

Good fruit (Galatians 5:1, 13-25)

What does freedom in Christ taste like?

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Grapes take the bus.

In college, friends of mine invented a game of deciding what mode of transportation various kinds of fruits would use if they traveled. Maybe bananas ride bikes? Sure. Pears prefer limousines. OK. Can you imagine a cantaloupe driving a speedboat? It's a stretch. What everyone could agree upon was that grapes take the bus. Clearly.

Sunday school explorations of Galatians 5 have landed in similar territory. What kind of fruit would exemplify each of the virtues in Paul's list of the fruits of the Spirit? Personally, I think generosity looks like a big, ripe watermelon. Self-control might be, hmm, lemons?

It's silly. But sometimes childlike play and silliness can be the beginning of reverent contemplation.

Paul wants us to move about the world in ways that bear love toward our neighbors. To invite us into that mode of transportation, he speaks profoundly good news: Christ has set us free. We are set free. Like the tastiest pomegranate jewels, these words dazzle on the tongue as they nourish. We need to eat them, take them into our bodies, and let them guide us. We need to ingest this good news. Otherwise, we may distort God's word and end up consuming each other.

Christ has set us free. Let that news move in you for a moment. What does freedom in Christ taste like? How does it move us to act?

How is Christ's freedom different on our tongues than other cultural messages about freedom, messages that too easily become words of hate? Or a grasping onto privilege?

Good fruit is fruit that is shared; it is not for self-indulgence. Far too often the cry for freedom is shouted loudest by those who don't want their privileges hampered by their neighbor's needs. Freedom is misused to bless practices that splinter community. Hoarded fruit rots.

Likewise, hoarded freedom turns us sour. Obsessed with protecting our corner, we can be quite rotten to one another. And we can get stuck there, unable to move.

Christ's gift of freedom is different. Freedom from fear, sin, death, and oppression moves us toward the sharing of fruit that builds community. Love of neighbor and the gift of freedom in Christ are so linked for Paul that they become one and the same. He envisions a people guided by the Spirit freely bearing fruit for the sake of others. In Christ, coercion, strife, and shame are cast aside. Our way in the world—be it by wheels or wings or a lifetime of footsteps—will be love.

Mangoes ride the train, by the way.