

Sunday 28th April – W4E

Galatians 5:22-25

Luke 15:1-11

PART 1

Fruit trees – different fruits – guess the tree

Can only get strawberries from a strawberry plant etc

The experience of moving to a new house and discovering what is in the garden

My experience with a gooseberry bush

Fruit is produced by the tree or bush to ensure that the species continues

Seed within the fruit

Birds or other animals eat the sweet fruit, and the seeds are dropped to the ground where some will take root and grow – hence a new tree

In the Bible the things we do – the way we behave; our character if you like is sometimes described a fruit. That's what the reading that Elliot just read is all about

The fruit of our lives. What our living produces

And it spreads and grows

We see someone else behaving in a good (or a bad) way and we often copy them
Good and bad behaviour

Smiling is contagious

But so is grumpiness!

Treating people kindly is contagious

Treating others badly also is (road rage)

SO people look at the fruit of our lives and copy

If the fruit of our lives is good ..

But if its bad ..

In the reading from a letter Paul wrote, Paul talks of these 9 things, attributes, types of character – and says they are fruits of the Holy Spirit

In other words if God is in us, we produce Godly fruit
We are like a God or Holy Spirit tree!

And others will begin to act like us and the world will be a better place

PART 2

From John 15

We have an apple tree in our garden (it really is an apple tree)

Every year it produces an apple. Just one. Actually that's not strictly true. One year while we have been here it produced none at all; and another it excelled itself by producing 5.

But its not a well tree. It is far from healthy

And the fruit it does produce - not only not plentiful; but also the few that are produced are not very good.

If we continue the analogy of our lives, and the things we do and say; our characters etc ; sometimes (perhaps more than sometimes) it's a bit like that

We want to be patient – but we find it impossible – we cant tolerate waiting at the traffic lights; or the queue in Sainsburys

We want to show love; but cant bring ourselves to do it. We get angry; short tempered; flair up at the slightest provocation

We want to be joyful; but again we find ourselves concentrating on the bad news and end up always looking on the bad side; to being the pessimist rather than the optimist. A glass half empty person

We want to exercise self control, - but we are tempted far too often. That bad habit we have tried for years to overcome once again gets the better of us. Its the start of a downward spiral.

And yet we are still part of the church; we still believe and we hope trust in God. But the spark has gone. We don't seem to be able to pray or find time to pray; reading the Bible seems too hard; perhaps we still come to church but find it hard to really worship God

Think about a fruit tree or a bush

In June or July as the fruit begins to grow

If we had an apple tree with lots of fruit growing and cut one branch from the tree – what would happen

It would still be an apple branch; the leaves would still be apple leaves; the fruit would still be apples

But as time goes on the leaves would begin to wither; the fruit will get no bigger, and will eventually shrivel up and drop off from the branch; and the branch itself will slowly die as the sap from the tree can no longer give it life.

And maybe our lives feel like that sometime

We struggle to live how we would like - The fruit we want to see doesn't come or doesn't grow

We feel there's no point to anything - Things begin to dry up & wither

Something missing - We have lost contact with the source of life.

In our Gospel reading Jesus uses similar language. He talks of the vine. And he talks of a vine because vines were the common trees. In our culture it may well have been an apple tree or a blackcurrant bush

"I am the vine; you are the branches"

To produce fruit; to be alive, we as branches need to be connected to the vine. To have the sap of life flowing through us. To be in a relationship with Jesus, with God. Spending time with him

we might call this prayer.

Because prayer is not just asking God for things. It's about resting in his presence. It's about enjoying spending time with him – praising, thanking, reading and studying

and simply being. It's about our faith being not just for Sundays at church but being for the whole of our lives; for all that we do and all that we are. Faith is about our Monday mornings and Thursday afternoons – our time with our families and at our work and our leisure - being as much part of our worship and prayer life as our Sundays.

But the key times are times we spend intentionally with God in prayer.

The thought of spending time in prayer might seem like a bit of a hard task. But spending time with someone we love is never a burden – it's a joy. Think about the time you spend with those who are closest to you – your best friends if you like. Spending time with them is an essential part of keeping that relationship alive and fresh. It's something we want to do. And it's the same with our relationship with God.

So how can we do this?

The prayer book we produced last year,, worship on Sundays; Bible reading – daily or study groups

In a couple of weeks we have what we are calling Pathways to Prayer
A chance to try out different ways of praying
Different ways of spending time with God

In church guided on Sat 11th; resources in church all week

Meditation
Walking
Doing
Moving
Drawing
Making
Etc etc

Each of us is different and different things will help

This development of our relationship with God, our friendship with God, is not to just to benefit ourselves. It helps us to bear fruit – fruit that will last. Fruit that others will notice and fruit that will bring others to God