

Fruit That Lasts

May 17, 2009

(Easter 6 - Year B)

John 15:9-17

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

On the kitchen counter in our house, we keep a bowl of fruit.
The intent of the fruit bowl is to entice the members of our family to eat more fruit.

However, it seems that many times the fruit never gets eaten and ends up rotting and being thrown in the garbage.

However, the fruit in my grandmother's kitchen never got thrown out.
Because in my Grandma's kitchen, she believed in fruit that will last.

I think I have told you all before about my Grandma and Granddad's ranch.

In the backyard of the house at their ranch, there was this giant fig tree.
My Granddad took great care of this fig tree, watering it daily so that it would bear fruit.

When summer came, the fig tree produced tons and tons of figs.
We had so many figs that we ate figs with everything, including on top of our cereal.

And my grandmother was determined to make the figs last.
She made the figs last way past summer, because she would preserve them in glass jars, to be used as fruit preserves later in the year.

I can remember being in my Grandma's kitchen.
And to make fig preserves, my Grandma took loads of figs and cooked them in a pot on the stove.

Then, she would take glass Mason Jars and sterilize them in boiling water.

She would use tongs to take the jars out of the hot water.
Then, without touching the cooked figs, she would carefully pour the

fruit into the sterilized jars.

After all the jars were filled with fruit, Grandma had melted paraffin wax in a pot on her stove.

Each jar of fig preserves got a coating of melted wax on top, to seal them and to keep out anything that would cause the preserves to go bad or to rot.

After the paraffin wax cooled, then a round brass covering went on top of each jar, then she screwed on the lid.

All of these jars of fruit preserves then went into Grandma's dark pantry, so that the fruit would last.

Months later, in the dead of winter, when I would spend the night with my grandparents, my Grandma would wake up and make me pancakes.

As the skillet was getting hot, my grandmother would go over to her pantry and pull out a jar of those fig preserves that she had canned months before.

As the pancakes came out of the skillet, each pancake with a fluffy center and crispy edges, my Grandma would say:

“Jeff, I think those pancakes would taste even better with a little fig preserves on them.”

Then, came my very favorite part:

Grandma would pull up a chair and I would stand on the chair and watch her open the jar on the kitchen counter.

She used the edge of a knife to pull off the wax paraffin seal.

And then, rising to the top of those fig preserves, was the best syrup that you have ever tasted.

And I poured that fig syrup right on top of my pancakes.

As little boy, sitting at my Grandma's kitchen table with my pajamas on, eating those perfect pancakes with fig syrup running down my chin,

I experienced love.

In my Grandma's kitchen, I experienced fruit that will last.

Jesus says:

“You did not choose me,

But I chose you.
And I choose you to go and bear fruit -
Fruit that will last.”

Each of us in this church today have been chosen by Jesus.
We have been chosen to go out and to bear fruit.
However, the fruit that we bear is not fruit that sits in the bowl in the
kitchen until it rots and is thrown in the garbage.
Jesus has chosen us to bear fruit, over the long-term and over the long
haul.
Jesus has chosen us to bear fruit that will last.

At St. Alban’s Episcopal Church, we are in this community for the long-
term, for the long-haul.
At St. Alban’s, we are chosen by Jesus to bear fruit - fruit that lasts.
And we never know when we will be asked to open up our jars and share
the fruit and its syrup that has been so carefully preserved.

Many of us in this church are aware that the unique cross that hangs
above our altar is the well-recognized symbol of St. Alban’s
Episcopal Church.
The cross was hand-carved in wood by Camille Webb Ward soon after
this church was built.
Mrs. Ward, I am sure, carved this cross with love.
And her love has born much fruit in her unique gift to this church, which
has been preserved over the long-haul for the past 50 plus years.

Last week, I received a phone call from Jessica Ward, who happens to
be Mrs. Ward’s great-granddaughter.
Even though she is no longer a member of this church, and even though
she now lives in Austin,
Jessica Ward asked if she could be married in this church next year.
I enthusiastically agreed to perform the wedding here.
And as I did, I thought back to the elder Mrs. Ward’s most unique, long-
term gift of this cross.
And I thought about how her gift of love has spoken so profoundly,
generation after generation.
I wonder if, when Mrs. Ward was carving that cross, if she would have

ever imagined that her great-granddaughter would be married in the shadow of this great cross.

For Camille Webb Ward did not just preserve her fruit of love in mason jars that were stored in her pantry.

But Mrs. Ward's gift of a carved wooden cross has born long-term fruit, fruit that lasts.

In the last few weeks, I have had several people tell me how they believe that the Holy Spirit is very alive and active in this church right now.

And I do believe that this is true.

And I believe that right now, in many of you, the Holy Spirit is bearing much fruit, fruit that lasts, fruit that we have well-preserved for the long-haul.

And, according to the Apostle Paul, the fruit that lasts is:

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.¹

And what I am waiting for - is to climb onto the chair in my grandmother's kitchen,

I am waiting for us to take the edge of a knife and pry open the jars of fruit that God has prepared and preserved in us over the long-haul, just for this moment.

I am waiting to taste the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control that will pour out of our well-preserved jars.

Maybe the fruit that is in your jars will call you to serve in a new ministry to our at-home and elderly parishioners that will begin this coming fall.

Maybe the fruit that is in your jars will start a new Bible study group that you will organize.

Maybe the fruit that is in your jars will blow open the doors of this church and outreach center, turning it into a place that serves this

¹ Galatians 5:22-23

neighborhood, night and day.

Jesus tell us to go - and to bear fruit, fruit that will last.

Because the Church is not a museum, where mason jars filled with
preserved love are kept forever in a dark pantry.

The Church is Grandma's kitchen table, where the syrup of love runs
down our chins, oozing from the fruit that lasts.

AMEN.

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