

“Handle with Care: Fruit Upon Fruit”

Micah 6:6-8; Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16; Galatians 5:22-23 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – May 31, 2026

Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we might each receive the fruit of the Spirit as you see our need and our calling. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

It is still very red in here today! At Vista La Mesa, we celebrate Pentecost as a season, not just one day, because it stretches from the Day of Pentecost through the last Sunday of June, when we call upon the Spirit to be present as we consecrate the lay leaders who will be serving in the upcoming ministry year that starts on July first. That is what makes it possible to have a Pentecost sermon series, as we have six weeks of this fiery Holy Spirit glory. It's a blessing to have Pentecost right around the time of year when we are focused on the “business” of the congregation. On June 14, we will have our annual meeting, when all of us are asked to weigh in on decisions that are proposed to share the coming ministry year. And then on the 28th, we will install the officers and committee chairs and elders and deacons who will help guide our beloved church into the future. Doing all that with a heightened awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence and power is vital.

So our focus, in these weeks, is on spiritual maturity. Each week, we will re-read those words from Ephesians 4, with a special emphasis on the end of verse 13, where the writer calls us to come “to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” This series is about helping all of us “promote the body's growth in building

itself up in love.” And that last bit might help explain why. You might be wondering why a series on spiritual maturity seemed timely to your pastor. Let me assure you that all is well with our lay leaders; this series has not been prompted by any shenanigans happening here at Vista La Mesa. I am so grateful for the grace and wisdom of our leaders here and blessed to be working with all of you.

However, I also think that we are in a moment when we may be poised for growth, and that we need to be ready for the new challenges that growth could bring. A church like ours is most likely to receive new members who come from other congregations, rather than people who are brand new to church completely. And if someone has left another congregation, there is usually a reason. Those folks may be coming from a situation where church conflict erupted and wasn’t handled well. They may have trauma or other issues that aren’t fully worked through yet. And we need to be prepared to be a steady place for them to land. The spiritual maturity of our leaders and, really, all of us is a huge part of what makes that possible.

So let’s think of these weeks as a time to focus on our own spiritual fitness, for the good of our common life. As we get to know what spiritual maturity looks like, we will also get better at recognizing when behavior that doesn’t meet those standards emerges and understanding how we need to respond. I want to make a note here to say that we are not all on our own in this. Some of what we will be covering in the next few weeks is inspired by a document from Disciples Home Missions titled

“Ethical Guidelines for Congregational Conduct.”¹ And while mostly, we’ll be looking at how that document teaches us to relate to one another, we should also pause for a moment to absorb the other lesson it offers. Because that document starts with a section about “Our Relationship as Members to One Another,” but it keeps going, through relationships to our church leaders, our ministers, our community and country, other churches in our community, the denomination, and the church universal.

Ethical, healthy, holy, fruitful relationships are not just important for the ones with people we interact with regularly. We often describe Vista La Mesa as a “Micah 6:8 church,” where we take the scriptural teaching “to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God” seriously. This series is, in many ways, about the “loving kindness” part of that command. But one could argue that the difference between kindness and justice is really just one of scale or context. Each of the interpersonal, congregational issues we will explore in the coming weeks is something that could be scaled up and recognized as a justice issue in a global sense as well. Consistency is part of integrity, which is central to spiritual maturity. A congregation that is perfectly ethical in its dealings with its members and ministers might be nice community to be part of, but I’m not convinced it would really qualify as a church, if those behaviors did not also manifest in its relations with its community and beyond.

¹ https://cdn.disciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/06162724/Ethical_Guidelines_for_Congregational_Conduct.pdf?_gl=1*fb0owv*_ga*MTY5MzQ2MjUzOC4xNzc4OTcxNzUz*_ga_KNQ4DTJE17*czE3Nzg5NzE3NTMkbzEkZzAkdDE3Nzg5NzE3NTMkajYwJGwwJGgw

So let's get into this. If we're going to talk about spiritual maturity, we need to know what it is. I thought we could start with the fruit of the Spirit, that well-known list of virtues from Galatians 5. Feel free to open your Bibles back up to page 191 in the New Testament, if you want to have them handy. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It's a good list. There is some overlap with our theme scripture from Ephesians 4. But let's be clear: the writer here is not trying to say that these are the only virtues worth pursuing or the only ones that qualify as gifts of the Spirit. I wonder what you might add to the list? Spiritual maturity seems like it might be one of those things that is hard to define, but we know it when we see it. I'm guessing that for many folks, it's most easily explained by talking about a particular person who exemplifies spiritual maturity for you. So I want you to take a moment and think about who that might be. It doesn't have to be someone who is perfect; we all have our moments. But is there a moment in your memory when someone stood tall in the face of messy circumstances and led with the compassion of Christ? What were the attributes that stuck out to you about that person?

I've thought of a few I would add to the list of Fruit of the Spirit, and you may have other ideas. [slide] Here are the ones I would suggest: integrity, honesty, humility, courage, wisdom, and grace. Take a moment and ponder all that, and then, if you would, turn to a neighbor and tell them about the virtue that you're thinking about and, if there is one, the person who exemplified it in your experience.

Zoomers, I hope you will type your thoughts and stories into the chat box, in conversation with one another. [...]

So what do you think? Spiritual maturity is...? Any particular insights you'd like to share? Or people you'd like to lift up?

Many of us have been through conflicts or crises, at church or at work, and sometimes even in our families. Conflicts and crises are when spiritual maturity becomes most necessary and sometimes most obvious. You may start thinking about those experiences over the next few weeks and reflecting on what you learned, both from good examples and possibly from bad examples. We will be looking at some stories from scripture, some of which will offer us wisdom and some of which are basically cautionary tales. Either way there's something to learn, right? And learning is how we grow. And growing is how we move toward maturity and help to build up the body in love.

I am grateful to be on this journey with you. I am grateful for the people who will be able to arrive here and know that they have found a community that is loving and honest and trustworthy. I am grateful for the Holy Spirit that shapes us in this continual process of becoming more and more Christ-like. May we open ourselves – our hearts and our minds and our souls – to the influence of this Spirit of Love. Hallelujah and Amen.