

[Guess the Fruit Game]

The seed game is silly because it's pretty much impossible to guess. Unless you happen to be a botanist or an expert gardener, there's no way to look at a seed and know what kind of fruit will grow from it. And yet, as we will see today, the Bible tells us that the life of God, the life Jesus described as "truly life", is a life in which we live as though we can taste the fruit, even though we can only see the seeds.

We're in a three-week series called ELEMENTAL, where we're exploring the basic building blocks of a fully human life. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul tells us that, "Three things will last forever - faith, hope and love - and the greatest of these is love." -- 1 Corinthians 13:13

Last week we looked at hope: Hope is believing God's promises are true, even when it doesn't seem like they are. This week, we're going to look at faith.

What is faith? How is it different from hope? Fortunately, another writer defines faith for us. Hebrews 11:1 tells us: "Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see." -- Hebrews 11:1

Let me show you a more accurate translation, one that highlights how challenging, difficult, hard faith is: "Faith is the reality of what we hope for and the evidence of what we don't see." -- Hebrews 11:1

Faith is the *reality* of what we hope for. We don't hope for things that are real. We just have them. If you have a good teacher at school, you don't hope for a good teacher. You just have one. You only hope for a good teacher if you have a mean teacher.

You don't hope for a million dollars if you have a million dollars. You just have a million dollars. (Ask kids - do you have a million dollars?) You only hope for a million dollars if you don't have it.

You don't hope for a good marriage if you have a good marriage. You don't hope for a fulfilling job if you have one. You don't hope for healing if you're healthy.

We *hope* for what's not real, not tangible, not present. But Hebrews says that faith is the reality of what we hope for. Huh?

The next phrase is similar: Faith is the evidence of what we don't see. But evidence *is* what we can see. When you gather "evidence", you're gathering what you can sense with your 5 senses. And Hebrews says faith is the evidence of what we *can't* see. Faith is the reality of what we hope for.

If Hope is believing God's promises are true, even when it doesn't seem like it, then faith is *acting* on those promises. Faith is living as though God's promises are true, even if they don't *feel* true.

That doesn't sound right, does it? We so often equate faith with feeling. Many of us come to church so we feel something - a connection to God, a positive swell in our chests. When we're scared or stressed or confused, we say a prayer and *feel* better.

[Faith = feelings vs. faith > feelings] It's natural for us to think of faith as something we feel. And there is an emotional component to faith. But a faith that rests entirely on feelings is dangerously shallow. Think of a friendship that was only a friendship as long as no one was mad at each other - that's not a real friend. Think of a marriage that split when things got hard - that's not real love. No, faith, according to the Bible, is not based on feelings. Faith *includes* feelings, but faith is not *equal* to feelings.

Faith is measured in how we live. Do we act like God's promises are true? Even if they haven't been fulfilled yet? Are we living as though God is faithful?

[Scripture Slide] If you have a Bible, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15. This is a couple of chapters after Paul told us that faith, hope and love will last forever. The whole book of 1 Corinthians is written to a very dysfunctional church. And for every problem they're facing, Paul keeps coming back to Jesus' resurrection. Why can the Corinthians trust that God's way really leads to life, even when it doesn't seem like it? Why can the trust God's plan for how to deal with conflict, God's plan for sexual ethics, God's economic policies? Because God raised Jesus from the dead.

Here in chapter 15, Paul is bringing all his arguments in the whole book to a head. Chapter 15 is all about Jesus' resurrection. Paul describes Jesus' resurrection as a down payment, a sneak preview of what's to come. Paul knows we have questions - remember, it's not reality yet. We can't see it yet. So here's what he says:

Someone may ask, "How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?" What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn't grow into a plant unless it dies first. And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting. Then God gives it the new body he wants it to have.
-- 1 Corinthians 15:35-38

Paul acknowledges that we don't know what it will look like when God's promises are fulfilled. How could we? It's like playing the "Guess the Fruit" game when you're not a botanist or gardener.

But for Paul, it doesn't matter that we don't know exactly what the fruit will look like. He challenges us to live as though we can already taste that fruit.

When our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless. -- 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

We already have victory over sin and death through our Lord, Jesus Christ. So now, let us be strong and immovable. In other words, Jesus' resurrection that this world of seeds isn't the End. God is giving life to everyone, and we're going to be transformed.

While we wait, while we live in a world of seeds, we're to live as though we can already taste the fruit. We're to live as though God's promises are already fulfilled.

At school, you don't only obey good teachers - you obey even mean teachers because you're really showing your faith to God, not to that mean teacher. Because you're living like you can already taste the fruit, even though you only have the seed.

[Picture of Ryan as a kid] Fruit-living can do amazing things in our world. Way back in 1998 (I know, super-long ago, right?), there was a 6-year old boy named Ryan Hreljac who heard at his Catholic school that children around the world often had to walk miles every day just to get water. Ryan started saving his chore money and speaking to his friends (and eventually to his parents' friends) about clean water. The next year, in 1999, Ryan paid for a well to be built at a school in Uganda.

Over the next several years, Ryan established a charity called Ryan's Well Foundation. That foundation has completed more than 1,000 projects around the world, which have provided water for almost 1,000,000 people.

Not bad for a 6-year old, right?

Ryan lived in a world of seeds: where kids get sick and even die because they don't have access to clean water that we get out of our sinks. But Ryan didn't settle for a seed world. Ryan believed in the fruit of a world where everyone has clean water, where kids like him don't have to get sick. Ryan had *faith* that God is doing something in the world, that God is working to bring life, to bring healing and resurrection. And Ryan's faith motivated him to live into that world. He joined in what God was doing, and through Ryan's faithfulness, God has brought healing and hope to an impossibly huge number of people.

What if you lived as though God's promises were already true? How would that transform your relationships? What if you chose to treat your spouse with love and respect, even if your marriage is strained? What if you worked at your job out of a sense of gratitude (for the income and provision), as though you were working for God, no matter how personally fulfilling it might be? What if you extended grace and love to someone who hurt you, even though they haven't asked for your forgiveness?

Friends, acting on what we *feel* isn't faith. Reacting to the world in front of us isn't faith. Because, as Paul reminds us, we live in a world of seeds. We live in a world marred by sin and death, by cruelty and disease. But God is at work, bringing life into the world. All that brokenness we see, all the brokenness we experience in our bodies, in our relationships, in our culture, they're going to be buried with Jesus, and raised new, restored and beautiful.

We don't know what that new life will look like, exactly. But we know that a life-giving fruit will grow from this current brokenness we experience. So let us live as though we can already taste the fruit. In another letter, Paul describes some of the qualities of this fruitful, Spirit-filled life. He says that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.

Friends, this is the way of God. And we don't have to wait until we experience the resurrection from the dead at the end of time to live that way. We can do so now. Paul encourages us to do just that. Death has been defeated, so let us live strong and immovable. Let us be committed to love, joy and peacemaking. Let us be committed to patience, kindness and generosity. Let us be committed to gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.

Let's live now as though we can already taste the fruit God has promised. As we do, let's watch our lives become a banquet overflowing with spiritual fruit that invites all those who are hungry to come and taste the power of God to bring *them* life, too!

Communion Set-Up

[Communion Slide] That life of fruitfulness begins at this table, which invites us to join the meal Jesus shared with his followers. At that meal, he broke bread as his body, broken for us. He offered us wine as his blood, poured out as a new covenant between us and God.

Hebrews tells us that Jesus endured the pain set before him because he knew God is faithful. Jesus lived as though he could taste the fruit of God's promises, even when it took him to the cross. And because of his faithfulness, God raised him from the dead to rule over all creation. By approaching the communion table today, we follow Jesus in faithful living, trusting that God will be faithful to all the promises God has made.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive communion today. If you're willing to trust God, to live as though you can taste the fruit of God's promises now, then you're welcome to receive this meal with us.

Before we approach the table, I'm going to lead you in a prayer of Examen. You found a packet of seeds on your chair when you came in. Consider them as you prayerfully reflect on these four questions. I'll close us in prayer, and then you're welcome to approach the table as you're ready.

Examen

1. When in the last week have you lived trusting in God's promises?

2. When in the last week has it been difficult to live by faith?
3. When in the next week will you struggle to live by faith?
4. How can you live in the next week by faith?

Prayer of Consecration

Let us pray