chocolate!), and then you're only allowed to open one of them each day.

And then the presents appear under the Christmas tree and you have to wait for them.

Finally, you get to Christmas Eve and all is set, you have to wait all night. So you wake up extra early – but no, you can't open presents yet, because you have to wait for everyone else in the house is awake too.

We all need some patience!

Patience. Things would be so much easier if we exercised it. But waiting is just so hard.

The season of Advent, though, is about waiting. It's about expecting something that will certainly happen.

The word 'advent' means 'coming' – in the sense of 'arrival' or 'beginning' or 'start', and it's the time of the church year when we look forward to remembering that birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, but we should be focusing on – and looking forward to – the Second Coming of Jesus, when all that he came to earth to accomplish when he was born as a baby in Bethlehem, will be fulfilled, will be completed. And Christians have been waiting for that for two thousand odd years.

Our bible reading this morning from Matthew's gospel talks about Jesus' return.

In our gospel reading today, we heard that Jesus tells us, "about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" – so we can't know when it will be, as much as we might like it if we could. And neither can anyone else. Although since Jesus ascension many, many people have claimed they did know.

And although we don't know when it will be Jesus warns us to keep watch (Matt 24:42) and to be ready (Matt 24:44). So not to count down to a specific date, but to look forward to a specific day.

Paul picks up the theme in his letter to the Romans – “And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. (13:11)

Our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. We don't know when Jesus will return, but we know he will, and so, logically, we know it gets closer every day. We are one day closer to the day when Jesus will return to put all things right than we were yesterday.

We can't count down to it, but we need to hope for it, to look forward to it, to expect it, and to respond to it.

We shouldn't be living as if this world will last forever. And we shouldn't be living doing whatever we want for ourselves, without regard for God and without regard for other people.

As we wait for Jesus' return, we need to be loving our neighbours. And although we all know how central to Christian living loving our neighbours is, it is something that we all struggle with.

As we wait for Jesus' return, we need to be exercising the fruit of the spirit – using and showing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – in our lives.

As we grow in the knowledge and love of God, we need to be consciously – and intentionally – sharing that love with others.

And it is hard going, and the state of the world is often not very conducive to loving our neighbours. So many people don't love us or won't love us. People will mock us and our faith, people will persecute us.

We live in dark times.

We live in a dark world. But that darkness is going to end... so let's not simply try to endure whatever darkness confronts us, let's not simply try to withdraw from the world. Let's reject the darkness, and live as people of the light.

You are the light of the world, Jesus said. You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matt 5:14a, 16)

In John's first letter, he writes “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the

truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:5-7).

We need to be people of the light. We need to share the light with the world. The source of the light is not us, though. The light comes from God, as we read at the beginning of John’s gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. [John tells us] The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-5,9,14)

God’s light came into the world in Jesus, and it shines through us today. We need to be showing the world God’s light, and showing the world God’s love.

And we do that, by living as the people of God. Living as God wants us to live. Trusting in God, trusting in the salvation Jesus has won for us by his death on the cross. Relying not on our own strength, but on God’s strength. Exercising the fruit of the spirit that we have received. Living with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

We will struggle, though, whether through our own selfishness, or our ignorance, or because we just can’t figure it out for ourselves. But God understands, and because of what Jesus has done for us, we are forgiven – as we’ve reminded ourselves this morning, and as we remind ourselves each week here at church.

Our sins are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

The reading from Galatians tells us clearly how we shouldn’t be living – Paul tells us that the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.

Have you seen any of those lately? I’m pretty sure that sorcery is not rife in modern Australian society – but the rest of the list is pretty common.

I often contemplate that those who promote ‘Christian values’ will speak out against sexual immorality, but not so often about jealousy or dissension. But they are all problems, they are all problems that get between us and the way God wants us to live.

And clearly, the works of the flesh are appealing. Because we see people following them day after day.

Our challenge though, is to not follow them. Some of those sinful desires will be easier to resist than others – and our challenges will all be different, and will change over time. But we need to meet those challenges by putting our faith in Jesus.

Not just in what he’s done in his death and resurrection, but what he will do on his return. The return that we can’t down to – but that we can – and should – be hoping for, waiting for and looking forward to.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:51-52) “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

So we live, day by day, as Christian people, knowing that with each day, Christ’s return is nearer than when we first believed, and that we are one day nearer home.

And we wait. We don’t count down to just a day’s celebration. But we look forward with hope to a bright and everlasting future.

And we wait. We don’t – we can’t – count down to Jesus’ return, but we look forward with hope to it.

And we wait for that trumpet to sound – living in love for each other, trusting in the God who loved us, with hope – that certainty in the future of life with God forever, growing in the knowledge and love of God, and so living like people of the day, having moved out of the night, out of the darkness, to be the people of the light that Jesus brought into the world.

Amen.