St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
Sermon: "The Fruit of the Spirit: SELF-CONTROL"
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Galatians 5:16-25
Rev. Steve Filyk
November 1, 2026
Opening Hymn: For all the saints #611
Choruses: Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God & Create in Me a Clean Heart
Hymn after sermon: Take my life, and let it be consecrated #637
Closing Hymn: Be Thou my vision #461
All Saints Sunday

Every year we attend Katie's violin recital.
Every year we listen to beginner,
intermediate, and advanced students.

One year there was one student
who wowed the crowd with his performance.
I commented to Katie's teacher that he was fantastic.
The teacher responded that yes, he was very good.
Then he added something I wasn't expecting:
"He would be great if he actually practised!"

Some of us have been given natural talents
which enable us to do well in certain fields: carpentry, sports, music.
But no matter how much raw talent you've been given
People develop excellence through intentionality,
Through repeated decisions to practise, improve,
resist distractions and persevere.

What is true of violinists, or hockey players, or craftspeople,
Is equally true of Christians.
Christian maturity doesn't happen simply
because we've been attending church for years.
Christian maturity is the result of
intentionally submitting our lives to the Holy Spirit
So we might be shaped and formed into the likeness of Christ.

PAUSE

Today we are finishing up our series on the Fruit of the Spirit.
We didn't get through all nine that are listed in Paul's letter
To the church in Galatia.

But remember that this list was never intended
To be the definitive list of those graces
the Holy Spirit develops in Jesus' followers.
There are but some of those Christ-like characteristics
Of which Paul says, "Against such things there is no law." [Galatians 5:22]

Today we are exploring self-control.
What is self-control?
One writer has described it as: "the healthful regulation
of our desires and appetites,
preventing their excess." [Jeff Bridges The Fruitful Life 132]

Consider that list of those 'acts of the flesh'
That disqualify people from God's kingdom:
"sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;
idolatry and witchcraft;
hatred, discord, jealousy,
fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions
and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like." [Galatians 5:19-21]

Many of these behaviours begin with desires
that, in themselves, aren't necessarily bad.
We all desire intimacy, justice, and recognition.
But when those desires become disordered,
when they take control of us
or become more important than God and others,
they can lead us into destructive behaviours.

A desire for intimacy,
disconnected from God's purposes, can become immorality.
A desire for justice, consumed by resentment, can become rage.

Self-control is the grace
That enables us to avoid the dangers
Represented by the ‘works of the flesh’.

Self-control also helps us to cultivate the Spiritual Fruit
we have been exploring.
You cannot excel in love if you allow selfishness to rule you.
You cannot increase in peace if you let anger dictate your responses.

Self-control is a significant gift
That allows us to avoid the behaviour
That gets in the way of Christian character
And allows the fruit of the Spirit to thrive.

But how do we increase in self-control?

PAUSE

I knew it would be a bad idea to purchase
Halloween candy early.
I have a difficult time keeping away
From sweet things.

On Friday Amy brought home
a couple of containers of chocolates
for Saturday’s trick or treaters.
I broke into one of them before supper.
I only ate 3 or 4 of them.

Later I thought I was being clever
by leaving the candy downstairs
when I went upstairs to watch TV.
Out of sight, out of mind, right? Apparently not.

Eventually, I found myself making a special trip downstairs
just to retrieve the bag.
That's how much self-control I have when chocolate is involved!

So how do we grow in self-control?
When it seems to be so essential to Christian maturity?

I think there are two essential insights
from each of our readings.
And that both need to be held onto
At the same time.

In the reading from 1 Corinthians
Paul’s illustration of the athlete
Reminds us of the intentionality of their efforts.
Athletes can be disciplined
Because they are pursuing a concrete goal.

Paul wants us to know
That if they have any inspiration in their efforts,
We should have more.

Yes they may be able to look forward to a cheering crowd
At the end of their race.
But we can look forward to being received by our Lord
As good and faithful servants
Who have faithfully completed what has been trusted to us.

For his part, Paul isn't running
For self-improvements.
He wants to finish well.
He wants to be faithful to the calling God has given him
and to receive the reward that God has promised.
He knows that this requires discipline.
He cannot simply indulge every appetite,
pursue every preference or exercise every freedom
to achieve this goal.

Have you ever considered how you will be received by God
at the end of your journey?
How might that motivate you for greater discipline?

Do you have ANY goals when it comes to spiritual maturity?
Maybe you'd like to introduce loved ones to Jesus.
Maybe you'd like to experience freedom from certain vices
And see certain graces take root in your life.

God wants each of us to grow in Spiritual maturity.
Greater progress will be achieved
when we establish and train towards goals.
This is something Paul teaches us:
intentionality matters.

At the same time, Paul's teaching about Spiritual Fruit
Reminds us that this is not a solitary project,
a demonstration of self-reliance.
All these fruits are the consequence of the Holy Spirit's work in us.

Some of us may lack intentionality in Spiritual growth.
And some of us may be trying to accomplish Spirit growth
All on our own.
Paul advises us again and again
That to grow in God's grace we need to:
'walk by the Spirit',
'be led by the Spirit',
and 'keep in step with the Spirit'.

If we stick with the image of physical training,
It is like the Holy Spirit is our personal trainer
Who is setting out a routine,
calling out encouragements,
and pushing us into bigger challenges each week.

Have you been trying to develop self-control
and finding you aren't succeeding?
Consider asking God to reveal where your desires have become disordered.
Consider asking him to change your heart, not simply your behaviour.
Call out for wisdom when you are facing temptation.
Cry out for rescue when you are stumbling and need help.

When it comes to cultivating self-control,
today's passages offer us two distinct suggestions:
We are encouraged to be goal-directed in our pursuit of Christ-likeness;
We are advised to lean on the Holy Spirit for courage and strength.

The early 20th-century Anglican Theologian William Temple said:
"It's no good giving me a play like Hamlet or King Lear
and telling me to write a play like that.
Shakespeare could do it. I can't.
And it is no good showing me a life
like the life of Jesus and telling me to live a life like that.
Jesus could do it; I can't.

But if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me,
then I could write plays like his.
And if the Spirit of Jesus could come and live in me,
then I could live a life like his." [William Temple, quoted in John Stott, The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 37.]

Someone else has said:
"God doesn't call the qualified,
God qualifies the called."

On All Saints Sunday, one of the things we do
Is to give thanks for the lives and witness of Christians who have preceded us.
Their faithfulness encourages us to persevere.

Mac Porter died this past February.
I still remember when I would ask him how it's going,
He would respond, "not very fast".

Mac was kind and patient
And had an easy way about him.
I'm sure some things got him angry,
but I never heard him running other people down.
He was careful and gracious in his words.

I admire the work God accomplished in Mac's life
And how he participated in it.
Maybe there's someone in your life that you admire.

One of the gifts of being part of the church
is that we don't have to figure out
what Christian maturity looks like all by ourselves.
God has surrounded us with people
whose lives demonstrate the difference his Spirit can make.

We give thanks for them.
We learn from them.
And we are encouraged by their example.

But ultimately, our eyes aren't fixed on Mac,
or on any other Christian who has gone before us.
Our eyes are fixed on Jesus.

And as we run our own race, we remember that the same Spirit
who was at work in their lives is at work in us,
helping us to become more Christlike.
But let's not become complacent.
Let's not assume that we have finished growing,
or that we have reached the limits of what God can accomplish in us.
Let's keep running. Let's keep growing.
And let's keep in step with the Spirit. Amen.