

“RESET VALUES”
A Sermon Preached at
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(transcribed from audio file)

The scripture today comes from the Book of Galatians 5:24-6:10.

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

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. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbour's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads.

Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. NRSV

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

You know that thing that happens when you hear something more than once from different sources? We start to wonder. M'mm, maybe I should pay attention to this. Well, that happened to me recently. I was reading two different books and they both talked about the same phenomenon. They both talked about the trap that Christians

often fall into of judging others harshly. Both books were by different theologians, one written in the 1950's, one written in 2010 and both of them talked about this phenomenon that can easily happen when the people of God try to live into their calling and live a Christian life.

One of the authors put it this way. The danger of those who are really trying to live the Christian life is that they are apt to judge the sins of others harshly. It's the danger that the early Jewish Christians fell into as well. They were having a hard time accepting the Gentiles as Christians, without the Gentiles first being circumcised and following the Jewish Law. And so, they were judging other believers based on unnecessary expectations and Paul sent a lot of Galatians, trying to work out this problem and talk to them about this problem.

While we, in 2024 may not be arguing about circumcision and law, but we still argue amongst ourselves. Do we not? We say things like, "Well, if they were a real Christian, they would have shown up to help with the food distribution" or "If they were a real Christian, they wouldn't have dropped the ball on that project", or, "If they were a real Christian, they would be inviting people to church", or, "If they were a real Christian, they would vote the way I'm voting".

I learned a new word recently. The word is sniping. I'd never heard it before. Some of you know what this word is. Sniping can be defined as, to make malicious underhanded remarks or attacks, or to make petty or snide criticism at a person in their absence. We are good at sniping, aren't we?

I heard that word and learned the definition and immediately felt convicted in my heart. What was that quote I just shared? I said, the danger of those who are really trying to live the Christian life is that they are apt to judge the sins of others harshly. Perhaps we could tack on to the end of that and fall into the act of sniping. Sniping.

Well, I think I've probably shared this story before, but it's a good one and it's appropriate, so I'll share it again. Right around the time that I got married I had a friend in seminary who had been married for quite a while and they were going through a particularly rough patch in their marriage. And they were arguing a lot, and they were sniping, although we didn't use that word at the time. And frankly they were on the brink of divorce. She was talking to me about whether or not divorce was the right decision.

I remember one of the things she said to me that had started to help was that when they were in the thick of arguing; when they were in the thick of sniping at each other, she would say to her spouse, “I’m on your team”. I’m on your team.

I remember filing that away in my brain because it’s so simple and so powerful. I am on your team. It was a gentle reminder that they didn’t need to fight against each other, that they indeed had the same goals, that they were working together even if maybe they were a little cranky with each other at the time. They were on the same team.

Our scripture passage this morning is a reminder of that for us as Christians. Verse 25 and 26 say, *If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.* In other words, we’re on the same team.

So much so the scripture goes on to say, *My brothers and sisters, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.* Transgression is a big word here meaning to slip up or I don’t know any other word here to say. It’s like a car is driving straight on a patch of ice and it starts to slip. It’s not intentional. It’s a mess up.

Well, what the Galatians are trying to do is not to snipe at someone when they mess up or slip up, but to gently, gently restore them. Restore them in a spirit of gentleness it says, and the word restore places an emphasis on healing and curing them, not punishment and discipline. Not sniping about them.

The scripture passage is a reminder that we as Christians are on the same team. If we live by the Spirit, and we are guided by the Spirit then that looks different than living the way the world lives. Our values are fundamentally different than the rest of the world because instead of sniping at each other; instead of punishing each other when we mess up; instead of just judging each other, we are called to restore one another in a spirit of gentleness because we are on the same team.

Being on the same team also means that we are to bear one another’s burdens which is a call to live differently than the world does, because the world we live in, so values individuality, doesn’t it? Pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. Not asking for help. But instead, our values as Christians is to bear one another’s burden, as the body of Christ, and we practice that through Needs Among Us, as you will experience this week and next.

This week is the last week in our Reset Series, and I invite you, this week, to ask yourself where your values might need to be reset. Where might you be judging someone when you need to be gently restoring? Where might you be sniping when you need to remind yourself and them that you are on the same team? Where might you be called to bear someone's burden with them? Think about it.

Sometimes we get caught up in life, caught up in jobs and careers, and family, and putting dinner on the table, and doctor's appointments, and, and, and all of the things and we start to wonder, what's God's plan for us? What should we do? Do we take this job? Do we stay? Do we move from here to there? What does God want me to do? I hear that question a lot.

One of my favorite Christian musicians recently said this. God's plan for your life is not a career path. God's plan for your life is the posture of your heart. God's plan for your life is not your career path, but the posture of your heart.

And our scripture passage this morning talks about the posture of our heart as Christians. That they are to be guided by the Holy Spirit, bearing one another's burdens and restoring one another in gentleness. That is the posture of our heart that God cares about. In other words, remembering that we should work together because we are on the same team.

So, this week I invite you to remember whose team you are on. Team Jesus. And instead of asking, what is God's plan? Perhaps ask, how can I care for others? How can I care for this person?

And I leave you with the last two verses of our passage as inspiration this morning. *So, let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the benefit of all, and especially those of the family of faith.*

Amen? Amen.