

Aldersgate UMC of Butte, MT www.aldersgatebutte.org

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Message

Bearing Fruit

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Question to ponder:

What is it that needs pruning in my life in order to bear more fruit?

One of the images that comes to mind when reading scripture around the subject of bearing fruit is the verse from Galatians 5:22, 23: *“The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness (generosity), faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”* This is no doubt a litmus test for how we are doing in our spiritual lives. However, if we are honest, there are times when it is difficult, if not impossible to bear fruit as illustrated here:



There is the bearing of fruit, but abundant and healthy fruit does not come forth without pruning. Pruning is necessary in order for the fruit to flourish.

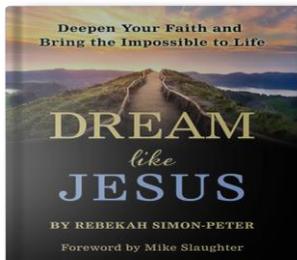
Churches by and large must be strong in both comfort ministries as well as challenge ministries to thrive. You may or may not remember, but Comfort ministries are those ministries in the church which provide *comfort* to those who are hurting. Challenge ministries are those that go beyond comfort and

challenge not only the church but the larger community in making this world a better place to live.

For example, it is one thing to comfort those who are the victims of prejudice of one form or another, but it is quite another to fight the causes of such prejudice. And sometimes there are consequences for standing up for truth and for justice. Anyone who has stood up against the status quo on fighting a prejudice of one kind or another may have had threats or insults or maybe even rotten tomatoes thrown at them. Individuals standing up for justice have had not only threats, but have also been the victims of harassment and even violence.

Churches have also been the victims of vandalism and violence when they have stood up against the status quo as they did during the 60's when speaking out against the VietNam war as well as standing up for civil rights.

Churches are dying because their focus is on survival. Instead of the churches focusing on surviving, they must focus on thriving. *“What the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve.”* This is where we dare to dream like Jesus in being who we are called to be and to do what we are called to do.



Any church that dares to dream like Jesus will grow in new and profound ways both spiritually and numerically. As the subtitle reads in this book: *“Deepen Your Faith and Bring the Impossible to Life”*.

I confess that at times during my ministry, I have had too little faith in dreaming like Jesus.

So as I got to thinking about what it is that needs pruning in my life in order to bear much fruit, it is unbelief. Furthermore, not only do I need to prune this unbelief from my being, I need to prune discouragement. Not only do I need to prune discouragement from my being, I need to prune a sense of hopelessness about what is going on in our world today. It is far too easy to lose hope when we hear of all that is going on in our world and for today, I will spare you even naming all the things that are so deeply troubling in these times. If you have been listening or watching the news you know exactly what I am talking about. In fact, for some, you may need to prune too much bad news in your life. This isn't to say that we should not listen to the news, because we do. However, like a diet, everything in moderation!

Remember the quote:

What you think, you look.
What you think, you do.
And what you think, you are.

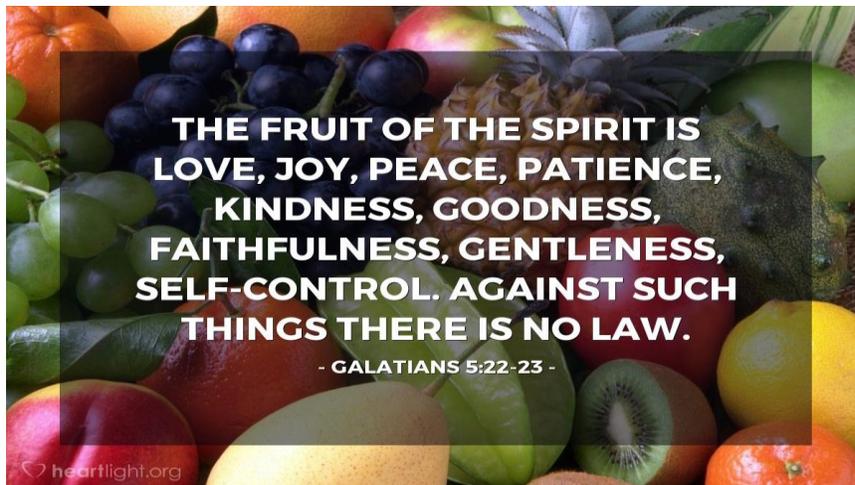
So be careful how much of the bad news you take in. As a people of faith, we need to bring hope and good news to those around us. **Are we bearers of good news or bad news?**

Another thing that may need pruning in our lives may be taking in *mis-information* or *false information*. If we seek the truth in all things and in all people then we need to be as objective as possible when listening to news sources, as well as to those individuals or organizations that are spreading lies and conspiracy theories. Hear these words from Matthew 7:15-20:
(Slide # 4 coming on next page)

15 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? 17 In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not

bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus you will know them by their fruits. Matthew 7:15-20

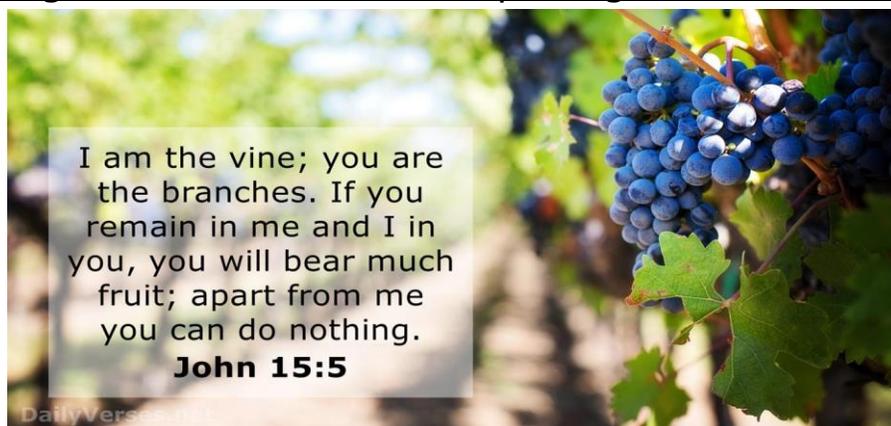
Question is are we growing in the fruits of the Spirit or not? As I have said before, if you are curious about whether or not you are growing in the fruits of the Spirit, ask a loved one?



Ask them if you are growing in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,(generosity) faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Another word for goodness is generosity which we will discuss more at a later date.

Our opening slide summarized this passage with this verse:



In Mid-Week Reflections someone pointed out that the fruit that comes forth comes forth in its own time. Furthermore, we do not produce it. Just as the branch abides in the vine, the fruit emerges because of being connected to the vine. So this begs the question: are we truly connected to the vine? And if we are, what needs to be pruned for the fruit to grow freely? There are a ton of things that may need pruning from our lives such as anger, fear, sadness, grief, and unkindness. Or it may be in the way of too much of something; food; alcohol; TV; video games and maybe our phones. This brings up an interesting question about whether or not we are hostage to our phones. Are we addicted to our phones? There are all kinds of things that may need pruning in our lives in order to bear more fruit.

One of the most powerful images for me is not just an image. It is a living reality of the power of this biblical story. Because of this story of Mary & Martha, I have deepened my experience of what it means to abide in Yeshua.



Abiding in Yeshua involves at least two things. First is the need to be like Mary who sits at the feet of Jesus and to meditate on the teachings of Yeshua. When meditating on these teachings such as the Golden Rule, "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,*" it changes the way in which you live and move and have your being. When meditating on the Golden Rule, one comes to realize that in the little things and the big things, we are

asking the question, **“What Would Jesus Do?”** Said in another way, **“What would love do now?”**

Then, once we spend time at the feet of Jesus meditating on teachings like these, we are empowered to be Martha in service to others. It is not one or the other. It is both. At times we need to be a *“Mary”*. And at times we need to be a *“Martha.”*

This past year has been hard on loved ones. This past year has been hard on us. I confess that this past year for more reasons than one, I have struggled. This past year has taken a toll on many of us but if we are truly abiding in Christ, we will be a living sanctuary for God.

*Lord prepare me to be a sanctuary
Pure and holy, tried and true,
With thanksgiving, I’ll be a living sanctuary for you.*

Let us prepare for the Sacrament of Holy Communion with this song entitled, “Sanctuary”

Hymn of Preparation # 2164 Sanctuary
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxB9VH3cCN4>

Or google: Youtube Sanctuary and a song will pop up

Holy Communion

*United Methodists practice “open communion”
where everyone is welcome to receive. Everyone!*