

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro  
11 January 2025

10:30 a.m. MT Worship  
Baptism of our Lord Sunday

Calvary Baptist Church  
Denver, Colorado

## ***“Pruning as a Spiritual Practice: Fruitful & Freeing”***

Midyear Reorientation to theme, *Abide & Grow: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit*

*NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.*

***John 14:25-27, 31; John 15:1-5, 8-11, 16a and Galatians 5:13-26***

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

In his book, *The Tears of Things: Prophetic Wisdom for an Age of Outrage*, Father Richard Rohr writes, “Jesus gave us a rather clear code for authenticity: ‘By their fruits you will know them,’ (Matt. 7:15-20). So let’s always look for the fruit of the Spirit...: ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control,’ (Gal. 5:22-23). Without such fruits showing themselves, it is me talking [my ego, my pride, my rage, my grief], not God. [But] when these fruits are evident, we are talking as one.”<sup>1</sup> My heart is aligned with God’s heart, God’s voice, God’s desires.

As the title suggests, Rohr’s book is about the prophets and their role of being a “licensed critic” of their communities, a truth-teller

helping their communities see their shadow-side, and calling for reform from within. Prophets are teachers of a moral alternative, deconstructors of the prevailing order; radical change agents.<sup>2</sup>

Can we get a Prophet in the house please? Whether the Lord’s House, the White House, your house or mine—we desperately need prophets to help us talk, see, and live as One with God and God’s heart.

We need prophets who can call us back to a “code of authenticity,” as Rohr puts it. Not an enforcement of black and white law of right or wrong, but a code of authenticity—that is, what is most true to our humanity, or dignity, our creation as the *imago dei* (image of God), and our identity as beloved children of God—a blessing we celebrate today as

<sup>1</sup> Richard Rohr, *The Tears of Things: Prophetic Wisdom for an Age of Outrage* (New York, NY: Center for

Action and Contemplation, Inc. Penguin Random House / Convergent, 2025), pg 15.

<sup>2</sup> Rohr, pg xiv.

we remember Jesus' own baptism and that voice of grace naming him, and all of us who follow, as beloved: "*You are my beloved child, with you I am well pleased.*" And remember, this blessing is given *before* Jesus has a work history or CV, it's *before* any miracles or teachings, before he *does* anything. This blessing is about his *being*.

We need prophets who can help us tap into this sense of blessing, and who can help us see "as one" with God as Rohr puts it, and with each other too. Even when we watch the same footage, somehow we are not seeing the same reality. Our collective moral vision is broken and bifurcated. Divided and disillusioned.

This week has revealed, again and again, ***the division in our vision.***

Take the United States military operations in Venezuela and the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro last Saturday, for example. While some Venezuelan immigrants are cheering this news, others—heads of state and ambassadors

across the globe—are calling it an illegitimate attack, a violation of international law, and a threat to world order and peace.<sup>3</sup>

***There is division in our vision... Without the Fruit of the Spirit, we are not seeing as One...***

Tuesday was the fifth anniversary of the insurrection on the U.S. Capitol. As many remembered the horror and trauma of this day, the White House released a new J6 webpage which justifies the pardoning of the Capitol's convicted attackers, claiming that many were only "mere trespassers or peaceful protesters."<sup>4</sup>

***There is division in our vision... Without the Fruit of the Spirit, we are not seeing as One...***

On Wednesday, we saw a new level of violence by ICE, this time not against immigrants of color, but against a white citizen. A mother, a wife, a Christian; Renée Nicole Good was shot dead by an ICE agent during an operation in

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<sup>3</sup> Many thanks to Rev. Ryon Price, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas for his language on

these events as written in his pastoral letter and posted on Facebook on January 9, 2026.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Minneapolis. The Department of Homeland Security accused Good of interfering with the ICE operation, labeling her actions as an act of “domestic terrorism.” Witnesses present and other agencies dispute this claim;<sup>5</sup> they watch these same videos and wonder who is actually the domestic terrorist when a citizen is killed by state sanctioned violence.

***There is division in our vision...Without the Fruit of the Spirit, we are not seeing as One...***

And on Thursday, President Trump dismissed adherence to the rules and norms of international law, saying that his “own morality” is the only thing that can hold him accountable as president. This statement is deeply concerning to millions of people around the world who understand morality differently than the President does.

***There is division in our vision...Without the Fruit of the Spirit, we are not seeing as One...***

If we are *all* operating on “our own” morality, then we are not even seeking to *see* or live as

One, or as in line with something deeper or truer to our common humanity and common good. For one person’s vision will always be short-sided. As Rohr notes, “*Every viewpoint is [just that:] a view from a point [one point!], and we had best know our own. Where you start largely determines the questions you ask (or don’t ask), the trajectory you set, and the goals you hope to achieve. Truth does not appear like an apparition of low-hanging fruit in a celestial garden. It always comes wrapped in the society and historical moment that produced it. This is as true of the prophet’s writings as it is for us*”<sup>6</sup> today.

In all times, then, we have to uproot the overgrowth and decay to unearth the fruit of Truth.

Drawing on the imagery of our theme texts this year, I’d like to suggest that Prophets are Pruners. In the Vineyard of our Lives—as we dwell in, and root down in, and abide in God’s presence and as we seek to remain connected to the Vine of Christ’s Love and grow and cultivate the Fruit of the Spirit on our branches—we need

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Rohr, pg 19.

Pruners. People—ourselves and others—helping us know what is overgrowth or weeds, what is decaying or spoiling or rotting, and what is actually Good Fruit.

“In first-century viticulture (and still today), the pattern of pruning is that “Vines need training—in the ancient world either over rocks or on trellises, but in the modern world on wires. Then and now, branches need two kinds of pruning. In the spring, the new shoots will need trimming, so that the tendrils do not grow too far or too fast, thus getting the plant to put its energy into producing fruit rather than just adding more greenery [more fluff, more distraction]. This will also include [even] cutting out the smaller grape clusters, and even trimming some of the grapes out of a cluster to allow the other grapes to grow larger. The second kind of pruning happens in the fall, when the branches that are now exhausted are pruned off, leaving buds at the base which will produce [a renewed branch] that will bear fruit in the new season.”<sup>7</sup>

You see, pruning is never about cutting off a branch fully, as some interpretations have

suggested, but rather cutting branches back, so that the fruit of those branches can thrive. And the *fruit* is the focus, not the branch itself. Pruning does not exclude or eradicate; it is a loving act of guidance and growth, of encouraging health and vitality. You can never be cut off from Christ’s Vine, rest assured, but some of your overgrowth may need to be pruned.

Prophetic pruning, then, is about trimming away the fast-growing vines of pride and ego and power that wrap themselves around the Fruit of the Spirit inhibiting their growth AND it’s about pruning off some good stuff in our life that may be excessive or too much—*maybe even* our convictions and biblical interpretations and spiritual practices that have been good for a season but are no longer serving us! And—our collective laws, policies, and ways of being? They need pruning too. Pruning just one branch won’t save a Vineyard.

If you are just jumping in mid-program year with us, then you should know John 15 and Galatians 5 are our theme texts for our annual theme: *Abide &*

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<sup>7</sup> Paul, *ibid.*

*Grow: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit.* There is a whole curriculum and theme description you can study by scanning the QR code you'll find in the Service Notes section of the Order of Worship or by picking up a hard copy on the kiosk or listen to my sermon from the first week in September.

For those already familiar with our theme, as we re-orient ourselves back into this series, I want to touch on two new points from our texts, one from the Gospel and one from Galatians, that I've discovered since we began this series. The first is the context of John 15—this scripture is for a people who have just heard distressing news, and who are on the move.

In chapters 14 and 15 of John's Gospel, Jesus has shared the last supper in the Upper Room, he's washed their feet, told them he is dying, and told them he's going to prepare a place for them (something they don't understand), then tells them they don't need to be afraid, then tells them he is leaving them (again) and that he's sending the Holy Spirit (something they won't understand at that point), and then in the midst of the shock and grief of this news he

says: "*Rise, let us be on our way,*" (John 14:31).

Right after he has rocked their world with really difficult and life-altering news, Jesus invites his disciples to stand up and walk with him. To keep moving even in their shock and grief, to keep putting one foot in front of the other, even as they may not know where they are even going yet. "*We make our way by walking*" the spiritual teachers say. And this is so true. Even in times of deep grief, pain, suffering, and disillusionment, we may take a moment to breathe and process, and then we keep moving, because we still have life yet to live. If we still have breath in our lungs, we are still moving.

You see, this Vineyard imagery is not a metaphor given when "All is Well." This Abide & Grow sermon of Jesus' is not preached when the disciples are on retreat or when they have a lot of time to contemplate their spiritual formation and growth. No, there is an urgency to their days; they do not have a lot of time left with Jesus, and a key lesson and reminder in this for us is that as we abiding and dwelling in God is not about being static, it is full of

movement—growing out and pruning back.

And speaking of pruning, how DO we know what is Good Fruit? What to cut away and what to keep? That really is The Question, isn't it?

For this we turn to the Apostle Paul. And sometimes I can't believe I'm saying this, but I want to cut Paul some slack. Mostly because the thought of one of my sermons to a particular church on a particular day becoming "the Word of the Lord" 2,000 years later is terrifying. And remember, these writings of Paul were not scripture. They were just letters to churches he had started. They are snapshots in a cultural and ecclesial moment in time. Words matter and a lot of Paul's words are harmful/hurtful to many people. But it's less that Paul's words are hurtful and harmful and more that the interpretations of his context and his words are. So we have to take time to prune and cut away "a lot of stuff" in order to get to the Fruit of his writings and beliefs. And actually, there is some really good fruit in Paul's writings! Important fruit. For me, this week, *life-changing spiritual nourishment*.

In Galatians 5, Paul is actually offering us a "code of authenticity" as Rohr would put it; a guide to deeper spiritual freedom. Not a code of Right or Wrong, but a code that cultivates the most authentic qualities of what it means to live life Abiding in God and Free in the Spirit.

But unfortunately Paul uses this phrase "works of the flesh" which people interpret as "sins of the flesh" and this has messed up how we think about our bodies for a long time, as well as our sexual ethic and how it relates to shame and morality codes, etc. In other words, this passage has been read as a list of moral "right and wrongs" and as a reason to exclude people based on the "sins of the flesh," but using the scripture in this way is actually contradictory to Paul's message. Paul is trying, in all ways he knows how with the limits of the language of the time, to get the Galatian people to imagine what it is like to live in *freedom*, and not by the law.

As I shared in September, the context of the Galatian community is key. They had teachers telling them they must be circumcised as Gentiles or follow the laws of Torah, and Paul was saying, no, it's okay

for Jews if they want to do that; they can do that and follow Jesus, but for Gentiles you don't need to do that to follow Jesus. These teachers were trying to lead them back to a list of laws in the Torah to follow, rather than inviting them to live in the *spirit* of the law of the Torah. You can get at the spirit of a law that serves its purpose in one context, without having to actually follow the law in another context.

Another important contextual point about Galatians is its Greek/Hellenistic context. Please remember Paul speaks about the “flesh” in the common Hellenistic way of the day. It really has nothing to do with the *actions* of our physical body as we think of them today. We have a much more unified understanding of body/mind/soul/spirit. In Paul's day, when he says “spirit” that full understanding is what he is referring to. When he says “flesh” he's really referring to any action that draws us away from God or one another, rather than to God and toward one another. “Flesh” is a term to signify unaligned intentions or desires related to anything: heart, mind, body, or soul. It's not just about the physical body. Even in his list of the works of

the flesh, only three of that long list have anything to do with the body. The rest are about the communal body or community—how we live in relationship with one another. The difference in understanding word “flesh” (*sarx* in the Greek), then to now, is a worldview difference that unfortunately has turned into people using passages like this as the morality police. If we don't understand this context, we might assume Paul is speaking negatively about the human body and our bodily or physical desires. But that's not what he's doing. We need to prune away that interpretation to taste and see the real and good fruit underneath it.

Paul is not talking about our physical flesh, he's making a metaphor to talk about our dualistic world (alignment with God—spirit and misalignment with God—flesh), and he's giving us an invitation to not live in this dualism but to “see as one,” if you will, by making a qualitative shift in how we think about our living.

And this qualitative shift is all about where Paul places the Fruit of the Spirit and how he uses them to flip an ancient understanding on its head and

redefine the moral code for our life. This was a MAJOR epiphany for me this week. And I hope it's as helpful for you as it is for me.

What I learned is that when Paul lists out all of these “works of the flesh,” most of which, again, aren't about the “flesh” as we think of it (the body), this is not a list specific to Galatian behavior or things they were struggling with. This is not a list that Paul is just writing off the top of his head either. This was *a common list* in Hellenistic culture. Paul employs a literary genre which scholars have come to call a “Catalogue of Vices and Virtues.” This catalogue includes common ethical lists from Hellenistic philosophy. The history of the catalogue form can be traced back at least to Plato's Hades myth and in New Testament times, ethical lists of this kind were enormously popular. You can find them in Wisdom Literature, in Philo, in Gnosticism, in the Nag Hammadi text.<sup>8</sup>

As one scholar notes, “Without much difficulty they could be adapted to the various philosophical and religious

schools of thought. Therefore, we find them in various forms and contexts and with various functions... “In the many catalogues which we find in the New Testament and in the Apostolic Fathers little effort to introduce specifically Christian concepts can be detected. The catalogues differ greatly in length, in the order of concepts, and in their transmission in the textual tradition. There was apparently little interest in completeness, systematization, or creativity. The reason was probably that the catalogues sum up the conventional morality of the time. Christianity was interested in that morality to the extent that Christian existence should not be ‘against the conventions.’” (Gal 5:23).<sup>9</sup>

And once you know that this is not a specifically Christian list or a list of specific concerns that Paul has about the Galatians behavior then the phrase “*Now the works of the flesh are obvious*” makes so much more sense. This was common cultural knowledge of that day. Things people just accepted and the moral guidelines of a culture, not of a religion. If

<sup>8</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979, pg 282.

<sup>9</sup> Betz, pg 282.

something is “obvious,” it means it’s culturally accepted and known. Even the style of writing in these middle verses of this passage are weird and different; they do not sound like Paul. He is simply copying and pasting a list of Greek ‘vices’ that are commonly looked down upon that day. Even his sentence “those who do these things will not inherit the kingdom of God” does not sound like Paul’s typical writing at all. He doesn’t use the concept of “inherit” or the concept of the “kingdom of God.” He is borrowing language here to set up a contrast to what he really wants to say. To the part that is NEW—which is such liberating and freeing and GOOD news for us!

And that is that the Fruit of the Spirit is a whole new concept, the spiritual concept that Paul is introducing. But he’s introducing it in the context of a moral code—the Catalogue of Vices (works of the flesh) where people would then expect to hear a Catalogue of Virtues next, things like: abstinence (from sex and alcohol), truth-telling, forgiving, praying, honoring father and mother, etc. But he doesn’t do that.

First, do you notice the Catalogue of Vices (works of the flesh) is a chaotic assemblage of concepts, while the list in the spot where the “Catalogue of Virtues” would be (the Fruit of the Spirit) is well-ordered? That distinction alone represents “the dualism between the chaotic multitude of evils and the unity of the Spirit.”<sup>10</sup>

*Even more*, the “Catalogue of Vices” or “Works of the Flesh” lists very *specific behaviors or actions*, things that you do or do not do. Whereas, in his version of the “Catalogue of Virtues,” Paul flips the script and does not list a bunch of behaviors or things we SHOULD do...things that we can check off of a list like: be circumcised, eat kosher, follow this law, or do this thing. Instead, Paul uses this format that Greek culture would have been familiar with of setting up a contrast between Vices and Virtues, but **instead of delineating more quantitative behaviors, Paul offers us qualitative descriptors of what a life living in the Spirit, “at one” with God, aligned with God’s hearts and desires, looks like.**

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<sup>10</sup> Betz, pg 283.

Paul upends what the Galatian listener would be expecting, and does not give us a list of “Virtues” to follow; Paul gives us a list of qualities of what life looks like when we are actually abiding in God’s and walking in step with Christ’s life and love and ministry: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. **“There is no law against such things,”** Paul says. That’s when I had a HUGE aha moment this week. There is no law against such things, because there cannot be a law against these things. These are not behaviors to adjudicate in the court of law. They are attitudes and postures of the heart to shape our lives and communities by.

To circle back to John 15, we are able to produce *this kind of fruit* by abiding in the Spirit continually, by becoming One with God’s vision and love. It’s a life-long practice, not a one and done decision. These are not ‘virtues’ or ‘behaviors’ we check off a list.

This discovery—of moving from quantitative behaviors we can judge to qualitative postures of the heart that we experience, descriptors of a life lived in unity with God—makes me

really appreciate what Paul is doing here. He’s giving us a whole new way to define a ‘moral compass’ or a ‘code of Christ’ or a ‘code of authentic living in the spirit.’ Rather than behaviors to judge as right or wrong, he’s giving us qualities to look for.

The **Fruit of the Spirit**, then, become **indicators of how close or far we are from the kin-dom of God. Which is really our calling as Christians, isn’t it? To co-create the kin-dom of God. Not to judge behavior or moral or immoral, right or wrong.** It’s like that game you play when you’re a kid. Someone is trying to guide you in a direction and if they say you’re getting cooler or you’re ice cold, you know you are far from the object or destination. If they say you are getting warmer, you’re closer, but if you’re hot – then you’re there!

The Fruit of the Spirit give us a completely different moral framework in which to evaluate Right and Wrong. The Fruit of the Spirit are tools for pruning our vision and growth as co-creators of God’s kin-dom, rather than measuring sticks (as vices or virtues would be) for moral judgment or being a Bad Guy or Good Guy.

We are so trained to always look for where the fault is and make sure WE are on the side of the good guys, so to speak. But remember, our viewpoint is a view from *one point*, and before we define who is good or bad, we must remember that *all people* are beloved and created in God's image. So instead of casting a moral judgement of right or wrong, or who is good or who is bad, which may leave you stuck in righteous anger or rage, or finger pointing at another side, or just stuck in grief or apathy, Paul is giving us an invitation and an instruction for how we re-order our moral vision and how we co-create the kin-dom of God here on earth.

This re-orientation to a "code of authenticity" or living in the Spirit, has already proven itself to be fruitful and freeing for me this week. Let me explain how I've used it in real life examples.

It's been tiring and distressing, for me and probably you too, to look at the ICE shooting with Renée Good and hear two completely different interpretations of the same videos. And in large part, the interpretations are based on what you already think about

ICE or immigration, about the right to protest, about the use of force in law enforcement, about self-defense, and so on and so forth. We interpret incidents like this based on the convictions we already hold. In this framework, we go back and forth and different people can interpret things differently with their own moral guidelines or political beliefs, etc.

But what if we stop trying to adjudicate this incident as who is in the right or who is in the wrong, and instead watch it and ask ourselves, where do I see the Fruit of the Spirit here? DO I see the Fruit of the Spirit here? As I watch this video, where is self-control? Do I see peace? Is what I am watching kind? Is it good? Is it loving? And if I see those things then it doesn't actually matter who is right or wrong, all that matters is that I know it is leading us closer to the kin-dom of God. If, however, I do NOT see or experience the Fruit of the Spirit, then I know we are taking steps away from the kin-dom of God. And in that case, then yes, probably policies and laws and things need to be examined in order to ensure that next time we are moving toward the kin-dom of God...but it's a

collective examination, not an individual indictment.

Looking for where we see and experience the Fruit of the Spirit Is a point of view NOT based on policies or party, but based on the qualities of God's spirit, and thus the qualities we show forth in our lives when we are living and dwelling in that love. We don't have to know all the information about a situation or understand the training of ICE or whether Renée Good had a right to park her vehicle the way she did or which way she turned her wheels.

I knew immediately in my gut watching that video. This is wrong. This is horrific. This is NOT love. This is NOT self-control. This is NOT patience. This is NOT kind. And it's not about sides, it's about the grief that is dripping off the entire incident. For the system of ICE, the officer who shot Good, the life lost in Good, Good's wife witnessing, the physician trying to help, the immigrants that were trying to be protected. All of it. Full of grief. And what transpired, as a whole, was a HUGE step back from the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. And that's actually all I need to know to know what I need to think about this as a

Christian. It's all I need to know to know how to act. We must change our policies, change our ways of being, so that human life is not destroyed by bullets. So that people do not need to protect human life with cars. So that officers do not feel torn on when to shoot or not shoot. All of it. All of it is miles away from the kin-dom of God.

I invite you to try viewing the world through the lens of the Fruit of the Spirit this week. When you find yourself in a tough situation that you are thinking through, when you see a news story that enrages you because people do not see what you see, when you read about a policy that is being passed, or when you are listening to a friend vent about their problems—rather than going into “right or wrong” mode OR “whose fault is this or isn't this” mode, **try turning from quantitative moral judgements to *qualitative Spirit observations* and ask yourself: In this situation or in this encounter or in this policy or in this new story...where do I see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control?**

If you can identify those qualities in a situation or story or policy, then you know this is *Good Fruit*. We want more of this. This is fruit that is attached to a deeper vine than oneself. This is fruit that has come from a sense of abiding and dwelling in the presence of the Holy and the sacredness of all life. This is fruit of the new creation, the re-creation of the kin-dom of God.

But if you look at a situation or a new story or replay a conversation you had or a disagreement that you were in, and you *cannot* easily identify these qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control—then perhaps that is a clear signal that these behaviors or policies or ways of speaking or acting in the world are *not* of the Spirit or reflective of God’s nature or love. They are *not* helping us create the kin-dom of God on earth as it is in heaven. Which is OUR calling by the way—to create the kin-dom of God on EARTH as it is in heaven.

So if the conversation or encounter or experience is does not reveal the Fruit of the Spirit, then at that point, we can say, okay, this means policies need to change, systems need to be

revamped, our actions and behaviors need to be re-shaped.

It can be exhausting to try to judge all sides of a situation or a news story and try to find the truth in the midst of it, especially when Truth or fact-finding is not a value of many of our news sources or our leadership. But it can be clarifying and life-giving to look at an encounter and say: Where is peace here? Where is self-control here? Where is patience? Where is love? Where is kindness? It’s a very clear rubric. And depending on whether or not I see those qualities or not, I know all I need to know about whether it is a direction that God is calling our country (or any country) to go in or not. God will always be calling us to Live by the Fruit of the Spirit. And so, as we live our lives and evaluate our own actions and the actions of others, the Fruit of the Spirit is a wonderful litmus test for that.

This way of seeing is VERY different then the way of seeing that our world asks of us. So it’s going to take a lot of practice. It will feel fruitless and counter-intuitive at times. But I encourage you to keep at it. Keep asking, where are the Fruit of the Spirit present in this

decision or direction? In this person or this policy?

No matter what the law says or what I think the law says, distill it down: where is love? Where is peace? Where is kindness? Or calling as Christians is not living by the law, it is finding freedom in the Spirit and unleashing that freedom for all creation.

As I've learned through the legal process in the last few years, laws and policies can be defended and argued right or wrong from a lot of different vantage points and perspectives. Truth gets really murky in that system. But it is clarifying to simply ask: where in this do I see peace? Are the people in this situation exercising self-control? Are they being kind to one another? Is this a policy that uplifts goodness and generosity towards others? Who is speaking with patience and kindness? Who is living with joy?

So for me this week, the Fruit of the Spirit have been a balm for my soul in terms of letting go of my need to know all the facts in a situation in order to make a "judgement" as to whether something is lawful or not. I'm tired of justifications when

trauma is clearly telling me *this is not right*. When my gut speaks to me, my intuition of violence being horrific, that's my authentic human experience crying out. Regardless of the 'reason' that this happened, I can objectively say: this is not love. This is not peace. This is not self-control. This is not of the Spirit of God. Rather than evaluating if someone has a "right" to do this or that, it's a whole other exercise to look with curiosity as to how someone is (or isn't) displaying kindness or patience, love or self-control? Then it's not about facts or laws, it's about the community and life we are cultivating together. Are we creating the kin-dom of God, the new creation and way of being in the world that is full of these nine Fruit of the Spirit or are we not?

I know I'm being repetitive here, but this is such a new learning for me that I am working out this new thinking for me with you, even as a preach it. Everything becomes quite clarifying under this lens.

If we can stop seeing new stories as something on the Left or the Right, or whether something is part of your political party or not—and

rather look at the humanity and the people involved and say, how was kindness shown? Where is joy or peace in this policy? Where is goodness or patience in their response?— then I think we will come a long way into living the kingdom of God. A new creation that is not based on quantitative right or wrong, but the qualitative Fruit of the Spirit, which is freeing.

Let the Fruit of the Spirit be your Moral Compass. Not a Catalogue of Vices or Virtues, or a list of accepted laws, but a listening to and looking for these deep and rooted qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Let the Fruit of the Spirit serve as your tool, or lens, for pruning. Pruning is a spiritual practice for us as individuals and it is a prophetic call for us ALL: to create a communal ethic and to co-create the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. Perhaps it is obvious to say this, but sometimes I need to be reminded of it: the laws of the United States, or any country, are NOT the laws of God. They just aren't. Some may reflect the Fruit of the Spirit, some may not. It is these

nine Fruit that lead us closer to God, not any law.

Part of pruning is having the moral courage to call out what is wrong in our world, again and again and again. There is a collective prophetic task that we *all have*; it is not just for one special person or prophet. It is for all of us. We ARE the prophets we are looking for.

My mentor and pastor George Mason reminded me of Dr. Seuss's children's book *Horton Hears a Who!* this week. "The gentle elephant Horton spots an entire village of virtually invisible people living on a speck of dust. Whoville is threatened by other animals who don't believe Horton's word. The Mayor of Whoville organizes the community to make as loud a noise as possible to signal to the animals that they really do exist and must be protected, because as Horton says, "*a person's a person, no matter how small.*" All the screaming citizens of Whoville, along with all their clanging instruments, still could not be heard. Until one Who named Jo-Jo is found, who has been thus far silent. When Jo-Jo at last lets out his mighty *Yop!* in concert

with all the others, Whoville is heard and saved.”<sup>11</sup>

“If you are feeling small and helpless and are having trouble facing forward with hope, remember what Mother Teresa once said: “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love”— [or with great joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control.] Like Jo-Jo, add your Yop! Find your voice. Live into this new creation. Who knows what new you will become in the process? [A pruning prophet, perhaps?] And a *new you* may just be enough for others to see and hear the new creation coming to be, too.”<sup>12</sup>

Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> George A. Mason, “What’s Old Is (Re)New(ed)!” *Faith Commons* (8 Jan. 2026), accessed on January 11,

2026 at <https://faithcommons.org/whats-old-is-renewed/#new-creation-before-us>.

<sup>12</sup> Mason, *ibid.*