

How many do we have here today? I'll bet in a group this size there is absolutely no one here who has control issues, right?

I'm sure we all sometimes feel a need for control. There's a good reason for that. Feeling that we can control the outcome of something or knowing that we have achieved a specific result gives human beings a sense of well-being and competence.

Now, control is great when the only person we are trying to control is ourselves.

The trouble comes when we try and control someone else.

In my family we have an object that each member of the family tries to control. Each person thinks they know the best way to operate it. Each person thinks the other people are doing it wrong. This object is the dishwasher. Dishes facing in – or facing out? Pots on the top or the bottom? Silverware up or down?

Each one thinks their way is the right way. One person will open the dishwasher door to put in a bowl, only to notice that the dishes which were facing front earlier—are all now facing the back of the dishwasher. Mmm. You see how this goes?

Nobody likes being told what to do. Nobody likes feeling someone else is trying to control them or their actions.

Psychologists tell us that being “overly controlling” of others lowers our happiness, because it makes us feel angry and frustrated when others don't behave the way we want them to.

There have been many studies done on the issue of control. Let's look at one some of you might have studied in school.

The psychologist who ran this experiment started by dividing people into two groups. In one group he put people who had a high need for control. In the other, were people who had a low need to control.

He split each group of 2 into 2. Now there are 4 groups: two with a high need for control, two with a low need for control. Each group was asked to deliver an off the cuff speech to audiences who were asked to react in a supportive and pleasant manner to one group, but react negatively to the other.

Here's what the results showed: when the audiences were positive and supportive, both the groups: those having a high need to control, and those with a low need to control felt very happy. This is not surprising, of course.

When the audiences reacted negatively, however, the result was more interesting. When their audience had a negative reaction to what they were saying, the group that needed more control found it to be far more disturbing, and ended up feeling significantly more angry, than those who had a low need for control.

No need to control the message, the Spirit's got this  
Pentecost 18

The Rev Canon Lisa Fry  
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This result suggested to the research team that when we have a high need to control others, we set ourselves up for anger, frustration, and disappointment when the people we try and control don't behave the way we want them to.

This is exactly what we saw this morning in the readings.

Medad and Eldad were prophesying without the elders—or Moses' permission. Those who had a high control threshold reacted negatively. Interestingly, Moses thought it was great. Obviously he had a low need for control.

In the gospel, the disciples demonstrated that they had a high need for control when they tried to keep those who weren't in their immediate circle from doing ministry without first asking them if they could.

Interestingly, Jesus thought it was great. And what does that mean? Probably that Jesus has a low need for control. A trait that comes in handy with his disciples most of the time.

Now, Jesus spent his ministry teaching his disciples one lesson, over and over: love God and love your neighbor as yourself. And who is our neighbor? Everyone.

Jesus demonstrated this lesson in love with all kinds of different people: people the disciples expected, and people they certainly did not. It really bothered some people that they couldn't control who Jesus shared his healing, time and love with.

But eventually—the disciples started getting the message. They were doing so well with it, in fact, that they didn't think anyone else could do it quite as well as they did.

So when they saw that other people were actually spreading Jesus' message of love, and healing people, and all the rest--*without permission*-- well, that was just not acceptable. How were they going to control what these others said? How were they going to make sure that they weren't telling it or doing it **WRONG??**

And Jesus told them it didn't matter.

He just looked at them and said, "Stop worrying. If others are talking about the overwhelming generosity of God's love, and if they are loving everyone with that same generosity--- hey!—those people who are not *against* us are **for** us!"

When the disciples—and us—try and control how others spread that Jesus' message, we set ourselves up for anger, frustration, and disappointment when they don't behave the way we want them to. Jesus doesn't want that for us.

Jesus assures us that there is no need to control his message. His message is safe—the Spirit's got this.

All we need to do is love. And perhaps relax more. We need to take a deep breath and trust the Spirit.

After all: those who are not against us-- are for us! Amen.