

Happy Pentecost Sunday, happy Pride Month, and happy day to us all here at UMC, as we continue to journey through the Fruits of the Spirit.

Pentecost fits so nicely with this theme - that moment when God's Spirit descended on the followers of Jesus, allowing them to miraculously speak beyond the barriers of language and culture. It was a time of amazement, and we get this lovely honest bit of scripture when those gathered blurt out, "How can this be? Are these Jesus people drunk?" But it isn't intoxication, it is the Spirit, changing expectations, and pushing beyond what was humanly possible.

But let's turn again to our fruits. It was actually artificially colored candy that brought me to a deeper understanding of the Fruit of the Spirit. (SLIDE) A giant bucket of assorted sweets, in fact. Jolly Ranchers, lemon drops, smarties, you name it. Somewhere in my elementary school days, my parents decided to take me along with them to a large revival weekend retreat. All of the children in attendance who were about my age were relegated to a large room where we were introduced to our hosts. A cheery, well meaning middle-aged couple wearing tacky kid friendly clothes. You know – rainbow suspenders, and brightly colored hats. That sort of thing.

While most of our time was spent singing songs, playing games, and watching Christian kids vhs videos like Magee and Me or SuperBook, every once in a while we would take a few minutes to memorize a specific portion of scripture – Galatians 5:22 and 23 - a list of the Fruits of the Spirit.

This was helpful for me as a youngster with lots of questions - longing for certainty rather than faith. Here was a list of the specific characteristics of this elusive third part in the trinity. If I wanted to know what the Holy Spirit looked like, these nine things would point me in the right direction.

The adults explained how the memorization was going to take place by making a deal with this room full of kids. Come up front and say the first fruit out loud, and presto, you get a piece of candy. So on session one, if you were brave enough to go to the front of the room and speak out loud, "the fruit of the spirit is love!" Bam. Candy obtained.

Of course, each memory verse time got progressively tougher. The fruit of the spirit is love, joy. Candy please!

By the third time we got to our memory verse, I started to sweat a little bit. But there was candy on the line, and so my mind was sharp. I was running these words through my head like a student cramming for a test they haven't really studied for. Love, joy, peace. Candy. Ironically, this task required a few of these fruits - kindness, gentleness, and especially patience. At each gathering they would wait for the next nervous kid to navigate as far as they could make it.

By the end of the weekend, I could – and still can – run through all nine fruits of the spirit. Of all the verses in the Bible, this is one of the few that I have truly and deeply memorized, deep in my soul, bound there perhaps, by high fructose corn syrup.

But as time goes on, I continue to think about what else it might have shaped in me. It was certainly true that those words had a lasting impact. In seminary when given the chance to preach to the class on a random scripture text of my own choosing, I chose this one - going as far as to share a personal anecdote about a moment in my life where I felt each of those spiritual fruits were shared with me by another human being.

The apostle Paul, for whom the letter to the Galatians is often attributed, sometimes gets hung up on the disconnect between our earthly bodies, and the experience of the Holy Spirit. For Paul, it sometimes seems like he doesn't see humanity as being terribly capable of anything worthy, unless they are first filled with God's spirit. But as Paula and Jon reminded the kids during last Sunday's Children's time, that not only can we taste the spirit in a slice of apple, we are all filled, whether we realize it or not, with God's Spirit too.

Last Sunday's service made me ponder again which of these nine traits of the Spirit felt the most present or lacking in my own life. At first I thought of self-control... (SLIDE) My family knows I have a hard time going to the grocery store and not putting at least one carton of ice cream in with the rest of the groceries - especially if it is on sale. I have a tendency to go back for a second trip through the potluck line, or even third if I'm really enjoying myself. And beyond food, those who know me well know that if I pick up a hobby, I have a tendency to go all-in. My enthusiasm sometimes wins out over my own self-control.

But then I thought about patience. (SLIDE) Pomegranate?

For me, it's not so much patience waiting for a bus, or for friends to arrive, but the patience to see long term journeys come to fruition. I sometimes want to jump ahead in the timeline to find out how the book series or how my new favorite show ends, or skip ahead to figure out what kind of job or vocation I might be navigating in the next five to ten years. Meredith and I are a little beyond the parenting that Nathan mentioned last week, navigating a toddler changing their mind over which color of shorts to wear, but I still have to remind myself to have patience with whatever stage of life or new endeavor Anika, Alethia, and Jonas are navigating at any given moment. I want to know now if the Toronto Blue Jays will ever win another World Series, or if our dual-citizen children will choose to spend their adult lives in the USA, Canada, or some other part of the world.

I also struggle with patience when things don't go the way I expected - when an unexpected tension arises, or an expected outcome changes from what I assumed. Political polling *really* tests my patience.

But perhaps more than any of that, I struggle to find patience to wait for a more just and peaceful planet earth. (SLIDE) I want to know now if we'll ever really address climate change. I wonder how humans might better address our systemic racism, sexism, nationalism, militarism, and all the other toxic isms and inequalities that divide us each and every day. I want to know

how it will all unfold, and my patience is in short supply - I want a better future to get here sooner.

One of the young adults I worked with many years ago during my youth pastor days posted this week that he was tired of all the Pride month rainbows and celebrations. "Aren't we done with that work now?" he said. Well perhaps in some spaces, I pointed out to him, however my years in campus ministry, and even beyond that, have reminded me that in many spaces - especially faith spaces - LGBTQ folks still have a long way to go to feel as fully included and embraced in our world as their cisgender peers.

Even in our progressive college town, (SLIDE) our spiritual siblings over at Faith UCC discovered that their new banner had been vandalized this week when someone tried to light it on fire.

Those of us at yesterday's parade downtown probably noticed, amid all the joy and celebration, that there were still folks there to protest the mere existence of LGBT people in our world. It also dawned on me that if those who choose to condemn our LGBT siblings would simply look for Fruits of the Spirit as a marker, they would find these qualities in bunches. While certainly not perfect, LGBT spaces generally understand the need to work for more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in our world. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

This kind of impatience to want the world to be better - not just soon, but right now - can be crippling. And it's in that space that I realize that there has to be something just a little spiritual in the moments where I *do* find a little patience. Hal Kunkel, in our worship planning meeting this week, shared that in pivotal moments in his life, he needs to pause. And it is in that pause before moving forward that he begins to feel the Spirit's nudging. He said he had to pause first, but it was the Spirit that allowed him to move forward from that pause.

I found that to be so powerful and beneficial, and perhaps pausing enough to consider what Hal had offered us allowed me to remember something else. There is a practice in monasticism that Pastor Kate has referenced before called *statio*, which simply means, "the holy pause." (SLIDE) This Latin term could also be translated as, "I stand" or "I remain." The idea is to be intentional about our transitions during the day. Whether you are putting down your phone to check the weather outside, finishing the dishes to watch a movie, or leaving work to head for home, *statio* reminds us to be intentional about creating a little gap between activities, just long enough to not mindlessly, or frantically, roll into the next thing.

I'm not always sure of what to make of the miraculous stories of Pentecost, but in the midst of the grief and loss for those disciples, a rushing wind and tongues of fire would have certainly created a pause - an opportunity to consider what comes next before rolling into the next thing.

And it makes me think again to what that candy did to that impressionable child, all those many years ago. We were not being asked to memorize the full verse, but to take a stab at that first

word. The fruit of the spirit is love. Candy yes, but also a pause. Time to consider what came next. Time that required patience. And perhaps, a moment to allow the Spirit to guide our next steps.

In these anxious times, I wonder how we might incorporate a little more statio in our own lives? How might we remind ourselves and each other that sometimes there is spirit in our pauses?

As we continue through these anxious times, and as we continue to ponder the Fruit of the Spirit, I encourage us to share with each other. Which of those fruits are ones that come naturally, and which are those that take a bit more time to cultivate? And perhaps more importantly, how do you slow down enough to feel, hear, or even see the Spirit's movement as you move about the world?

May we be blessed with moments to pause, as we consider love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.

Friends, may it be so. Amen.