

The Fruit of the Sacrament in the Sanctuary of the Covenant

Genesis 2:24, 1:27-28

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For the last several weeks, we've been talking about how God made Adam and Eve male and female, and bound them in a covenant, in which they celebrate a sacrament. Tonight, we'll talk about the fruit of that sacrament. Scripture tells us that this refers to Christ and the Church.

Genesis 2:24 - Therefore the man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

You know, I cleaved to my wife and we became one flesh. We named that flesh Jonathan. If scientists were to break down his DNA, they'd tell you (I hope), "Yep, he's literally two people that became one." Peter, Susan and Jonathan – a trinity of flesh in the image of God.

In Genesis chapter 1, verse 27, on the 6th day of creation, we read:

So God created man (Adam) in his own image in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them "be fruitful and multiply."

Now this is the very first commandment in all of Scripture. Furthermore, it's a picture of Christ and the church. Understanding it, is utterly foundational to all of the Christian life. But we really seem to struggle with the concept. We live in a sexually indulgent and promiscuous society that destroys the picture. Promiscuous yet sanitized, which leaves us shockingly ignorant as to what it all means.

In the poor agrarian society of Jesus' day, where private rooms were a luxury and every child was involved in farming and raising animals, any 6 year old would know about seeds and sowing and where babies come from. But we really struggle to make the Biblical connections: "*Be fruitful and multiply.*"

Well, on May 28, 1983, I entered a covenant. And in the sanctuary of the covenant, I celebrated the sacrament. Susan and I strove to "*be fruitful.*" I remember the night so well. We went right up to our hotel room and got to work. It was really confusing and perplexing how to make fruit. And this is the best we could do. (Peter holds up wadded up notebook paper – colored yellow with a magic marker that kind of looks like a pear.)

In the morning, frustrated and exhausted, we realized that we needed help... someone with more knowledge and skill – we needed an expert. We went into town and found a professional fruit maker, and he helped us make one of these. (Peter holds up a fake pear.) Look at that! Anyone hungry? Take a bite! It's fake. It looks like fruit, but it's not fruit. You know, when you're hungry, fake fruit is worse than no fruit. Fake fruit is lying fruit – a mockery of real fruit.

The Bible says that the fruit of the Spirit is "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faith and temperance.*"

Are you ever hungry for those things?

When you're hungry, fake fruit is worse than no fruit.

Do you realize that with all of our knowledge and all of our skill, the world's greatest experts are entirely incapable of making one piece of fruit, one scrap of organic matter, one molecule of food? We cannot make life. Yet God says, "*Be fruitful.*"

Well obviously, "fruit" in Genesis 1 is a reference to persons. And so obviously, I'm just teasing about my honeymoon night. We actually did go up to the hotel room, and immediately went to work with the serious business of making a person.

Now I know this topic has been challenging for some, and for good reason. But I take God's commandments seriously, and we need to understand. Some of you may have seen this, but we'll see it again. It's that important. I set up a camera and this is actual footage of our first attempt at making a person in our image. Don't be alarmed; Susan looks the same, but I had different hair. Ok. Roll the film!

Young Frankenstein Movie Clip:

[Standing in a laboratory, wearing a white coat and a stethoscope.]

Dr. Frankenstein: This is the moment. Well dear, are you ready?

Inga (lab assistant): Yes, Dear.

Dr. Frankenstein: Elevate me!

Inga: Now? Right Here?

Dr. Frankenstein: Yes! Yes, raise the platform!

Inga: Oh! The Platform! Oh that, yes.

[The platform ascends, with Dr. Frankenstein standing on it, to the top of the laboratory, and into the sky.]

Dr. Frankenstein: Tonight we shall ascend into the heavens. We shall mock the earthquake. We shall command the thunders and penetrate into the very womb of impervious nature herself.

Dr. Frankenstein: Get ready! Get set! Go!

[Dr. Frankenstein puts on goggles and watches his monster closely. An assistant in the laboratory below pulls a large lever.]

Dr. Frankenstein: Throw the second switch! Throw the third switch!

Assistant: Not the third switch!

Dr. Frankenstein: Throw it, I say! Throw it!

[The third switch is thrown: Lightning. Thunder. Glass breaking].

Dr. Frankenstein: Life! Life, do you hear me? Give my creation life!

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“Life, life, life. Live!” (Peter yells at baby doll.)

“Live, live, live!” Does that remind you of church? A pastor yelling at a bunch of lifeless zombies “Live, live, live! Bear fruit! Be fruitful and multiply! Try harder!” So the zombies walk out, and pretend to have love, joy, peace, patience, when inside they’re dead... secretly longing to feed on the living.

Do you see my point? With all of our biology, psychology, theology and ecclesiology... with all of our knowledge of good and evil... We can at best make fake fruit and hang it on monsters.

(Peter holds up the doll and acts like it is talking.) “Hello, my name is Chucky. Would you be my friend?” Creepy. “I love you.” Creepy. Do you ever find church to be a bit creepy?

Well, the greatest experts, the most brilliant scientists, cannot make one piece of fruit. However, farmers (even little children) can grow fruit – multiply fruit. But the way they do it is *entirely counter-intuitive*.

First, you take one of these. This is called a seed. This is a kernel of corn. In Sunday School, they used to give us beans, and we’d plant them in Styrofoam cups. Seeds turn into plants that produce fruit – that are more seed. They’re absolute marvels. In Norway, they’re building this ultra high tech multi-million dollar international seed vault. They’re that important. They make food, and yet they are food. We wealthy modern Americans forget that.

In the 60’s, the Peace Corp was discourage to find that vast shipments of kernels of corn never made it to the fields for planting, but were being eaten instead. Now that does make sense, because what you do with seeds is *entirely counter-intuitive*. You bury them in dirt... that’s what you do with dead things! Dead bodies – you bury them in dirt. How weird! First, you take this amazing, wonderful seed, and then you bury it in the dirt! But not just any dirt: dirty dirt... dirt full of death and decay... and hopefully a lot of crap. You bury them in the dirt, or a pile of crap.

Do you ever feel like dirt? A piece of crap? And then you wife says, “Honey, it’s time to go to church.” And what do you do? You hide the dirt and bury the crap. Then you fake a bunch of love, joy, peace, patience... You fake some fruit even though you feel like crap.

But to grow fruit, you have to put the seed in the soil (the dirt, the crap). And not just any soil... tilled soil. You would think you might need to protect the soil, make it hard and impervious, but to prepare the soil, you just plow it to pieces and break it to bits.

Do you ever feel like you’ve got to get your crap together before you can come to church? Well to grow fruit, you have to bury the seed in broken soil. Then let it be... let it be.

You see, a farmer has to have a lot of faith (not faith in himself): faith in the seed and faith in the productivity of broken soil. If he doesn’t have faith, he’ll never sow the seed. He’ll eat it, or maybe put it in a vault or a barn. Because when you sow a seed, it’s like the seed dies. If he didn’t have faith, he’d never sow the seed, or if he did sow the seed, he’d dig it up in fear.

Remember in Sunday School when you buried your bean in the Styrofoam cup full of dirt, or in your first garden... you'd dig up the seed, worried about its growth. You'd try to measure the fruit, and you'd kill the fruit.

Do you ever Hate that you don't have **Love**?

Are you Sad that you don't have **Joy**?

Do you Worry that you don't have **Peace**?

Are you Impatient with your growth of **Patience**?

The more you worry about fruit and try to force fruit, the less you seem to have.

But if the farmer just buries the seed in the soil and walks away, the seed turns into a plant (like a tree). And the plant (or tree) takes the dirt and crap in the soil and mixes it with light and turns it into fruit, bearing even more seed. But to sow the seed, is to lose control and exercise faith. It's to witness a death and trust in a resurrection. So the psalmist writes:

Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

In this world, the sowing and the reaping, the sorrow and the joy, don't normally happen at once, but Amos prophesies another day:

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes, him who sows the seed."

So, in that day:

The sowing will be reaping, and the reaping will be sowing.

The giving will be receiving, and the receiving will be giving.

The losing will be finding, and the finding will be losing

... like sowing seeds in a garden of delight, a glorious dance of love and life. And that reminds me of how human fruit is made... that taste of Eden in this fallen world that we talked about last time. And that kind of reminds me of this communion table. You know on the earthly side of this table, there is incredible sorrow, as the son of Man is sown like a seed into the heart of the earth. But on the heavenly side, there is unspeakable joy... the marriage supper of the Lamb, the consummation, in ecstasy.

Well, if you didn't follow all of that, don't worry. Just get this point: The greatest scientific experts can't even come close to making a single fruit, and they certainly can't make human fruit – that is, a baby. At best, they can only produce a monster. You know that even a test tube baby isn't a man-made baby. Not even close. Scientists still have to have the egg from the mother, and the sperm from the father.

And check this out: that word "sperm," or the verb "spermiate"... those words appear in Scripture about 366 times. But they've been sanitized and translated as "seed," "sow," or "offspring." The Greek word for "seed" is "sperma." Jesus is the sperm of Abraham. In both Greek and Hebrew, "seed" and "sperm" are one word. So any child understood that Adam plants his *seed* in the womb of Eve, the same way the farmer plants his *seed* in the broken soil of the earth. And that's how we become fruitful and multiply.

At its best, it's like dying, yet living. Losing, yet finding. Giving, yet receiving. And in that place of broken soil and dirt, life is conceived. In that place of passion, confusion and seeming chaos, a seed is

implanted. It is *entirely counter-intuitive*. And if you try to dig it up, if you try to measure it, judge it or control it, you kill it... or him... or her.

Susan and I tried like crazy to have kids for a year. It was the best year of my life. And it was the worst year for Susan. And that has some spiritual significant. Well, because she was desperate to bear fruit, she seized control. It was work, work, work. A friend who didn't want a baby got pregnant at the time. Susan's heart grew hard with anger, until finally her heart broke. She surrendered her broken heart to God and gave up on manufacturing fruit. Then she made love to her groom (me), just because she loved her groom (me). And then she got pregnant four times.

Now listen very closely. If you want to have a baby and can't, I'm absolutely not saying it's your fault, or that your heart is hard. Actually in Scripture, it's barren women who seem to be God's favorites. Sarah, Rachel, the mother of Samson – Manoah, Hannah, Elizabeth. And it's not their fault. But into their broken heart, God speaks his word which bears astounding fruit... even the Messiah. Isaiah says:

“Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married,” says the Lord.

So if you are childless, I'm not saying it's your fault at all. But I am saying that you may be most fertile of all. Surrender your broken heart to the Word. And one day, you'll see fruit beyond your wildest dreams.

And this is my point for all of us: You can't bear fruit by trying, by seizing control. Just like you can't simply decide to have “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faith and temperance.” A tree doesn't grow fruit by trying: (Peter pretending to be a tree, trying to grow fruit) “ugh... peace... I must try harder. Patience... now.” That's not how you bear fruit. And once you have kids, that's not how you raise them and shape them in your image.

Look how God does it:

- 1 He makes space for Adam – freedom.
- 2 Like seed into soil, God breathes His Spirit into dust and makes Adam.
- 3 He allows Adam to fail.
- 4 And then He speaks His Word of Grace – Jesus – who descends into Adam, and completes him, completes us in God's image.

If you simply control kids with rules and laws, you may get some fake fruit, but you'll probably produce a monster. But give your kids space to fail, then speak words of Grace, like seed into broken soil, and I bet you'll grow a person in the image of God: someone who loves in freedom.

You know, Jesus taught that the Word of God is seed. He said, *“The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life.”*

Paul writes, “*You are God’s field*” -- God’s ge-orgion. [earth (ge) – work (orgos) – Earth Orgy] His plowed field, prepared to be His garden. We receive God’s Word into broken hearts and they bear fruit. And that is more seed.

Mark 4:26 *Jesus said, “The Kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows. He knows not how. The earth (ge as in ge-orgion) produces by itself first the blades, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.”*

“The seed sprouts and grows; the farmer knows not how.” If he says he knows how, it’s probably not real fruit that he’s growing. There are a million books written by experts on How to Grow Spiritual Fruit... How to Grow the Church. But if they understand how, it’s probably not the Fruit of the Spirit that they’re growing, or the Church of Jesus Christ. Those things may grow attendance, bank accounts and facilities, but that’s not the church. It’s extremely rare to find a book that advocates the church growth method suggested in Scripture, for it’s *entirely counter-intuitive*.

Jesus said God’s Word is seed and Scripture tells us that Jesus is God’s Word. And Jesus said that He would build His church. In John 12:23, He says, “*The hour has come for the son of Man to be glorified.*” He was speaking of death on a cross. Then He said, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a kernel of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*”

When you come to the table, dirty and broken, and you receive His body and blood, you receive eternal seed into your barren garden... your desolate womb. And then you bear fruit. That is, in turn, seed for others. You actually bear Jesus in yourself and in others. He is the seed, and He is the harvest; bread and wine; the body and blood of Christ; the harvest of this earth.

You are the Bride of Christ, who becomes Mother Church; the woman in Revelation 12; the Jerusalem above; the mother of the Body of Christ.

In Luke 11, a woman yells to Jesus, “*Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you nursed.*” And Jesus says, “*Blessed rather are those hearing the word of God and keeping it.*” That is, blessed are those receiving the seed, for they are the womb that gives birth to me. That’s amazing.

But for now... Do you understand that the strategy for multiplying fruit and babies is remarkably different than the strategy for multiplying everything else? The strategy for multiplying living things is remarkably different than the strategy for multiplying dead things.

And so, we need to decide: Is the kingdom a living thing or a dead thing? Is the church a living thing or a dead thing? If it’s dead, we need to call it an institution, school or business and treat it as such... and stop referring to it as a body or a bride. Referring to a dead thing as a living thing creeps people out, because it looks alive, but get close and you find it dead... the walking dead – no soul – a monster. That’s creepy!

But if the church is a living thing, and we’re supposed to multiply it somehow, then we’re like brides, mothers, and farmers - husbandmen. And then, first and foremost, we need to have faith in:

- 1 The power of the seed
- 2 The productivity of broken soil

A farmer multiplies living things (seeds), yet a farmer also multiplies dead things (tractors and barns). You see, I'm not saying manmade things, like tractors and barns, are bad. I'm just saying they only matter insofar as they serve the fruit, which is seed.

As a preacher, my job is to scatter the seed - to preach the Word.

As a believer, it's your job as well - to scatter the seed... even become seed incarnate.

I think that most of us are here, and not in our beautiful new barn on the mountain, because we have faith in the seed, and we have become broken soil.

A couple of weeks ago, I went to a conference on church leadership. We heard about growth strategies, management schemes and program structures - how to become an expert and measure the results. Then we sat around and discussed how successful we had been. It was painful for me, because three years ago, I would have been the super-star at my table. But now I said, "Well, I failed at that... guess I stink at that." And please understand, all that knowledge and skill is really valuable... just like a conference on Barn Building is valuable to a farmer. But if a farmer has to choose between a new barn and seed... well, it takes a really confused farmer not to pick the seed - the Word of God. Have faith in the seed!

Well, the conference was painful, and then I realized that the success of all these human strategies and techniques was measured by their ability to keep the leader from getting crucified by those he sought to lead. In other words, it was all designed to keep the seed out of the soil. And by that standard, Jesus was the world's greatest failure. Yet we know Jesus was God's greatest success.

You know they wanted Jesus to grow the nation of Israel by forming an army, overthrowing the Romans, and establishing a worldly government.

But Jesus did something that was *entirely counter-intuitive*.

Jesus went to a tree (a skulon in Greek). He went to a tree (the tree of law), and he was nailed to that tree. And His life is the fruit of the tree. His body and blood is seed. It falls into broken soil, and produces an entire new creation - the Harvest of this earth.

And Jesus said, "*As the Father sent me, so send I you.*"

Both Hosea and Zechariah prophesy a day when Israel would be sown in the nations. I think WE may have just been sown into Downtown Denver.

Last year my wife had a vision in church: She saw a field -- just dirt. Then out of the dirt grew the most beautiful flower she'd ever seen. Then that flower wilted and died, and returned to the dirt. Then she saw nothing but dirt, for a long time... then a green stalk breaking free, and reaching for the sun. The first flower had gone to seed.

I think the Sanctuary is a seed that's been sown, and now we've been called to bear fruit - which is more seed. But it's absolutely critical that we understand what fruit is, and how it's born.

We're about to have a congregational meeting. We'll talk about tractors, barns, buildings and budgets... stuff we can do, and it's all important. But it's just not fruit. And if we think it's fruit, and if we think that's what church is, we'll only produce a monster.

A bride can't make herself pregnant, no matter how long she stares in the mirror. No matter how hard she tries to get her crap together. A bride bears fruit by surrendering her shame and delighting herself in the love of her groom. The church gets pregnant when she confesses her sin, and delights herself in the grace of God, in Christ Jesus. In other words, we will only bear fruit if we worship. Worship is a tilled field, a broken heart that receives God's Word, who is mercy.

So on that day, the day He went to the tree, Jesus took break, and he broke it, saying, "Take, this is my body. Take and eat." And in the same manner, after supper, and having given thanks, He took the cup and said, "This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many. Take and drink."

We are bound in a covenant in which we celebrate a sacrament, and produce fruit that is life. We know not how.

Covenant → Sacrament → Fruit

If we reverse that order:

Manufacturing Fruit, to produce → A Sacramental experience, in order to → Make a Covenant

... we become a monster; we literally become the beast, and the false prophet. We become Sadducees and Pharisees, and human religion. And the world doesn't need any more of that!

So bride of Christ, let's pray: Jesus, we are your bride, you are our groom. We confess that we've tried to fulfill the whole law on our own strength, with the "knowledge of good and evil," and we've failed. We're desperate for you. We're barren without you. We are desolate without your love.

Take a moment and surrender your heart to Jesus. Some of you have sorrows that you need to tell Him about. Some of you have sins that you need to confess.

Listen: You are a broken field. You are an empty womb. Now receive the word of the Lord:

"Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married," says the Lord.

"Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring (seed) will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities.

Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer."

Tear off a piece of bread, dip it in the cup, then place that seed in the broken soil that is You. Believe the Gospel, and worship.

Communion.

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Benediction:

It's the first commandment: Be fruitful and multiply. And how you do that, is *entirely counter-intuitive*. We are the Bride of Christ. Jesus is our Groom. That stresses us out sometimes, because the evil one has messed with all of our pictures, and destroyed our images. But the way that God bears fruit is entirely delightful. When we surrender to Him in worship, He fills us with His Spirit, and bears the fruit of His Spirit. That's how we "become fruitful and multiply." If we do it any other way, we create a monster. So believe the Gospel, in Jesus name. Amen.