

Fruit of the Spirit: Faithfulness

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Osler Mennonite Church

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Luke 16: 1-13; Romans 8: 24-27

Good morning,

Today's fruit of the spirit, faithfulness, stood out to me differently from the other fruits, in that it, by its nature, asks for continued renewal. This invitation by Jesus to live faithful lives requires trust and loyalty. Trust in that which we cannot see, and loyalty to something that many of us still struggle to understand. But, many of us might recognize the call of faithfulness as Jesus' call to discipleship. We are invited to take the risk to follow Christ and carry with us the virtues of joy, love, and peace (other fruits of the spirit) through all we do. There is much to question as we consider faithfulness – what does it mean to *keep* the faith? Is faithfulness kept between a disciple and God? Or is this faithfulness kept through our surrounding community? The answer would probably be a mix of both. Faithfulness is the journey of practicing discipleship, and with that living lives of service. In all the ways that that might be difficult, confusing, we have chosen to live a life of love and justice.

When I was in high school at Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) in Gretna, Manitoba I took a number of classes with a teacher named Tim Wiebe, who taught English and Mennonite Studies. Tim passed away back in March, after a tragic year-long battle with cancer, and though I knew it as a student, at his funeral it was once again apparent to me that Tim was something of a Mennonite celebrity in Southern Manitoba. In addition to being a teacher at MCI, Tim was

known for his theological devotions on Golden West Radio. Tim had probably recorded hundreds of devotions for Golden West that would air around 8:00am each weekday morning. These devotions were diverse – they would range from describing his experience buying a new thrifty mug at the MCC store, to discussions on the importance of interfaith dialogue. Whatever they were about, they were encouragements to all of us to live life with a bit more faith.

Tim would usually test ideas for devotions with our class before he would broadcast them, in part because he liked to test his new ideas in class, but also because he cared about our opinions. Tim would often reflect on how the curious minds of 15, 16, and 17-year olds would sometimes reach some of the more profound theological reflections he had heard. Tim knew that God was showing him miracles every day in his regular routine life, and he didn't need to look far to find them. Tim taught us a word that he used to describe his journey of faith: a posture of *Gelassenheit*. Loosely translated from German, *Gelassenheit* refers to a "yeildedness to the Holy Spirit."

Tim would often jokingly ask his students, ever so casually in the hall: "have you practiced *Gelassenheit* today?" And while this question was typically met with laughter because I heard the question so much, it strikes me today as one of the most important questions to ask ourselves as we consider our journey of faithfulness. *Gelassenheit*, a yeildedness to the Spirit, implies a posture of humility, and the text from **Romans 8** that was read this morning speaks exactly to the significance of that humility as we consider faithfulness: **25 And hoping for what we cannot see means awaiting it with patient endurance.** Hope, as an act of faith, requires us to wait and prepare ourselves for the mystery of Christ to be revealed to us. As hard for us as busy people, posturing ourselves in a state of yeildedness to the Holy Spirit to move and

transform our lives puts us in a place of vulnerability, which, as Tim practiced, would sometimes reveal the small miracles of the mundane and routine. I really liked the phrase “patient endurance” in this verse because it asks us to *wait*. Faithfulness is not exactly a means to an end in the same way that we work towards being happy or work towards peace. It is an exact description of the process of faith. A description of this model of yieldedness to the Spirit is read as we continue in Romans 8: **26 The Spirit, too, comes to help us in our weakness. For we don’t know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit expresses our plea with groanings too deep for words.”** Practicing *Gelassenheit* invites the spirit to guide us, and it is when we are in that space of humility and vulnerability, we are guided to live out the virtues of joy, love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. We don’t always know what these virtues look like, and as people of faith, we are invited to pray and consider how we might live those virtues out. I also appreciate this verse, because in it we see the presence of the Spirit also putting faith in us. The spirit sits with us in our confusion on this crazy walk of faith.

In Anabaptist circles, **Gelassenheit** is often used in reference to the Amish community. The Amish, who practice simple living and non-conformity, adopt this posture of yieldedness where they are not distracted by “worldly” thing. The Amish received public attention in 2006 when the news of a school shooting at Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, hit the stands. The response from the Amish community was forgiveness to the shooter and his family. It was a decision made by the Amish that was received both admiration and criticism.

Today, we read in the Gospel of Luke the story of the dishonest steward. And I will come back to the Amish. The story itself sounds quite contemporary: a dishonest steward is about to lose their job because they have misspent their employer’s assets. Because the steward doesn’t

want to do manual labor or receive charity, they find all the people who owe the landowner money and the steward reduces their debts. The steward does this so that they will be hospitable to them after they lose their job. To our surprise, the employer commends the dishonest steward for being “enterprising.”

Why is the dishonest steward commended? And, why does Luke include this story in his Gospel? This story is often used as an example of what *not* to do, as an example of faithfulness. To begin to answer these questions, we can note that this parable serves as a bridge between the stories of the Prodigal Son (15:11-32) and the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31). Like the prodigal in the preceding story, our dishonest steward has “squandered” what was entrusted to them (15:13; 16:1). And, like the story that follows, this parable begins with the phrase, “There was a wealthy person” (16:1, 19). Although our dishonest steward does not repent (like the prodigal) or act virtuously (like Lazarus), they nonetheless do something with the wealthy landlord’s riches that reverses the existing order of things. Lois Malcom, theologian at Luther Seminary in St. Paul’s, observes that in the stories told in the Gospel of Luke, “reversals of status are at the heart of what happens when Jesus and the kingdom of God appear. The proud are scattered, the powerful are brought down and the lowly lifted; the hungry are filled and the rich are sent away empty.” Luke’s depiction of Jesus’ ministry, and that of his followers, is dependent on the hospitality of others. More specifically, hospitality is often provided by those who are considered religious outsiders or lower down on social hierarchies.

Hospitality to others is a virtue of faithfulness. Like the Amish, this yieldedness can lead us to places and meet with people who may not have expected. The Amish, consider to be

societal outsiders, offered the most profound and holy gift to someone who committed an act of evil. Sitting with a posture of yieldedness, the Amish chose grace.

In the Luke text, Jesus already tells his disciples that he knows they will fail. They will slip up on their journey of discipleship because they are human. Jesus knows what he has asked of his disciples is hard, which is why faithfulness is a continued renewal of asking for grace so that we might extend that grace as a service to others. Jesus' entire ministry was about trust. The radical call to live lives of joy, love, peace, hospitality, etc. is because we have been trusted to do so. Posturing ourselves to be inspired by the divine, moved by the spirit, and asking ourselves the question, "Have you practiced *Gelassenheit* today?" This question can also be a call to more self-care, which Nora reminded us about last week when she explored inner-peace. Taking time in our day to ask ourselves where we see the miracles of the divine, whether it is listening to our favourite radio program, buying a thrifty mug at MCC, or telling your students that they matter, is an expression of faithfulness. With this posture we are allowing the spirit to move within us and can be a daily reminder for ourselves to slow down.

I have asked that we sing "I will come to you in the silence" as our closing song because it is exactly the reminder that Christ has faith in us to do what we have been invited to: "You will hear my voice, I claim you as my choice, be still and know that I am here." As we sing this song, I invite you to take on a posture of *Gelassenheit* and allow the spirit to move you.

Amen.