

West Branch Community of Christ

Participant Companion Guide – Lectionary Lessons Pilot

February 1, 2015

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (Ordinary Time)

Theme: LOVE GOD

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Food Offered to Idols

8 Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 2 Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; 3 but anyone who loves God is known by him. 4 Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” 5 Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords— 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

7 It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 “Food will not bring us close to God.”[a] We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? 11 So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed.[b] 12 But when you thus sin against members of your family,[c] and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling,[d] I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them[e] to fall.

Central Ideas:

- ***Loving servant ministry blesses and builds up the faith community more than knowledge alone.***
- ***Those with more understanding of the gospel message are responsible for modeling ethical love.***
- ***Consider the needs of the entire community of Christ. We need to build loving relationships and avoid wounding the body of Christ.***
- ***When we come to the Communion table, we come as a community of believers and are reminded of our relationships with others and with God, having opportunity to seek God’s grace and mercy.***

Exploring the Scripture

In 1 Corinthians 8:1–13, Paul responds to a group of Corinthian Christians’ inquiry about the morality of eating food offered to pagan idols. Rather than offer a direct answer to the specific question, Paul offers a broader lesson in ethical living.

There are at least two groups of members in the Corinth church. There is a group of intellectuals. There is another group from the working class. This second group had recent experience with pagan rituals. Much of the social life of the elite population of Corinth occurred in dining areas around temples. Typically they sacrificed an animal to a deity and some of the flesh burned on an altar. After the sacrifice there were feasts, celebrations, or public events. They sold the remaining meat to the public, usually to the well-to-do.

The educated elite Christians knew there was only one true God and the ritual food had no meaning. Other newer Christians, however, believed the food should not be eaten because it had been used in pagan rituals.

According to the intellectuals “all of us possess knowledge” (v. 1). We know the meat is not sacred. While Paul has used knowledge of God as essential, he disagrees with this particular argument. Here he counters with “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” Paul insists it is not what one knows that is important. It is how one shows love and concern for all believers.

Paul connects knowledge and love. One understands God’s love best when one knows and models the love of Jesus Christ. Knowledge offers the freedom to choose. Paul contends the best choices are those made with love and for the benefit of the whole community. Some may know the sacrificial meat has no special significance and so is acceptable. However, others are vulnerable. They are not as spiritually aware and knowledgeable. “They still think of the food they

eat as offered to an idol" (v. 7). If they see some of the members eating meat they may think it is acceptable to consume it. They may confuse their previous pagan rituals with newer insights about the one true God.

Paul's message may seem to be about eating idol meat. Instead, it is about love—God's love expressed through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. This love includes making responsible choices that support all members of the community of faith. Relationships among sisters and brothers in Christ are more important than one's personal knowledge and wishes. When our actions cause other members of the community to be unfaithful, they are unethical and sinful (vv. 11–12). A faithful, loving relationship "builds up" (v. 1). We model faithfulness to God through love of God and others.

According to Paul, knowledge can be valuable when used with love in caring servant ministry. For example, it is a gift to understand the unlimited nature of God's love, grace, and generosity. We can use this knowledge to bless others with love, grace, and generosity. "Knowledge [without love] puffs up, but love builds up" (v. 1). Unethical actions wound the entire community, the family of God. Ethical behavior reflects God's loving nature and considers the needs of the entire faith community.

The imagery of food connects well with the Communion service. Participation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper reminds us of our commitment to oneness and equality in Jesus Christ (Words of Counsel, April 14, 2013). When we come to the table, we come as a community of believers. We remember Christ's love for us and our love for one another. We have opportunity to seek forgiveness for the harm we have caused in our relationships and seek God's grace and mercy in our lives.