

Colossians 1:1-14 (Re-read v. 6) **“All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.”**

Brothers and Sisters Growing in Knowledge and Faith:

If you’re a fruit lover, this is a great time of the year. Just in the last week I’ve been able to enjoy strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and cherries -- some of them locally grown. You walk through the Farmer’s Market and each week more produce, including fruit, is ripening and being sold for our enjoyment.

The Apostle Paul lived during a time when fruit was ripening all over the world: the fruit of the gospel. As the followers of Christ spread out sharing the good news of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, more and more people believed and were added as fruit to the Tree of Life. It is estimated that by the time the last Apostle died, John, in the 90’s AD, there were more than ½ million believers in Christ in the then civilized world. Lots of fruit!

Christians, rejoice that you are part of the harvest! Today we’ll rejoice that ***“You Are the Growing Fruit of the Gospel.”*** (1) ***Look what God has done for you,*** and (2) ***Consider what more God can do through you.***

I

Paul’s opening words in his letter to the Colossians is a profusion of encouraging words to them. Epaphras was their pastor and had reported to Paul (who was in prison at the time) that the members of the church at Colossi, while undergoing pressure from without and from within, continued to stand firm in the faith. They were recent converts to Christianity and it would have been easy for them to walk away. But they didn’t. However, Paul knows they needed reassurance. So, just as our children need encouragement as they grow, so do God’s children. Paul is telling them, *“You’re doing well! I’m so thankful for you! Keep on holding fast to Christ Jesus and his teachings. I pray for you every day, and I know you will keep on getting stronger and produce even more fruit!”*

He reminds them about what you and I are here at church today to be reminded about: ***“Look at what great things God has done for you!”*** He says, ***“Give thanks to God the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints.... He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*** Notice the action words, the verbs, in that passage. God is subject of those verbs. God has done these things for you. For example, ***“He (God) has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints.”*** Right now Olympic qualifying is taking place. Only the very best in their sport can go on to represent their country. Although we confess we are not the very best, not qualified to go to heaven because of our sins, Jesus qualifies us automatically! Paul says you’re a ***“saint.”*** A saint is a “holy one” (perfect!); one who has been chosen by the Lord and set apart from the corrupt and dying world. As Paul put it, ***“He rescued you from the dominion of darkness.”*** Because of that, you now have an ***inheritance*** that ***“can never perish, spoil, or fade, kept in heaven for you”*** (1 Pt 1). That’s all God’s doing...free!

II

Looking for a reason to celebrate? Our forgiveness is cause to celebrate! The gift of heaven is reason to celebrate! Paul tells us how to celebrate. We don’t need fireworks or a pa-

rade. He says, *“Live a life worthy of the Lord... bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God...”*

While Paul recognized that these young Christians in Colossi had been brought from death to life by faith in Christ and heaven was their future home, he also wanted them to keep growing while they were still here.

It's easy for us to **stagnate**, to become complacent Christians and even a complacent congregation. The devil loves it when we simply go through the motions of Christian life. Being on spiritual autopilot may be comfortable, but rarely is it conducive to spiritual growth and enthusiastic outreach to gain new souls. Satan also loves it when we just go through the motions of Christian worship: just saying the words of a prayer or singing the words of a hymn while our hearts are far away somewhere else. Jesus actually rejects that kind of worship as useless and disrespectful.

You and I are the fruit of the gospel. God's Word produced us! What a privilege! Apples on the tree just after the spring bloom are nice to look at but not mature. Young apples need to grow. The rain falls, the sun shines, and eventually the apples are ready to fill the pie. The maturing process needs to take place our whole life long. Paul says, *“We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”*

People often talk about something's **potential**. If you watch the show *House Hunters* on HGTV, people will go into a fixer-upper home and say things like, *“This place has potential.”* We're all fixer-uppers, but God gives potential to each one of his children. There is always more we can learn and do! The motivation to keep learning and growing is Christ's forgiving love.

When Paul says he prays that God will fill us *“the knowledge of his will,”* he's not just talking about learning facts. Being great at Bible trivia doesn't necessarily mean we are growing spiritually. He's really saying that God wants us to grow in Christian wisdom -- the ability to see things as a child of God and evaluate them: to reject what is bad and false, and to hold tightly to and share with others what is good and true -- and then to put that into practice.

This wisdom doesn't come automatically with age. Sometimes little children see the simple truth of God's Word much more clearly than their parents. Little Christian children know that when things get scary, Jesus wants us to jump into his arms because he's always with us. Often we adults freak out and think that we're the only ones who can solve the problem. Little children know that saying bad words and watching bad movies are harmful to our souls. Often we adults think those things won't hurt us because we're old enough to handle it. Since when has drinking poison been a good thing for young or old?

You get the point. Spiritual maturity comes from listening to what Jesus says, trusting what Jesus says, and putting it into practice in our lives. Talk about potential! This is heart-transforming and life-changing! Just imagine Christ's Church on earth if believer in the world did that every day: Listen to Jesus, trust in Jesus, and put into practice what Jesus has told us. We would not recognize the world we live in!

Dear friends, you are the growing fruit of the gospel. By grace, God has made you his good fruit. Consider each day, in prayer like Paul, what great things God can do and does do through you when you hear him, trust him, and put his word into practice.

Amen.