

“Light Bears Fruit.”

Ephesians 5:8-9

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Ephesians 5:8-9 (PowerPoint)

Preface

Last Monday through Wednesday, my wife and I went to a seminar for pastors and their spouses organized by CLSK Christian Life Growth Study Group through an introduction from someone.

The venue was the House of Meditation at the Mary Monastery in Susono, Shizuoka Prefecture. In front of the house is Mt. Fuji, which appears to be red in the sun. The mountains that accompany it in the sky are spectacular. The monastery grounds are surrounded by vast tea plantations. It was truly a place where I could feel the beauty and freshness of the Lord's nature all over my body.

There, we were allowed to enjoy a moment of quietness and grace.

When we entered the monastery building upon arrival, I was a bit overwhelmed by the “Silence” sign on the wall right in front of me.

In the building, talking is basically prohibited except in designated areas, and even in the chapel where worship is offered, you must take off your shoes and enter without speaking.

Even at meals, there is no talking at all, and we eat in silence.

At first, it feels very cramped, but once you learn the intention of talking with God and listening to the faint voice of God speaking to you, like the prophet Elijah, and begin to enjoy the grace of silence, we found the place very attractive and a special space rich in blessings.

At mealtime, we could not even utter the word “delicious,” and we had to pay attention to the sounds of chopsticks and spoons clashing with dishes, and the sound of chewing the food in my mouth. The first dinner on the day we went there, I was so nervous that I thought I would not be able to digest the food, but I soon got used to it. Once I got used to it, I felt the deep flavor of each dish, and as I chew carefully, I enter a spiritual “solitary gourmet” state, a moment of bliss.

Prayer, too, is a pleasant time of quiet contemplation on the words of the Bible that are read to us, and simply focusing our minds on the reality of Christ’s presence through the Holy Spirit, which is a time of solemn rest for the heart and soul.

The time of the lecturers who lead this seminar, and the time of sharing with the limited group of 10 pastors and their spouses from various parts of Japan, from Hokkaido to Shikoku, was a time of warmth and gratitude, a time of relief and healing.

Part One

There were times of quiet, times of sharing, times of meditation on the words of the Bible read to us, times when we took off our shoes and entered the chapel with the tension of silence, times of silent prayer, times of silent meals, times when I stayed alone in a separate room from my wife, times when I took walks and did radio exercises with my wife through the tea fields while watching Mt. Fuji. All the times I experienced there were filled with unspeakable blessings. Among them, the time of listening to the lecturers and their spouses and sharing with my wife and the pastors who attended with us was especially a time of realization of a great blessing for me.

One of the lecturers gave a testimony about his own work attitude when he arrived as the third head pastor of the church he had pastored for 37 years as an evangelist, assistant pastor, and head pastor.

Perhaps it was because the church was a very large church with a large number of people, where visible results were evident, or

perhaps it was because the work of the previous lead pastor, who was competent, gifted, and loving, was excellent, but after he became the lead pastor, he unwittingly fell into a results-oriented attitude of comparing himself with others.

He said, “If I could do this, it would be great. If I couldn’t do that, it’s no good. I have to tell, I have to teach, I have to change, I have to be different, and a competitive mindset that I had to compete with others in order not to be outdone.”

When I heard this story, I thought to myself, “Ah, I am in a very similar situation to him. But I don’t think I am an achievement-oriented person, in fact, I think I am the opposite of an achievement-oriented person. I am trying to prepare myself not to be a performance-based person.”

However, on the last day, during a group sharing session, one of the pastors in the same group said (I have permission to share this in my sermon), “I realized that there are things in our church that are not the gospel of Christ, things like performance-oriented thinking, that are surprisingly prevalent.”

“Actually, perhaps because I was a bit tired, I dozed off for about 5 minutes during the last lecturer’s talk earlier, even though I was sitting at the very front.”

“This cleared my head and allowed me to listen carefully and intently to the rest of the sermon. Through this experience, I realized that I had been blaming those who dozed off during my worship sermon.”

“Whenever I saw people dozing off, I felt sorry for myself, thinking, ‘Oh, my sermon is not meeting the needs of these people’. But at the same time, I thought to myself, ‘What a man to doze off in worship! I thought, ‘If you can do this, I will love you; if you can do that, you are an important to me. if you can’t do that, NO.’ I realized that I had unknowingly fallen into an achievement-oriented attitude that attached some kind of condition to my work. I realized that I had somehow allowed a way of thinking that was different from the gospel of Christ, “God is love,” to prevail in me and in the church.”

Hearing this, I was shaken to my core, saying, “If that is the case, then I myself am definitely a performance-oriented person, and I too have fallen into the elbow-to-elbow performance-oriented mindset of judging, I have to judge, change, communicate, teach, and persuade people in a performance-oriented way.”

After listening to his testimony, it was my turn to speak, and I told something like this.

“When I am driving home from a vacation or returning to church after such a special time, I am so scared that I cry alone when I think of my imminent return to the pastoral field. When I thought about returning to Ibaraki after this time of grace was over, I was honestly scared to death.” I revealed my honest thoughts at that time. Then the pastor who was sitting next to me said, “I am going back to Osaka now, but for the past two nights and three days, I have not been able to stop thinking about what I have to do after I return home. I am actually feeling heavy at the thought of returning to the pastoral field where I spend my days, feeling sorry for my inadequacy and frustration at not living up to the expectations.”

Then, all four of us in the group said, “Oh, we all have fallen into the results-oriented mindset. We are thinking, ‘I have to do this, I have to do that,’ and we are thinking things about ourselves, the church, and the people in the church that are not in accord with the peace of Jesus.

Then we all remembered that scene when Jesus was praying, dripping with the sweat of His blood, and His disciple Peter fell asleep because he couldn’t stand the sleepiness. As a matter of fact, when Peter was dozing off, Jesus said, ‘The spirit is on fire, but the flesh is weak,’ those words, ‘You are not able, you have not become! Don’t sleep!’ I came to understand that those words were not intended to condemn Peter. ‘You know what I mean. You yourself may think that your faith is strong and your human nature is strong, but the truth is that you are weak. Peter, you are lucky to have realized your weakness. Later on, this experience will surely help you to love your neighbor for the sake of others. I love you for being so

weak, and because you are more important than my life, I will go to the cross for you.” We thought this is a message of peace and consolation that is the opposite of the achievement-oriented “If you can do this, if you can do that...” We began to think in this way. And we all agreed, “Surely, that’s right”.

Through this sharing, I felt as if my eyes were opened to the peace and promise of Jesus, which is to be communicated, taught, and changed, rather than to the achievement-oriented emphasis of communicating, teaching, and changing.

Part Two

At the end of every program, there was a question, “What is the takeaway you will take home with you from this seminar?” Each participant had time to think about and write down the answer.

Afterwards, there was time for participants to ask each other, “What is your takeaway?”

After the worship sermon last week, I began to think about the scripture for today’s service, Ephesians 5:8, “You have become light in the Lord, that light bears fruit”, I was anxious and burdened before and during going to the mountain retreat to prepare for the sermon, so when I thought about this souvenir, I remembered and wrote down these words in connection with this verse from Ephesians.

“Cherry blossoms are cherry blossoms. Cherry blossoms become cherry blossoms. Cherry blossoms bloom.”

This may be because in front of Megumi Church, there is a row of cherry trees spreading out.

The fact that cherry trees are cherry trees never changes, and the fact that they are cherry trees sometimes makes beautiful cherry blossoms bloom. In the same way, Christians who were made light in Jesus did not become light and Christians by their own strength. Through God’s guidance, God’s grace, and Jesus’ love, they became

Christians, were made lights, were made children of light, and became trees planted by the waters of life.

The tree planted by the waters is ready to blossom and bear fruit when the time comes.

There is no such thing as a tree that walks by itself and is planted by the waters. In this way, Christians who are connected to the person of Jesus Christ, planted, and made light by the hand of God, are not driven to bear fruit by an achievement-oriented sense of urgency that they must “bear fruit”. I was reminded of the fact that we were made trees planted by the water of life, that we were made a light, and that as trees and as light, we are made to blossom and bear fruit.

Certainly, the Apostle Paul did not say, “Be fruitful, you must be fruitful, you must bear fruit,” but rather, “Light bears fruit,” and he was simply referring to the fact that it appears in a natural way.

Just as it is natural for a cherry tree to blossom, so it is for each and every Christian who is made into light to bear fruit.

Because of the fact that the path we have taken in the past and the present time we are walking in have become light in Christ, all of them are beneficial and bear fruit.

Of course, this fruit is not measured in terms of passing an exam, becoming rich or famous, winning an award, doing well, or being healed of a disease. Of course, it is true that God gives us these kinds of “blessings”. But we find that neither God, Jesus, nor the Bible has ever described things like these as “fruit”.

We, too, find ourselves prone to think of such things as “fruit”.

Part Three

So what is fruit?

It is Galatians 5.

Galatians 5:19-26 (PowerPoint)

Things of the flesh are not called “fruits of the flesh” but “works of the flesh,” and things accomplished by the indwelling of Jesus Christ in us by God the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, are not called “works” but “fruits of the Spirit”.

The word “works” is used for what we do, what we must do, and what we should do by our own training and actions. On the other hand, “fruit” refers to something that is quite natural and whose very existence is the reason for its “fruit,” just as a cherry tree produces cherry blossoms, an apple tree produces apple blossoms, and a mandarin orange flower produces mandarin orange blossoms.

In other words, “fruit” is not something that we “must” do, but something that we “want” to do. Just as a cherry tree wants to produce cherry blossoms, an apple tree wants to produce apple blossoms, and a mandarin tree wants to produce mandarin blossoms, so the fact of being light makes us think, “I want to bear the fruit of the Spirit,” not, “I must bear the fruit of the Spirit”.

Instead of “I must love, I want to love,” “I must forgive, I want to forgive,” “I must rejoice, I want to rejoice,” “I must pray, I want to pray,” “I must worship, I want to worship”. That is because we are the light.

It is true not only for oneself but also for others.

I think it means that we can wait and think, “This person is also determined to become light and bear fruit,” just as we ourselves are determined to become light and bear fruit, rather than thinking “I will not do this or that” about others.

That is why he says in verses 25 and 26.

Galatians 5:25-26 (PowerPoint)

How thankful we are to be able to “quit the performance-based judging because it fits the occasion and bears fruit.” Such words seem to be a sharing of the grace of the Apostle Paul.

Conclusion

The fruit that we bear after becoming light is not something that only belongs for Christians or only for Christians, but something that all people in the world share a common desire for and wish to be.

We have been placed in a place that is destined to bear such fruit, and as we reflect on the fact that we have been remade anew, and on our very existence in the Lord, we hope that we will be able to walk in a way that reduces our over strain.

Let's pray.

Benediction : Ephesians 5:9