

Today we consider a second word from the Fruits of the Spirit which Paul lists in Galatians chapter 5. That word is Faithfulness. Now in our world, faithfulness is not seen as often as it once was. Our world has undergone a change in emphasis about faithfulness. I feel this is a result demonstrated best when looking at attitudes seen from employment situations, both from the employer and employee perspectives. Workplaces have moved from communal orientation to an individual emphasis where one looks at any situation the question for employee is: "What is best for me?" And the question for the company is what is best for the company?

Gone are the days when faithfulness was celebrated with a gold watch presented to a retiring employee for their long period of service and faithfulness. Now employer-employee relationships are such that a lifetime of service in one company is about as common as a handwritten business ledger.

Such a change has thus pushed the concept of faithfulness to the background, such that people may not understand what faithfulness and commitment mean. Oh, there are examples of faithfulness we observe in our world, but they are usually more short term. Perhaps our problem is that we don't look in the right place or maybe we don't think enough about the One who is truly faithful: God.

Every morning we see the faithfulness of God. We breathe air filled with rich oxygen which we cannot see unless the air is so cold that when we breathe it out, we see it. We too see the sun come up at its appointed time. We go to the table to eat, and find food that provides nourishment and strength for each day. All these come because a faithful God has ordered our world.

When we consider faithfulness, our starting point is the knowledge that with God there is no false advertising, no broken contracts, no deceptive business practices. God is utterly faithful. In our text for today on this subject, we have a reading from Lamentations.

The book of Lamentations is not a happy book. It is written by Jeremiah the prophet and he is moaning about how so much of his life does not go well. He laments about life with all its problems. Not only does he have problems, but his people suffer because of their unfaithfulness. In the midst of depression, sin, and sorrow, Jeremiah talks about one ray of hope that surrounds him. He lifts it up to the people. He says in verse 22, "Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail."

God willingly responds with help when we ask. Perhaps there is some sin in your life that you thought God would not forgive. God's steadfast love and mercy are greater than any sin. God promises forgiveness. Jeremiah knew from personal experience about God's faithfulness. God tells Jeremiah and the people, disobedience can bring punishment and it often did. But God also promised future blessing and restoration for those who remain faithful.

That too occurs.

So the person who acknowledges God and walks with God, experiences new mercies daily. Thus when we understand God as faithful, we can know too that God calls on us to be faithful in our relationships as well.

Faithfulness is something that people can appreciate and be blessed by. We need to understand though, that sometimes faithful living will mean serving where God calls us. An example is seen in the story told by Morgan Barkow who used to take his neighbor every Friday to McDonald's for coffee and a snack. Now McDonald's is not exactly a glamorous place, but for Morgan's neighbor who is primarily a shut-in gentleman as he could hardly see, these Friday trips were the great joy of the week. Morgan was faithful and if a week came when he could not go, he always called and made arrangements for another time.

That small gesture of faithfulness may not seem like much, but its impact was great from the neighbor. It is an inspiring story about living where God calls us. Sometimes when we serve God, we need to do so in faith that our action will be appreciated and valued.

Now do not be confused here about faithfulness. It could seem like commitment is the primary factor. However, the element of faith also is very important in understanding faithfulness. It is critical that we understand the role of placing our faith in God and living as God directs that makes faithfulness the fruit of the spirit and more than just a commitment. Faithfulness without faith, would be like a checking account without checks. The money is in the bank but how do you get it out without something directing it? One must use a check or other authorizing notation to get the money out.

In similar fashion, without faith, faithfulness lies in a vault, gathering dust. It takes faith to release the blessings God desires for us in life. It takes actions and moving forward on the promises of God to show others that living a full life with God is that important. Faith must be used for the blessings to be released.

A veterinarian, Dr. Earl Pierce, wrote a devotional story that illustrates this very well. He says that a city dweller retired and moved to a small farm as he had always dreamed about. He bought a milk cow for his few acres, yet shortly after he had it, the cow went dry. When the man reported the fact to Dr. Pierce, they both were surprised.

Then the city man explained about the good care the cow received. "I Just can't understand it. For if ever a person was considerate of an animal, I was of that cow. If I didn't need milk on a given day, I wouldn't milk her. If I only needed a quart, I only took a quart." Dr. Pierce writes, 'I laughed to myself then explained how a milk cow works. "The only way to keep milk flowing is not to take as little as possible, but to take as much as possible daily.'"

In that devotional, Dr. Pierce wrote that this is true for the Christian life of faith as well. Those who only turn to God when in need, miss the real joy and heritage that a faithful Christian life gives.

Never underestimate the power of using one's faith. Scripture teaches us that we should, walk by faith and pray in faith. Living and walking by faith is part of the Fruit of the Spirit called faithfulness. We live with faithfulness when we walk with Him daily, trusting God to guide and provide.

Our God is faithful. We have all seen it in our lives from the air we breathe to the food we receive. And we see it every time we come before the Table of the Lord in times of Holy Communion