

“Poverty, Justice and the Fruit of the Spirit”

a sermon for the Sea to Sea rally, Queenston Heights, Sunday, August 24, 2008

My sisters and brothers, in the fifth chapter of his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul writes that ...

“... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

There is no law against such things.

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.”

In the beginning was fruitfulness.

And in the end, there will be fruitfulness.

From the beginning to the end,

it's always been about fruitfulness.

A fruitful creation.

A bringing forth creation.

From the fruitfulness of the earth

to the fruit-bearing trees,

to the multiplying fruitfulness of birds, fish and animals,

to the fruitfulness of that creature who images the Creator,

it has always been about fruitfulness.

In the beginning was fruitfulness.

And in the end there will be a tree of life,

with fruit borne twelve months a year,

and with leaves that will be for the healing of the nations.

In the end it is all about fruitfulness.

From beginning to end, it has always been about fruitfulness.

Fruitfulness is what this story is all about.

Be fruitful and multiply.

I will make of you a great nation that will bear much fruit.

Obey my word and you will be fruitful in all your ways.

You shall share the fruit of your labours,

and the poor will glean from your fields.

Israel is a vineyard and the covenant God is the vinedresser.

In exile you are to be fruitful and multiply.

I will make the wilderness bloom and bear rich fruit.

They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
and they shall plant gardens and eat their fruit.

This is Israel's story,
the story of fruitfulness in covenant,
the story of a fruit-bearing creation,
the story of a fruitful community of justice
and yet ...
a story of fruitlessness when covenant is broken,
a story of bitter fruit when paths of idolatry are followed,
a story of injustice and oppression when fruitfulness is hoarded.

So Jesus comes and tells stories of fruitfulness.
There was this sower and he sowed his seed ...
The Kingdom of God is like the smallest seed ...
A man planted a vineyard ...
I am the vine, you are the branches ...
You will know them by their fruit ...

Fruitfulness,
it's always been about fruitfulness,
the proof of the pudding has always been in the eating,
the truth of the gospel has always been in the fruit it bears

The body of the risen One,
the image of the invisible God,
the risen steward of the new creation,
brings forth fruit,
rich fruit,
life-giving fruit,
the fruit of justice,
the fruit of restoration.

And he is embodied in the church,
when the church bears the fruit of the Spirit,
rich fruit,
life-giving fruit,
the fruit of justice,
the fruit of restoration,
in every dimension of life.

The fruit of the Spirit is love ...
30,000 children die daily from starvation.

The fruit of the Spirit is joy ...
38 million are dying from AIDS.

The fruit of the Spirit is peace ...
 untold thousands are dead in Iraq, Afghanistan, Darfur.

The fruit of the Spirit is patience ...
 71,000 households are on the waiting list
 for subsidized housing in Toronto.

The fruit of the Spirit is kindness ...
 50 million Americans have no health insurance.

The fruit of the Spirit is generosity ...
 every year more than 13 billion dollars is used
 to service foreign debt in Africa.

The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness ...
 1.2 billion in the world do not have access to safe drinking water.

The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness ...
 a single mom working full time in Ontario at minimum wage
 takes home \$16,640 a year.

The fruit of the Spirit is self-control ...
 and we live in an addictive, consumerist culture
 which keeps us in an insatiable orgy consuming products,
 services, and images, 24/7.

Ye will know them, by their fruit, Jesus says.

So today some 200 folks rode into this park on their bicycles.
 Over 200 people riding sea to sea to raise awareness about poverty,
 to raise money for its alleviation,
 and to bear witness that another world is possible.
 more than 200 cyclists for justice.
 more than 200 cyclists for Jesus.
 more than 200 folks with sore backs, tired calves, sun burnt faces
 and aching bums
 on a campaign to end poverty.

Like Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem,
 like Jesus who abandons the chariot and the war horse
 for the foal of a donkey,
 these campaigners do not arrive in their Hummers,
 these campaigners do not wage war on poverty
 from their armoured vehicles,
 no, they ride their bikes.

Solar powered machines for justice.
 Solar powered vehicles on a mission.
 Solar powered bikes for the Kingdom of God.

I don't know,
 but maybe the fruit of the Spirit
 has a better chance at cultivation
 on a bicycle seat than in a
 fossil fuel consuming,
 carbon producing,
 polluting,
 too fast,
 too easy,
 too autonomous
 automobile.

Fruitfulness needs cultivation.
 Perhaps bicycles are better tools for cultivating the fruit of the Spirit,
 then are automobiles.

Paul brings this whole story of fruitfulness into sharp focus
 when he writes about the fruit of the Spirit.

That Spirit that hovered over the waters in the beginning,
 that Spirit who led the children of Israel from the fruitlessness
 of the empire through the wastelands of the desert
 to a land rich in fruit,
 that Spirit who breathed through the writing of the Scriptures,
 that Spirit who would lead the exiles home,
 that Spirit who inspired the prophets with visions of fruitfulness,
 that Spirit who rests upon the One who proclaims
 the Jubilee of renewed fruitfulness in Israel,
 that Spirit who falls upon the disciples at Pentecost
 to lead the young church in paths of fruitfulness
 that Spirit, says Paul, bears rich fruit in our lives.

And that fruit is named:

love
 joy
 peace
 patience
 kindness
 generosity
 faithfulness
 gentleness

self-control

Bear that fruit, says Paul,
 receive the gift of such fruitfulness from the very Spirit of God,
 and cultivate the growth of such fruit in your lives,
 then you will be known by your fruit,
 then the world will know who you follow,
 then the world will know that another world is possible,
 because there is another Lord,
 a fruitbearing Lord,
 embodied in a church of fruitfulness.

Our friends are riding to end poverty.
 And we are here to support their ride,
 we are here to add our voice, our lives, our dollars
 to this audacious vision.

But we must become the change we long to see in the world.
 Did you hear that?
 We must become the change we long to see in the world.

And to do that we must meditate daily on the fruit of the Spirit,
 and pray that this fruit is borne in our lives.

We must seek to cultivate our lives in such a way
 that the Spirit can grow such fruit in us.
 If we are to enter into this story of fruitfulness,
 if we are to be known by our fruit,
 if we are to pledge our allegiance to the Kingdom of God,
 then our lives must manifest such fruit,
 this fruit of the Spirit must shape our character,
 these must be the virtues that direct our paths,
 this fruit must become second nature to us,
 simply the most natural way in which we engage the world.

And make no mistake, my friends,
 these virtues, this fruit of the Spirit,
 cannot be limited to personal morality,
 cannot be relegated to our private lives!

No! These are public virtues,
 the fruit of the Spirit is the fruit by which we will be known,
 and so the fruit of the Spirit means nothing if our political,
 economic, agricultural, ecological, cultural and social lives
 are not shaped by the likes of
 love
 joy

peace
 patience
 kindness
 generosity
 faithfulness
 gentleness
 self-control

Reduce the fruit of the Spirit to personal piety
 and private virtue,
 and the fruit of the Spirit will be co-opted
 by the forces of oppression,
 you will be comfortable in a world of poverty and injustice,
 and the Spirit will be grieved.

The fruit of the Spirit is love,
 sacrificial love in a world of market exchange,
 a free gift in a world where everything has its price,
 a suffering love that cannot and will not
 allow injustice to have the final word.

The fruit of the Spirit is joy,
 a deep joy in a world where our desires are manufactured
 by the ad companies,
 a contented joy in a world of insatiable consumption,
 a joy that must meet the world's sorrow if it is not to be reduced
 to a cheap happiness.

The fruit of the Spirit is peace,
 an all-embracing shalom in a world bleeding from its wars,
 a peace rooted in justice in the face of the war on the poor,
 a covenant of peace in a creation groaning in travail.

The fruit of the Spirit is patience,
 a quiet, non-anxious patience because we know who saves this world,
 patience in a sped-up culture of quick fixes and immediate gratification,
 a patience that is committed to justice for the long haul.

The fruit of the Spirit is kindness,
 a deep disposition of care in a world of harshness and indifference,
 an economics of kindness in the face of trade agreements
 that systemically keep the poor in their poverty,
 an open kindness that refuses a lifestyle of aggressive mastery.

The fruit of the Spirit is generosity,
 an economics of enough in the face of unspeakable affluence,

a generosity that insists that the fruitfulness of creation
 is to be shared equitably by all,
 a generosity that says if we are to make poverty history,
 then perhaps we will have to make affluence history first.

The fruit of the Spirit is faithfulness,
 a faithfulness to our God that is more concerned with obedience
 than effectiveness and results,
 a faithfulness that will not break faith with our most impoverished
 brothers and sisters,
 a faithfulness that refuses to be slaves of the empire
 because we are subjects of the Kingdom.

The fruit of the Spirit is self-control,
 a self-control that can say "no" to our own pleasures for the sake
 of justice,
 a self-control that can secede from an affluent consumerist society,
 a self-control that can break our addiction to "more"

This is the fruit of the Spirit, my friends,
 this is who are, if we are filled with the Spirit,
 this is where this story of fruitfulness becomes manifest in our lives.

And there is no law against such things, writes Paul.

There is no law against
 love
 joy
 peace
 patience
 kindness
 generosity
 faithfulness
 gentleness
 self-control

But if our lives are shaped by these fruit of the Spirit,
 then we will face social disapproval,
 we will face defensiveness in our churches,
 in our families and in our communities,
 and we will find ourselves at odds with
 the principalities and powers that rule our world.

But if we live by the Spirit,
 if the fruit of the Spirit is cultivated in our lives,
 then we will walk by the Spirit.
 Refusing the idolatrous direction of the spirits of this age,

we will submit our lives to the leading of the Spirit of God.
 And this Spirit will lead us in paths of justice,
 this Spirit will lead to embody his fruit in every thing we do,
 this Spirit will make us into a community of
 love
 joy
 peace
 patience
 kindness
 generosity
 faithfulness
 gentleness
 self-control

Sisters and brothers on the Sea to Sea ride this summer,
 ride on, ride on in majesty.
 Ride on bearing the banner of the King.
 Ride on with the energy of the Holy Spirit.
 Ride on and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in your tour community.
 Ride on and bear witness to a different world,
 in which,
 love
 joy
 peace
 patience
 kindness
 generosity
 faithfulness
 gentleness
 self-control
 shapes our lives.

Ride on for justice,
 and ride on, knowing that each push of the peddle,
 each hill climbed,
 each town passed,
 in its own way,
 brings us closer to our calling of a world in which justice rules,
 where none are left out,
 where the poor hear good news,
 the captives are set free,
 and the world becomes that delightful place of fruitfulness
 that it was created to be.

Ride on, brothers and sisters, ride on.