

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 9
Year C

Isaiah 66:10-14
Psalm 66:1-8
Galatians 6:1-16
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

“My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.” What does this mean to us today? How might we be tempted as we deal with someone else? Isn’t it our duty to point out the errors of others so they might be reconciled with God?

I think it might be an understatement to say we live in a divided country. Pick an issue, select any topic or field of study - there will be disagreement from someone. Politics? Religion? How our neighborhood should look? Pick anything and you will find people who have opposing views, and unfortunately today, too many express those differences violently. How, then, are we to deal with someone we think is transgressing God’s will? And, how might we avoid falling into a trap?

First of all, we need to remember how Jesus handled every contentious situation with which He was faced. Be it the woman caught in the act of adultery or Nicodemus not understanding the basics of a new life, how did Jesus respond? One word sums up every interact Jesus had with those who came to Him - LOVE. Jesus didn’t accuse; He didn’t blame; He didn’t belittle. Jesus loved them.

When we look at the actions or behaviors of others, we need to begin from this same point - we need to love them for who they are and how God has created them. God has made every living creature - man, woman, animal, plant - God made them all. If we look at each person as a unique creation of God, how can we stand in judgement? If we have not lived their life, how can we understand what has led them to the place wherein they find themselves?

In his discussion with Peter about eating with Gentiles, Paul points out that all was fine until the “Judaizers”, those who believed the only way to be a Christian was through the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, showed up. Then, Peter distanced himself from the Gentile believers. Peter was not comfortable make others uncomfortable, even though he had been the first to take the Gospel to Gentiles. Are we uncomfortable around others who believe differently?

At the end of our reading, Paul states, “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!” Our rules mean nothing. They are not what is important to God. Our rules are about conformity; everyone needs to be like us. Look around at the world in which we live. Does everything look alike or act the same? No, God has created diversity. This world would be very boring if everything look the same. Paul’s point is that the church is strongest when it embraces diversity in all its forms.

Further, Paul tells us that this diversity brings unity. How? By accepting “the other”, we are accepting all that God has made. This acceptance brings out the love God has planted within each of us. And, loving one another is the core of unity. We are one in the Spirit because we love one another.

“As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” What is God’s rule? Is it that we should go to church every Sunday, give of our resources, love everybody? That is only part of God’s rule - that’s the easy part. Acceptance of all, unity through the love of God, loving the unlovable - these are the signs of the Spirit’s activity in our community. Peace and mercy will follow.