

“Live Creatively”  
Luke 10:38-42; Galatians 6:1-10

Pastor Norman Fowler  
First Presbyterian Church  
September 2, 2007

Did you see what they're doing? I can't believe it! It's a shame!

Anybody wonder who I'm talking about? Just a little curiosity beginning to form? A little desire to be in on the ability to look down our noses at someone else?

As Paul begins this piece of Galatians he talks about detecting others in sin. The NIV actually translates it “catching others in sin”, to be caught in sin. It leaves that door open there for us to use those words to think about others in that condescending way, if not worse. And even as we begin to look at those words, I would suggest that what is being translated as *detect or caught* in the original Greek had an element of surprise in it. So as we begin to look to see what someone is doing, to catch somebody at sin, we already see that we can't go looking and be surprised at the same time. Paul is suggesting that we notice, that we allow ourselves to be surprised as we notice what's going wrong in someone else's life and quickly suggests to us that we do the restoration, tender the help gently.

Maybe it's just human nature. It seems so easy to want to look down our nose at someone else, to use those words for judgment. And yet I think Paul is not calling us to judgment. Rather he's calling us to simply notice so that we can help. He quickly warns us, in fact, not to let it be an occasion for sin ourselves. Not to fall into that trap. He says, *those of you who have received the Spirit* - that past tense *received* gets translated by Eugene Peterson into *live creatively*, being open to having received, letting the Spirit move in us means to see things new. He sees it as creative ways in which the Spirit works in us, helping us find new ways. New ways to what? Well, the very next phrase is *to bear one another's burdens*. He's not encouraging us to go and find everyone who's in sin, so we can look down our noses at them, but rather to expect that we'll encounter one another and encounter the difficulties we each have and bear one another's burdens gently holding each other up, finding the Spirit will always help us see new ways of caring for one another. It's incredible.

The next thing he says is *and in doing so you fulfill the law of Christ*. You will fulfill the law of Christ; that's also a pretty incredible statement. And I'd like to think about just the words that are in that - to fulfill - to make full. Eugene Peterson translates as *complete* the law of Christ, or Christ's law. Complete. It means something is completely full and actually starting to overflow. To overflow with the grace and goodness of God.

He just got done talking about how we're not to follow the Law anymore and here he's talking about law again. What does he mean? The interesting thing is that behind that word is not only the rules and regulations and legalities of life, but the sense of the vital force of God that created it all and that created the way we live together and the way things work together. So we think about that as law, that vital force of God that is creative and created and given us the way to be together and live together and share life together. And it's the Law of Christ, the vital force of Christ. What is that? Are we expecting that we just turn our life over to Jesus in a way that He now controls everything? I really don't think that that's exactly what it means. I think we see that

God came in Jesus Christ to show us the wonder of his grace and love and to invite us into this new life together and in that we experience the love and grace of God.

So, let me re-translate that sentence. As we allow our lives to overflow with the vital force of God, the love and grace of God that we know in Christ, that's fulfilling the law of Christ. It's allowing God's gift to us to begin to overflow, that we live it out, being consistent with what God has done already and to show that grace and love to one another.

These are wonderful verses and it begins to help us see that as God embodies God's love in Christ and encourages us then to embody that love in our lives, that there is a real and practical way that works out. We share one another's burdens. I always get the image of the dwarves walking down the road, carrying their loads and helping each other. Yet, it's really much more than that, isn't it? If I'm a very critical person, it really helps if somebody comes along and doesn't jump on being critical with me, but helps me begin to see things in a different way. Or if I've got anger problems, it helps if someone comes along and helps me begin to see how my anger is expressed or where my anger comes from, and how I express it inappropriately, and begin to be more appropriate. There are all kinds of practical ways we can share one another's burdens.

And yet in the midst of all this, as we begin to think about sharing one another's burdens and trying to live out, to overflow, with the love of God, there's a temptation. There's a temptation to know what we're supposed to be like and to begin to pretend that we are. It's one of the things that Christians tend to get criticized about over and over again. We begin to pretend because - perhaps we just want to so badly, perhaps we're covering up something else in the rest of our lives, but we know who we're supposed to be, so let's pretend. I don't think Paul is urging us to go there at all. He, in fact, says take a good look at your own life, see what you are doing, take a look and see, step back and remember God's not fooled. He warns us about that. If we are so just pretending, it gives a whole new meaning to the idea of being virtual with nothing to hold onto in the end.

There's a real difference between pretending to be God's people and simply trying. I think that is all Paul is asking us to do - just try, to open ourselves to God's Spirit and let God's Spirit change us, as we try to do what we can, open to the work of God and allowing ourselves to see when we have the opportunities to share each other's burdens. In fact, in a lot of ways, Paul concludes here with a fairly simple statement of what we are to do. Whenever it's possible, do what's a benefit to others. Whenever it's possible, do good, what's good for all. And the interesting thing is he doesn't say *just think about the people on the other side of the world, start here*. Start with each other. Start with the person next to you in your pew. Start with a family of faith. As we continue to try and do the work of God, let his love overflow in us to the people who are right around us. Not only do we fulfill the law of Christ, but we are a witness to God's love and grace. Paul doesn't even go there here, yet I think it's true. Paul instead invites us, not to pretend, but to simply try, to open our lives to the works of God, to live creatively, allowing the Spirit to move us. He invites us to come as a family together, to share a table, to know that God is moving among us. He invites us to be God's people, to fulfill the law of Christ. Amen.