

"Being Known By Our Fruits"

Final sermon in series on *Fruits of the Spirit*

Matthew 7:13-21

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As we listen to what Matthew has to say about narrow gates and bad fruit, we are struck by the seriousness of his message. A lot is at stake here. Matthew is talking about life and death, both in the here and now, but also for all eternity. Matthew says three things in this passage: the uncommon path leads to life, God will call us to account for the fruits we produced in our life, to follow Jesus means more than just words.

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Today ends a five week series on the *Fruits of the Spirit*. We have looked at **Love, Joy, Peace, and Self-Control**. Today we consider what our fruit says about who we are. Jesus said you can tell who a person is by the fruit they produce.

Today we take a walk through the produce department. How are we doing with our fruit?

I did a little informal survey of all the fruitful things that are happening here at LHPC. There is a lot going on! When you add all the workers up, **it amounts to about 230 workers!** Isn't this incredible! That's the good news. Now for the bad news. This number is not accurate. These statistics lie. Why? Because

there is a hard-core group of you who are involved in multiple ministries. About 50 of you bear the work of 230 workers. No wonder you fifty are tired.

When fifty plants bear fruit for 230 people, this is not sustainable farming! The land needs refreshment; wells need replenishing; soil needs to go fallow.

God's farm needs all believers to be active! All hands on deck! The body of Christ needs all its parts bearing fruit. OK, I can already hear silent grumbling. Why is it that the church always keeps asking for more? Well, for one, it's what Jesus told us to do. It's what Jesus warned us about. Many of us, though, either don't buy in to the long term warnings, or we ignore them. There's always more time tomorrow.

Forget about the long term for right now. There is an immediate, **here-and-now** reason to serve. There is a selfish and private reason each one should serve. We need it. Each one of us NEEDS to act on faith, not because we are commanded to do it, but because it will **grow US and feed US** when we do. It will increase our love, joy, and peace.

Each one of us is hungry for meaning in our lives, every single one of us struggles with being valued, each one of us needs to feel we make a difference, but it is impossible to make a difference if we sit back and do nothing!

We are entering into a new season in the life cycle of LHPC. The leadership of this church (your pastor and Session) ARE UTTERLY CONVINCED God is calling LHPC to focus on our stated mission.

What is our mission statement? Do you know? Can you state our corporate mission, the words this church struggled over and hammered out through prayer and discernment several years ago? *To Go and Make Disciples.*

Like most mainline churches, LHPC has not done so well with MAKING NEW DISCIPLES. We do OK with **recycling old disciples**, but new ones? We are afraid of that five syllable "E" word. We don't like it. We shun it. You know what word I am talking about. Evangelism. But get this. Here's the irony. EVANGELISM---the word itself---MEANS 'GOOD NEWS'. We don't spread the good news! We have not talked about evangelism, we have not valued evangelism, and we have not done much evangelism. LHPC has twelve standing committees, but we do not have an EVANGELISM committee! Guess how much money is specifically allocated in our budget for evangelism? Zero.

We enter a season of opportunity and possibility that is absolutely critical. This time, this season, will not come again. It is a God-given time to embrace

our mission and vision. It is time to be focused, deliberate and intentional. It is time to turn ourselves out into the streets of Lake Highlands, to scatter seeds all over our zip code, to draw some of 8,000 unchurched residents who drive by our church every single day!

Why do we do this? There are two reasons, one Biblical, the other practical. We do this because we are commanded by Christ to do it, because it is central to who we are as Christians. We also do it because we want LHPC to be thriving into the next century! You all did not sweat blood, sweat, tears, and financial hardship to bring this church into existence, to build this new building, in order for LHPC to close up shop. A church must grow to stay alive. It's that simple.

Where do we begin? Learn and incorporate LHPC's mission and vision. Turn to the front of your bulletin. Let's say it together, "Making disciples by reaching out, loving, serving, and inspiring spiritual and personal growth." *Now let's say it again like we really believe it!*

Second, we pray together and seek to discern God's will. Join us as we pray for the will and creativity to reach out, invite, and nurture new believers. Come on **Tuesday afternoons at 2 p.m.** or on **Wednesday mornings at 6:30 a.m.** to pray. If these times do not work for you, get your own group. Meet here at the church at a time that works for you!

Third, support our leaders. They are tired. They need help. God is calling every single one of you to do this. God is not looking at your birthday, or your previous years of service. God doesn't see what you CAN'T do, God sees what you CAN! God calls you to serve NOW. Few of us will be evangelical witnesses, but there is something for every single one of you sitting here today. Together, we will figure out what that is.

Evangelism can be done in many, many ways. You will be hearing more about this later. Fear not. There are lots of behind-the-scenes things which need to be done to support the evangelical process. Something for everyone, even the most timid.

TO BEGIN:

1. Know our mission and vision.
2. Pray for new believers to come.
3. Help our leaders.

You who are not yet **directly involved** in any ongoing ministry, support the very active members. Offer to help! Take on part of the load.

If you have a key to the building, if you are here every week working on something, **you must not increase** your workload! If you are one of the very active leaders of the church, ask for help! Ask someone you don't even know.

Pull out the Communication Card right now. This is for everyone, members, regular attenders, and guests. Make a commitment today to find a place where you may serve. Write down, right now, what you are going to do. If you don't know what to do, say you are willing! Put down a question or an idea. God is calling you, and we will be, too!

If you are a core leader, write down what you need help with. Write down what you need prayers for.

Be bold! This is not about our efforts; this is about responding to God who calls us to reach out to others and to grow. Be outrageous in what you are asking God for. There is not a chance God will bless our efforts if we do not turn to God and ask for what we need.

Turn in this card during the offering time.

There is much at stake. Everything, really. A matter of life and death. A matter of the narrow road, the road that leads to life. A matter of being known by the fruits we **produce**, not just the fruit we **want**. It is a matter of life and death.

In that final hour—when He asks us to describe our fruits, how we shared his message and brought others to belief—we want to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

That's the long term view. There's also the immediate. Right now we can choose to continue on the easy road, the road everybody else is on, or we can jump over to that narrow road of life---life the way God intended it to be: joyful, shared, outpouring love, life in all its fruitful and delicious abundance!