

*Fruit of the Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace*

Stories by Fred Craddock, presented by Bill Chadwick

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Mary, Judy and I chose the theme of our Sundays during Lent: the fruit of the Spirit as Paul enumerates in Galatians 3:23: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” That is the result we see in our own lives as we live in the Spirit of Christ, let Christ live through us.

Each week we will look at one or more of these attributes. This week I have the pleasant task of helping us think on the topics of love, joy, peace. As my illness continued into mid-week, I realized that the chances of me crafting a sermon that was even slightly intelligible were diminishing each day. So I threw a lifeline to one of America’s great preachers, Fred Craddock, who with his southern drawl and homespun manner has charmed millions. (LeRoy and Jane Horn knew him in college.)

I’m going to share with you a number of stories, most from Craddock (*Craddock Stories*, Chalice Press, 2001), but one from our own Presbyterian Mission Yearbook from a week or so ago.

Love/Joy/Peace can almost be used interchangeably. I’m going to share a couple stories of love, then we will do some music, then a few stories of Joy, followed by the pastoral prayer and offering and anthem, followed by two more stories of peace.

## LOVE

My mother took us to church and Sunday school; my father didn’t go. He complained about Sunday dinner being late when she came home. Sometimes the preacher would call, and my father would say, “I know what the church wants. Church doesn’t care about me. Church wants another name, another pledge, another name, another pledge. Right? Isn’t that the name of it? Another name, another pledge.” That’s what he always said....I guess I heard it a thousand times.

One time he didn’t say it. He was in the veteran’s hospital, and he was down to seventy-three pounds. They’d taken out his throat, and said, “It’s too late.” They put in a metal tube, and X-rays burned him to pieces. I flew in to see him. He couldn’t

He couldn't speak, couldn't eat. I looked around the room, potted plants and cut flowers on all the windowsills, a stack of cards twenty inches deep beside his bed. And even that tray where they put food, if you can eat, no that was a flower. And all the flowers beside the bed, every card, every blossom, were from persons or groups from the church.

He saw me read a card. He could not speak, so he took a Kleenex box and wrote on the side of it a line from Shakespeare...He wrote: "In this harsh world, draw your breath in pain to tell my story."

I said, "What is your story, Daddy?"

And he wrote, "I was wrong."

(This next one is from the Presbyterian Mission Yearbook)

*Mildred Grady was an earnest African-American teacher and librarian who worked at a high school in Arkansas in the 1950s. One of her students was a truant shoplifting senior named Olly Neal. One day, he wandered into the school library and was drawn to a book—The Treasure of Pleasant Valley by Frank Yerby. Because Olly didn't want to be thought of as someone who would ever check out a library book, he swiped it. A new world opened. Later, when he sneaked it back onto the library shelf, he discovered there was another Yerby book he had not noticed before. He took that one, too. The pattern continued, with Olly swiping, reading, returning, discovering. Enough, of course, for a conversion to occur. A reader was born.*

*Only years later did Olly Neal—the first African-American to be appointed district prosecuting attorney in Arkansas, then judge, then appellate court judge—find out the truth. Mrs. Grady (the librarian) had seen him take that first book. She had driven 70 miles to Memphis to see if she could find another book by that same author. At the class reunion where Olly and Mrs. Grady finally compared notes, she told him how excited she had been to see him swipe that second book.*

(Rachel Hunter, Director of Racial Equity & Women's Intercultural Ministries, Presbyterian Mission Agency.)

## JOY

When I was in Cincinnati, I met a lot of people I was glad to see, and a few I didn't really care to see again, but there they were. One of them was a fellow in one of the

churches in the Midwest; I'll not identify him any further. Grumpy sort. A controlling man—that was the problem I had with him. I gave Bible studies and preached in his church lots of times. He's a layman in the church, and a sort of controller, a very controlling man, one of those people that act like they're in the background—"Well, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know"—but they're really in charge. He controls his family, controls his kids, controls his grandkids, controls the whole family, controls the church, but acts like, "I don't know, I don't know." But he did.

I saw him coming. There was nowhere to go. I shook hands with him and said, "How're you doing?"

He said, "I'm doing all right."

I didn't recognize him—I didn't recognize him. I said, "How's the church?"

He said, "Better than we've ever been."

"Really?"

And this is what he said, "God is at work in our church."

I've never heard him say anything like that; I've just heard him criticize. "God is at work in our church." I said, "That is wonderful."

He said, "We're in better shape spiritually and in every way than we've ever been in my memory."

"That is wonderful! Who is your minister?"

He said, "We have a woman." He never did give me her name. He said, "We have a woman."

I said, "You do?"

"Yeah. I voted against her, and all my family voted against her, but we got outnumbered."

"And..."

He said, “I was wrong. I was wrong in my estimation of women.” And then he looked at me and said, “Brother Fred, if I was wrong about her, I was probably wrong about a lot of other stuff.”

Isn't that great? Finally, he met the gospel, broke the pattern, and he was making a new way.

*I recall once on a plane on a flight to Denver, and I was seated in the no smoking section, as is my custom. I was seated on the aisle, and across from me was a man who pulled a long black cigar out of his pocket. You're not supposed to smoke at all (in the no smoking section), much less cigars, and he had one of those long black ones made out of gunpowder and gunnysack and stuff. He lit that thing up and was filling the plane with smoke, so I stopped the flight attendant, in this case a very attractive young woman, and I said, “Am I in the wrong section? I asked for no smoking.”*

*She replied, “This is no smoking,” and then said to him, “Uh, sir, this is no smoking.” He didn't say a word; he went right on. She went on down the aisle to attend to other matters, and when she came back, I said, “He's still smoking. It's terrible here.” She said to him, “Sir, you're not even supposed to smoke cigarettes, here, you're not...this is the no smoking...you should be in the smoking section.” He didn't even stop, just went right on. I was boiling mad.*

*So later on, when we got out over the Rocky Mountains, she was coming down the aisle with a tray of pop and things, and we hit turbulence over the mountains, as frequently is the case. She was just between us when, I don't know, we hit air pockets or whatever the term is, and she went over with those drinks, and they went into his lap. Then, in an effort to correct herself, she fell back into my lap. Now, don't tell me there's no God...God really shouted there.*

I recall some years ago in a church, I was visiting on a Sunday afternoon, a van pulled up in the church parking lot, and a bunch of young people got out. They looked like thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, maybe up to eighteen years old. I think there were ten or twelve young people who belonged to that church. They got out with bedrolls. It was the awfulest looking bunch of kids you've ever seen, something like the cat (had drug in). They were really in bad shape. I said, “What is this” They had just returned from a work mission. They named the place where they went. In one week, those young people, along with other young people, had built a little church for a community. They were beat. Aw, they looked terrible.

They were sitting on their bags out there waiting for their parents to come. I said to one of the boys, I said, “You tired?” And he said, “Whew—am I tired!” Then he said, “This is the best tired I’ve ever felt.”

Now that’s what joy is. Do you feel that? “This is the best tired I’ve ever felt.”...The best tired there is, is called in your Bible, joy.

## PEACE

*Up near me, at Fannin County Hospital, ministers around take turns being chaplain for the week. I took my turn, and the week I was on watch, there was a baby born. Not a lot born in that little bitty thirty-bed hospital. But I went there, it was about nine o'clock in the morning, and I saw all these people gathered, looking through the glass. There was that little bitty new baby, and it looked like a clan of people gathered around. I said, “What is it, boy or girl?”*

*“It’s a girl.”*

*“What’s the name?”*

*“Elizabeth.”*

*“Who’s the father?” A man in the back said,) “I’m the father.”*

*I said, “Baby’s name Elizabeth?”*

*“Yeah.”*

*“Beautiful baby.” She was squirming—you couldn’t hear through the glass—but she was squirming and red faced, and all like that. I thought maybe he might be concerned, and I said, “Now, she’s not sick. It’s good for babies to scream and do all that. It clears out their lungs and gets their voices going. It’s all right.” He said, “Oh, I know she’s not sick. But she’s mad as hell.” And then he said, “Pardon me, Reverend.” I said, “That’s all right. Why’s she mad?”*

*He said, “Well, wouldn’t you be mad? One minute you’re with God in heaven and the next minute you’re in Georgia.”*

*Well, I thought, Man, I've got myself a real...Gnostic here on my hands. This guy's been reading Plato. I said, "You believe she was with God before she came here?"*

*He said, "Oh, yeah."*

*I said, "You think she'll remember?"*

*He said, "Well, that's up to her mother and me. It's up to the church. We've got to see that she remembers, 'cause if she forgets, she's a goner."*

When I was a kid on the farm, my sister and my brothers and I would play hide-and-seek. We would play that in the country, for it doesn't cost anything. We grew tired of it, but we played it. You remember how it goes. One person is "It." Whoever is "It" hides their eyes, counts to a hundred and then says, "Coming, ready or not," and you're supposed to be hidden. Then the person who's "It" comes looking and tries to beat the first one found back to the base in order to touch the base three times and say, "You're It." Then the other person is "It."

My sister was "It." When my sister was "It," she cheated. Well, she started off honestly enough; she would say, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, ninety-three, ninety-four." But I had a place under the porch and under the steps of the porch. Because of my size, I could get under there, and I knew she'd never find me. "Ninety-nine, one hundred. Here I come, ready or not." Here she came, in the house, out of the house, in the weeds, in the trees, down to the corncrib, in the barn. She couldn't find me. I almost gave myself away, down under there just snickering to myself, *She'll never find me here, she'll never find me here.* Then it occurred to me...she 'd never find me here. So after a while I would stick out a toe. When she came by and saw my toe, she said, "Uh, oh, I see you," and she'd run back, touch the base three times, and say, "Ha ha, you're it, you're 'it'." I would come out brushing myself off saying, "Oh, shoot, you found me."

What did I want? What did I really want?...

(From Pastor Bill) We want to be found. And we are found. And we have the charge to go out and find the lost. Amen?