

Sermon, June 26, 2022
Psalm 16; Galatians 5:1,13-25
“The Gift: Freedom”
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This fascinating plant is the titan arum. It's related to the calla lily among other plants. It's native to Sumatra, but is still very rare. If cultivated correctly, they can grow to around three feet in height. Great care is taken with them when they are grown in a greenhouse because of the rarity of the bloom.

The titan arum blooms at various rates, but they are all lengthy. While some of the plants have been known to bloom every other year, it common for the Titan to only bloom once every seven to ten years. This fact alone will cause horticulturists and plant lovers to gather from all over the world when they know one is about to bloom. After all, if you miss it, you may not get to see it again, who knows where any of us will be in ten years?

You may remember many years ago there is one at the Franklin Park Conservatory that bloomed in the summer of 2020. I think COVID restrictions kept most visitors away that year, but seven or eight years before when it bloomed, people came from all over to see this plant bloom in all of its glory.

Of course, it's not just the bloom people come to experience. You may know the titan arum better under its nickname the *corpse flower*. While the flower may be pretty, the bloom brings with it one of the worst odors known to mankind. As the plant begins to bloom, its core temperature will begin to increase, rising up until it's almost at human temperature. When this happens, a noxious odor emanates from the plant which smells like, well, a corpse or at least like something rotting. I don't really want to get any more graphic than that. Apparently, the plant does this in order to attract insects attracted to rotting meat. These insects help pollinate the plant. The plant increases in odor throughout the night, and then decreases during the day.

A breakdown of the chemicals in the plant reveal chemicals we find in limburger cheese, garlic, rotting fish, sweaty socks, a sweet floral scent, Chloraseptic, and animal waste. Not exactly the first Yankee Candle scent you'd pick up.

It's hard enough to imagine anyone voluntarily wanting to go to a greenhouse and smell this smell, although I'm sure only having to do it once every ten years is enough. But to voluntarily raise them? Now, given its complications, its long bloom and the horrible smell, it's fairly safe to say no one raises one of these plants by accident. It has to be done in very careful conditions. And surely no one is surprised when the plant grows up and blooms. This is what you expected. If you plant a corpse flower, nurture and cultivate it, then this is what you are going to get at the end. You don't plant a corpse flower and then expect roses on the other end. That just makes sense, doesn't it? If you want roses, don't plant a corpse flower. If you want a corpse flower, then don't plant and try to cultivate roses.

In other words, you get what you plant. What you plant and cultivate is what you will eventually see bloom in your garden. And what you plant in your life and what is cultivated is what is going to bloom in your life. Just like the garden, if you're planting corpse flowers in the soil of your life, don't expect roses to bloom. You get what you plant.

What do you want to plant in your life? As we continue our series on the gift of the Holy Spirit, we find Paul asking us this very question. The Holy Spirit has come at Pentecost to dwell within each believer. The Holy Spirit is the gift of God, the third part of the Godhead actually living within us. And what a gift. When we choose to receive it, it comes with life-changing consequences.

Paul says the Holy Spirit has come to give us freedom. We have the freedom to choose what is planted in our souls. Paul offsets the fruit of sin and the flesh and the fruit of the spirit. And Paul says look, you have choice what is planted in your life. You can choose to plant strife and jealousy, envy, impurity, and sin to be

planted in your life. Or you can chose to allow the Holy Spirit to plant peace, patience, loving kindness, generosity, gentleness, and self-control. You have the choice as to what is planted in your life. But what you have planted is what will grow.

And I think that's something we miss hearing sometimes. Or at least as I see how many of us live. We go around planting corpse flowers in our lives and then wonder why we don't smell like roses. If you are planting idolatry in your life, you will not cultivate a healthy relationship with God. You won't cultivate his Lordship in your life. If you cultivate anger, if you are sowing seeds of rage in your life, you aren't going to grow peace. If you sow hatred, you aren't going to grow love. Now, this just makes logical sense for us, yet we have so many Christians live as if how they live and how they act has no bearing on their soul. As if they can just plan unhealthy rotting things in their souls and somehow it will all come out better in the end.

That may be the next place for us to start. Look at your life, really examine your soul, and ask yourself what fruit is evident in you? Because your fruit will give evidence to the seeds you are sowing in your heart. If your life is marked by unfaithfulness sin, lying, whatever it might be, bitterness, you've sown the wrong

How do we plant the right seeds? Let me share a few things that might help. First, be careful what you allow to be planted into the garden of your soul. Don't allow things that are toxic and dangerous for your soul to take root. You are not invulnerable to sin and to bad seeds. If you surround yourself with anger, you're going to sow anger. If you surround yourself with dishonesty, that's what you'll sow.

Be careful what you allow others to sow in your soul. People will ty to plant the wrong thing in your garden. You'll have people in your life who will devalue you. You'll have people in your life that will deride you. You will have people in your life who will attempt to mar or blur the image of God He has put on your soul. I want you to hear this. Just because someone has planted a seed in your life does not mean you have to allow it grow. The Holy Spirit can pull up those corpse flower seeds in your life, you don't have to plant those. Be careful what you allow into the soil of your heart.

Secondly, what you cultivate will grow. If you are cultivating the fruits of the spirit in your life, they will grow and flower. Now that may take time. Self-control may not come easy to you. You keep watering it with the word of God and prayer, and in time, it will mature. Environment matters. If you want to cultivate the fruit of the spirit spend time with people who plant good seeds in you. You want to learn patience? Ask God to put patient people around you. You want to cultivate a spirit of generosity? Start hanging out with people who are generous. Start practicing generosity. You want to cultivate love? Yes, hang out with loving people but then go find some folks to love that nobody else loves.

Thirdly, enjoy the freedom. This is Paul's point. We can enjoy a freedom, a freedom from sin, a freedom from condemnation, a freedom from our past. We can enjoy the fruit of the Spirit that brings limitless joy

into our lives. But God will not force the fruit of the spirit into your lives. We must choose what will grow in our souls. What are you going to choose? Amen.