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2 Corinthians 9:10-15

Fruit of the Spirit: Antidote for the Modern World:

Kindness



"The greatest gift you ever give is your honest self."- Fred Rogers.

Mr. Rogers' quote discloses something profound in each of us. As we truly, fully, and openly share the core of our being, others are truly blessed.

Jesus of Nazareth did this so generously and powerfully that when people encountered Him, they knew they had met God.

He invites us to this table that we might discover again just how much He gave that we might have life. We remember on this World Communion Day that this table does not belong to us, to Brick Presbyterian Church, but to God. And we sit at it with all the faithful from every time and place, every nation and race, and thereby we sit at the widest table in the history of the world.

And we rejoice at this breadth because in it God generously, immeasurably enriches our lives with the grand kaleidoscope of humanity.

That is today's challenge of the Fruit of the Spirit; to fully, generously, and openly share who we are.

Sometimes we hesitate to generously share ourselves and our cultures because we are afraid of creating more walls and boundaries but in fact this generosity opens us to wonder at our generous God.

Today we will explore the faith of other countries and cultures and people that we too might be enriched by their generous faith.

As many of you know, I was born in Brazil where my parents were missionaries.

In Brazil there is saying my father taught me. *"Sein Vergonia"*, it roughly translates into "un-embarrass-able." Evidently it was a habit of mine as a child to do or say whatever popped into my head, serving as a source of endless embarrassment for him! There is a gospel lesson here.

We should seek to all be *Sein Vergonia* Christians, not caring what anyone thinks but our Lord when it comes to our willingness to do what is right, to share love, and to bring joy. It was people like my parents, willing to be ostracized by the community and even threatened by the government in order to share with anyone and everyone the Word of God.

At that time, it was discouraged to teach the Bible, but it was through scripture that people embraced Jesus' love for the poor and outcast.

The great Brazilian theologian, Paulo Freire, wrote, *"True generosity lies in striving so that these hands—whether of individuals or entire peoples—need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world."* (The Pedagogy of the Oppressed)

My parents worked not only to help people begging for bread but worked to change the system that kept it that way.

They worked to build hands with agency, authenticity, and power. Though it was few in number it reached across decades, but ended with them essentially fleeing for their lives from the government seeking to maintain control.

Through Brazil we are enriched by the church's generous courage and sacrifice to bring the gospel to the poorest of the poor and teach us something about Jesus' mission to liberate all people.

It has been God's Word throughout history that has opened eyes to the very nature of God, enabling people to find hope, forgiveness, mercy and purpose. This is why I so love the tradition of Chinese Christians. Each week or month the church focuses on a Golden Verse. The verse is studied and memorized by all ages and engaged on every level of learning. We have adopted that tradition this year and are currently focusing on the Golden Verse in Galatians. Perhaps by now you can say it with me "The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, generosity, and self-control."

By the way, I think in part because of this focus the church in China is one of the fastest growing. There are more Christians in China, about 70 million, than in France or Germany with about 40 million each.

The Bible in the hands of God's people truly becomes a force of power that the world's might cannot stand against. It was an uneducated 20-something Quiché Indian woman from Guatemala that lived this truth.

In her book *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, she not only shares her struggle but the joys of her culture. For four months of the year her family lived in the mountains. For example, she shares the loving, dedicated way they rise before the sun for the hours long process of making tortillas.

But for 8 months of the year her family must come down from the mountains. There she saw relatives burned by the military junta, her whole people systematically oppressed and horribly discriminated against and literally had no more than

five dollars. Her oppressors made her feel dirty as she said, "People think of us Indians as less than human. They always say, you lazy dirty Indian. They put emphasis on the last word Indian, as if an Indian were subhuman." She lived in a prison of oppression working essentially as slave labor since she was eight years old.

Despite this unfathomably difficult life she had something greater than the power of the oppressors' guns and it came from God's Word. It was her father's example and the Biblical stories of liberation that gave her courage and God's love that gave her a sense of power. This gave her the strength to learn the language of her oppressors, to organize her people, and to eventually earn the Nobel Peace Prize and to begin the path of liberation for her people.

The tragedy of this world is that millions of people like Rigoberta Menchu are never listened to or even seen as fully human. We have at least one member in our church from France and it is from there that early 20th century insightful and penetrating mystical French philosopher, Simone Weil, comes. She observed that "*Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.*" In a world in which so many are desperately ignored at times the most generous act we can give is to pause to recognize another's common humanity, so they can generously share their honest and truest self.

Jesus exemplified this in stopping on His way to important tasks to pause and listen to those the world would have us rush by like the tax collector, Zacchaeus, or the ostracized woman.

But the deepest steps to truly making this table one of welcome for all is to be generous with our love. Think about how we love our families. The world would change tomorrow if loved others with the same devotion. The seminal and groundbreaking Jewish philosopher from Holland

wrote in the 17th century, *“Minds, nevertheless, are not conquered by arms, but by love and generosity.”*

It was Jesus’ love that drove Him to us. It was Jesus’ love that led Him to feed, to listen, and to heal. It was His generous love in giving His life that has drawn people from every corner of the globe to this table. Galatians 5:6 *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love.”*

And this can be dangerous. While on a mission trip to Haiti I met a young pastor, Rev. Melick. He traveled hours both ways every morning to make it to seminary. And upon finishing devoted his life to bringing the love of Christ to others.

You can sense the Spirit of God within him, for he is filled with humble awe for this calling he has been given and he exudes a great evangelical joy and a servant’s heart. When Melick told us God’s call on his life, we were mesmerized and afraid for him.

He grew up in a voodoo church, serves in *Sity Soley*, perhaps the poorest and most violent neighborhood in all of Haiti. But God hooked him with a bold, courageous vision. *Sity Soley* consists of 35 districts, which means 35 gangs and 35 gang leaders of which he used to be a part. He feels called to convert them to Christ, so he asked for our prayers to keep him safe. He says he has no fear, for he knows he is in God’s hands. It was his love for God that has led him so generously to share his honest self with everyone he meets...no matter the cost.

Give people the supreme gift of your attention. Share your truest self with others. Let your generous act be driven by your love for God, loving them all in equal measure to the glory of God. Amen.