

Kimberly O'Brien, Sermon 3: Romans 8:22-27 preached 5/23/2021

We have the first fruits of the Spirit/ /

The days are getting longer, the sun rises early with birds chirping, singing a sweet melody into a new day

The powerful energy of the sun warms the earth, opening the leaves of the trees and the petals of the flowers, bringing forth abundant new life and growth

When we step outside we feel the strength of the ultraviolet rays on our cheeks and bare arms as warmth spreads across our skin

Warmth that cannot be manufactured by heating systems, sweaters or down blankets

Warmth that is only available from the sun

The sunlight remains in the sky for hours and hours, until well past 9 PM, offering us many opportunities to see, feel and enjoy its beauty.

These long days and warm sun are bringing forth the first fruits of the year.

I look forward to my first fresh strawberry

I imagine going to the strawberry farm with my baskets early in the morning

Bending and crouching my body to kneel in the neat rows,

Smelling the straw laid on the ground

Feeling the early sun warm my back, neck and shoulders

As I peel back the large green leaves of the plant, and pluck my first fresh, bright red strawberry of the season.

The first fruit of the year, the first fresh strawberry lands in my mouth

warmed from the late spring sun and plucked straight from the new growth of the plant

It feels a bit gritty and rough on my tongue at first

My mouth begins to water as I anticipate this sweet, juicy first fruit of the year.

And I take a bite

/ / /

We have the first fruits of the Spirit

The first, warm, sweet strawberry is resting in our mouth

Waiting for us to bite down and release its juicy goodness

But it sometimes seems like we don't recognize it

Do we know it's there? / /

We have the first fruits of the Spirit

And yet we're groaning in labor pains

Groaning inwardly and outwardly

Our attention and energy consumed by what we see around us

Waiting

Waiting for adoption, waiting for redemption

Waiting for something

Something to distract us and shift our attention elsewhere

Perhaps waiting for hope / /

We're told that the Spirit, the Advocate, will help and guide us

The Spirit helps us in our weakness

The Spirit intercedes and advocates for us

The Spirit connects us to God

Like the warmth of the sun, the Spirit cannot be manufactured

The Spirit is the answer we're given today

We have the first fruit of the Spirit

And yet we're groaning in labor pains / / /

We have **so much** to groan about

Lost work

Racism

Exhaustion

Injustice

Grief

Isolation

Competition

Uncertainty

We have so much to groan about

And yet we have the first fruits of the Spirit

We're holding this warm, fresh, first strawberry on our tongues

Waiting to take a bite

We have generations and generations of ancestors who have bitten into the strawberry and released the juice of the first fruit.

Moses, a man who begged God to send someone else, bit the strawberry when he led the slaves from Egypt

Sarah, who laughed at God's promise, bit the strawberry when she gave birth to Issac

Jacob, who wrestled with God and limped for the rest of his life, bit the strawberry when he was renamed Israel

Mary, young and unwed, bit the strawberry when she said "Here am I, the servant of the LORD"

Martin Luther bit the strawberry when he uncovered God's promise of grace throughout scripture and nailed his 95 theses to the door

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a self-proclaimed pacifist, bit the strawberry when he plotted against Hitler

Rosa Parks bit the strawberry when she refused to give up her seat

Faith Lutheran Church bit the strawberry when they expanded their ministry to include essential workers during this pandemic

We have the first fruits of the Spirit!

We hope for what is not seen

We wait

We continue to groan

meanwhile the Spirit knows us to our core

Meanwhile the Spirit calls our unique gifts out into this world

Meanwhile the Spirit advocates on our behalf

Meanwhile the Spirit gives us courage we didn't realize we had / /

It's hard to recognize the first fruit of the Spirit

The first fruit of the Spirit doesn't mean life will be easy

It doesn't mean things will go our way

Sometimes the first fruit feels gritty and rough

Recognizing the first fruit of the Spirit takes intentionality, and practice

Recognizing the first fruit of the Spirit requires us to pause

To pause and look into the eyes of the person on the street corner, and see their humanity before skipping to the filthy clothes, body odor and dirty hands

The Spirit is in our humanity

To pause and listen intently to a friend who asks for advice, before skipping to your ideas and solutions

The Spirit is in our presence with one another

To pause and wonder when a family member says something you disagree with, before skipping to prove your position

The Spirit is in our curiosity

To pause, and breathe when our anger rises up, before skipping to self justification

The Spirit is in our breath

To pause, and rest in the discomfort of uncertainty, before skipping to controlling and solutions

The Spirit is in the unknown

The Spirit is within each individual person/ / /

And the Spirit is collective within communities

Both individual and communal

Unable to be manufactured / /

Or Contained

We have the first fruits of the Spirit

We are adopted and redeemed by God

We are baptized into the Spirit

We are called by God into this world

To co-create with God

Here, in our time, in our place

Bite the strawberry

Amen