Welcome this morning! We are talking about the fruits of the Sprit as the apostle Paul lists them in the book of Galatians. Last week we looked at the first and primary fruit, Love, specifically agape love which is the other-directed love of God. Instead of a self-obsessed mirror, God provides us with a window so we can look out and love others. We learned that worshipping God is the best way to break that cycle because it puts our focus and attention on God alone. Worship directs our affection toward him.

Today then we take a taste of joy. Now throughout these sermons I think it is important for us to take a moment to define our terms. What does Paul mean by this word, joy? For him the word is *chara,* which is Greek for joy, okay, that’s easy enough, but theology professor Philip Kennison thinks it is important to know that *chara* sounds an awful lot like ­*charis* and *charis* means grace. These ideas, grace and joy are closely related. Grace of course is something we experience as a gift, it cannot originate from within ourselves. We can be grace-filled people, but only if we have been previously filled with grace. Is the same true of joy? Can we be joy-filled without first being filled with joy from someone outside of ourselves? Can we conjure up joy within? For the most part, it doesn’t work like that. We experience joy when we meet a special someone and get married, when a new baby comes into our lives, when our children achieve another milestone, when grandkids start coming on the scene (or so I’m told). Just like God’s love is other-directed, so too is true joy. True joy is found outside of ourselves. Paul expresses his joy relationally. He tells the Thessalonian church, “You are our glory and our joy!” and he says similar things to the Philippian church and the Roman church. So Paul experiences joy as he invests in other people, as he shares the good news of Christ’s victory over the grave, as he helps others come to accept the gift of eternal life, as he teaches others to follow Jesus.

Joy is not the absence of something bad or painful. Joy is our response to something desirable…namely God. Now there are sometimes in our lives when we don’t really want God around. We’d rather hide out in the dark and keep our thoughts and deeds hidden. Or sometimes we feel abandoned by God. In the midst of pain and suffering, cancer diagnosis, an injury, a broken relationship…these are certainly not occasions for joy. But thanks be to God! He is not an occasional God and finding joy in him is not an occasional experience. When we find our joy in the Source, that joy can undergird us even in our times of trial and hardship.

But there are plenty of Cultural Complications that get in the way of cultivating this joy. Our culture would like you to believe that all you need is the newest model or the bigger version or the better thing in order for us to find joy. Our culture fosters an addiction to consumerism. This then results in a never-ending quest for joy. I have noticed just locally here in the Twin Cities at least three brand-new self-storage facilities. I wanted to find out if this was an actual trend. Sure enough, with over 48,500 units to rent, annual self-storage revenue is right around 36 billion dollars. We have dedicated 2 billion, 300 million square feet to storage. Just to buy a spot to store more stuff, stuff that was supposed to make us happy. If we need more to be happy, then we will never be happy.

So how can we as Christens break this cycle? How can we cultivate joy? One woman has put forth her ideas: Her name is Marie Kondo. She is the de-cluttering guru of our time. She helps people minimize and find contentment. She wrote a best-selling book called Spark Joy. The premise is fairly simple. You go through every item in your home, hold it and see if it sparks joy. If it does, keep it, if not throw it out or donate it. Here she is in her own words: Show video

Now speaking as a serial clutter-er, I can appreciate the Marie’s concept here. It is probably good practice to go through the items you own and get rid of things every so often. And Marie is on the right track…joy is a good goal to try to work toward, but how does she go about it? Her method begins and ends with me and my feelings. Judging the worth of an object based on my own feelings is one thing, but what about the other areas of life? What about other people? Does this process really lead to joy? Again, true joy, Christian joy, is not something we conjure from within ourselves, it is certainly not something to be found amongst our clutter. This is Marie’s biggest failing…in her method the source of joy ultimately lies in our stuff and the way we feel about it. It is impossible to find lasting joy in the things we own. Not it is true, the vast majority of us could live with less stuff, but if we can’t find joy in stuff, we won’t find joy in the lack of stuff either.

We look to the early church for some ancient wisdom here. The Westminster Catechism describes our purpose as humans like this: “our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

This helps us set a **proper perspective**. Do we enjoy God? We enjoy a good performance; we enjoy a good hamburger…do we enjoy God? The Creator and sustainer? The Giver of talents and beef? God, the One who gave us lungs for breathing and brains for thinking. All that we have and all the we are derives from his hand…how silly of us to try to find joy elsewhere.

**Gratitude is** our secret weapon here. 1 Peter 1:8-9 No matter what happens God has provided for our salvation. All of our sufferings and trials can be seen through that lens. God has succeeded in saving us from the grip of death, from an eternity separated from him in hell. We have been given the gift of salvation…the proper response is gratitude.

I was visiting with Yizong the other day…if you are not familiar with him and his family, please get to know them. Yizong comes from China, a place where it is illegal to be a Christian, a place where the government constantly surveils it’s citizens in order to ensure that everyone stays in line. In fact, he shared with me that each and every text message that is sent, even messages he sends from our country to his relatives back home, is reviewed and approved by the government. If they don’t like what you are communicating, they simply delete your message. If you talk with Yizong for two minutes you will see a smile on his face. He is grateful to live in a country where freedom is granted and respected. He is grateful that he can speak freely raise his family in this country. But most of all, he is grateful to know the freedom that Christ has given him. Freedom from sin and death! Freedom to love Christ and pursue him! Freedom gives Yizong joy. His family is still in need of a green card and they are praying for an extension on his wife’s work visa. Their status as free citizens of the United States is not sure, and I invite you to join them in prayer for that to change but Yizong can experience and express joy in this time of instability and unknowing because his joy is rooted in his salvation and in the goodness of our God.

What are your deepest desires? What are the things in which you rejoice? I want to challenge you to write them down. Make a list. And in light of our quest to cultivate these fruits of the Spirit, take your list to God in prayer. Ask him directly if these desires are the right desires? Are your desires misplaced? What are your true needs vs. wants? And there is a second part to this challenge: take some of the items from your list of desires and bring them to your small group. Talk them through with other Christians. So what wisdom they have to offer you. We all struggle with misguided desires. All of our hearts get sidetracked and distracted some time. But examining our hearts in private prayer, and in the midst of Christian community is a sure way to set ourselves on a pathway to cultivating joy.

I want to close with the words of Jesus found in John 16: 21-22. He was talking to his disciples about a time coming soon when he would leave them and go to be with his Father. The disciples are reasonably concerned about such a message and Jesus says in response: When a woman gives birth, she has pain because her time has come. But when the child is born she no longer remembers her distress because of her joy that a child has been born into the world. In the same way, you have sorrow now; but I will see you again, and you will be overjoyed. No one takes away your joy.”

Jude 24 benediction

And now a benediction from Jude 24:

To the one who is able to keep you from falling and to present you blameless and rejoicing before his glorious presence, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, belong glory, majesty, power and authority, before all time, now and forever, May he bring you his unquenchable joy.