

Scripture Reading and Rev. Rita Message July 25

What does a community look like that is living out its call to be the “people of God?” What does it look like to be a community who is believing, receiving, becoming God’s love?

Paul answered that question in his letter to the Galatians. He wrote about the fruit of the spirit: “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

Paul of the New Testament was tireless in his efforts to share that good news of Jesus Christ with everyone he met. He did that in person and he did it with letters.

The New Testament contains 13 letters attributed to Paul, 7 of which are thought to be, without question, authentic. This morning’s scripture reading was a letter Paul wrote about 50 A.D. to the Galatian churches located in what we would know as modern Turkey.

When Paul wrote his letters, it was at a time when the Christians had not started writing down their recollections of the life of Jesus and the meaning of his death and resurrection. What we know as the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were just in the very early stages of being written down. The teachings and stories of Jesus were shared by word of mouth.

Paul travelled throughout Asia Minor and Europe. In the wake of these journeys, many faith communities were started. Paul could not always stay for long periods of time so he often dispatched emissaries and wrote letters to these new Christians.

Paul’s letters recalled the shared experiences that they had together. Like online today’s gatherings, it was the next best thing to being there. The letters served multiple functions. They bridged the distance between Paul and the churches, and they served as a vehicle to praise, encourage, advise, console and remind them about what it meant to follow the teachings of Jesus.

Paul had no doubts that when we live in God’s way that God would bring gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard --- things like affection for others, exuberance about life, a sense of compassion in the heart, and serenity.

We share many things in common with those small churches from long ago. Just like them, God calls us – Balzac United Church- to be a community of people loved by God and learning to love God and neighbor more fully.

In the days to come, may God bless us with many opportunities to share the fruit of the spirit.

Thanks be to God! Amen.