

First Lutheran Church, Morris MN

Order of Worship for Sunday, September 13, 2020: 15th Sunday after Pentecost

Gathering

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” —Matthew 18:20

Welcoming and Announcements

Confession & Forgiveness

In the name of the Father, and of the †Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Most merciful God, we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the †Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn: “O Day Full of Grace” #627

1. O day full of grace that now we see
appearing on earth’s horizon,
bring light from our God that we may be
abundant in joy this season.
God, shine for us now in the dark place;
your name on our hearts emblazon.
2. How blest was that gracious midnight hour,
when God in our flesh was given;
then brightened the dawn with light and power
that spread over the darkened heaven;
then rose over the world that Sun divine;
which gloom from our hearts was driven.
3. Yea, were every tree endowed with speech,
and were every leaflet singing,
they never with praise God’s worth could reach,
though the earth with their praise were ringing.
Who fully could praise the Light of Life
who light to our souls is bringing?
4. As birds in the morning sing their praise,
God’s fatherly love we cherish,
for giving to us this day of grace,
for life that shall never perish.
The church of God has kept two thousand years,
and hungering souls did nourish.

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Greeting:

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And also with you.*

Prayer of the Day

O Lord God, merciful judge, you are the inexhaustible fountain of forgiveness. Replace our hearts of stone with hearts that love and adore you, that we may delight in doing your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Word

Reading: Genesis 50: 15-21

Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Reading: Psalm 103:1-13

Bless the LORD, O my soul, **and all that is within me, bless his holy name.**

Bless the LORD, O my soul, **and do not forget all his benefits—**

who forgives all your iniquity, **who heals all your diseases,**

who redeems your life from the Pit, **who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,**

who satisfies you with good as long as you live **so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.**

The LORD works vindication **and justice for all who are oppressed.**

He made known his ways to Moses, **his acts to the people of Israel.**

The LORD is merciful and gracious, **slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**

He will not always accuse, **nor will he keep his anger forever.**

He does not deal with us according to our sins, **nor repay us according to our iniquities.**

For as the heavens are high above the earth, **so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;**

as far as the east is from the west, **so far he removes our transgressions from us.**

As a father has compassion for his children, **so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him**

Reading: Romans 14:1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then,

whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Gospel Acclamation Alleluia, Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia. Alleluia.

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35 (*response after announcement of Gospel: **Glory to you, O Lord***)

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

*(response after reading of Gospel: **Praise to you, O Christ**)*

Message

Hymn: "Give Me Jesus" #770

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| 1. In the morning, when I rise,
in the morning, when I rise,
in the morning, when I rise, give me Jesus.
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus.
You may have all the rest, give me Jesus. | 2. Dark midnight was my cry,
dark midnight was my cry,
dark midnight was my cry, give me Jesus.
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus.
You may have all the rest, give me Jesus. |
| 3. Just about the break of day,
just about the break of day,
just about the break of day, give me Jesus.
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus.
You may have all the rest, give me Jesus. | 4. Oh, when I come to die,
oh, when I come to die,
oh, when I come to die, give me Jesus.
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus.
You may have all the rest, give me Jesus. |
| 5. And when I want to sing,
and when I want to sing,
and when I want to sing, give me Jesus.
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus.
You may have all the rest, give me Jesus. | |

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Offering/Offertory "Create In Me a Clean Heart" #185

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free spirit.
Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

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Prayers

Lord's Prayer Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy Kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

Sharing the Peace Please share a sign of peace with one another

Sending

Hymn: "Rise, Shine, You People" #665

1. Rise, shine, you people!
Christ the Lord has entered our human story;
God in him is centered.
He comes to us, by death and sin surrounded,
with grace unbounded.
2. See how he sends
the powers of evil reeling;
he brings us freedom, light and life and healing.
All men and women, who by guilt are driven,
now are forgiven.
3. Come, celebrate;
your banners high unfurling,
your songs and prayers against the darkness hurling.
To all the world go out and tell the story
of Jesus' glory.
4. Tell how the Father
sent the Son to save us.
Tell of the Son, who life and freedom gave us.
Tell how the Spirit calls from every nation
God's new creation.

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Benediction

Go in peace, serve the Lord!

Remember in your prayers

Mick Rose, those affected by COVID-19, those who serve in the military, families of victims of war, terrorism and violence, those in our nursing homes and those who are homebound. Continue to pray for the overseas missionary we support. Pastor Alex LaChappelle serving as a pastor of Nairobi International Lutheran in Kenya, Africa. Note: you may honor a loved one and support Pastor LaChappelle in Kenya. Contact the church office for information.

Sermon for 14th Sunday after Pentecost September 6, 2020
Matthew 18: 15-20, First Lutheran Church, Morris, by Pr. Dan Belgum

You may have noticed that our bulletin for the past few months has a heading that is right out of today's Gospel reading! "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Yet, did you know that these words are stuck in the midst of guidance on how to deal with conflict or offense?

Erika Larson tells this story: One summer, our high school youth served at a day care in Chicago, helping run the day care and leading Vacation Bible School. It was a hot, difficult, emotional, exhausting, eye-opening, brutal, and beautiful week! As we traveled home, it came to light that one of our youth had lied to others and created tension throughout our week together. In our team covenant, we had used Matthew 18:15-20 as our guideline for dealing with conflict, so our youth and our young adult leader sat in a room together addressing the breach in trust; confronting the issue head on, entering into difficult conversation, and managing the volatile emotions. In the end, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation were achieved late in the evening after hours of conversation. Jesus asks us to wade into difficult territory, and then he promises, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." We need each other in order to experience God, and we need God in order to experience life-giving community. (Erica Larson '09 M.A., Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota)

Matthew's gospel, from Jesus' mouth, gives us pause to think about how we are to respond (*versus* "react") to a person who has offended us (sinned against us). There is divine wisdom in these words of Matthew. While not easy, to go to the person you feel has sinned (that is: "missed the mark") against you, Matthew provides a time-honored approach to a grievance. Solid guidance; Godly advice. We can back up a moment and note that: any time two or more people are in relationship, occasionally there is going to be conflict. It's part of life. In a marriage, it is pretty unusual if you don't offend your spouse sometimes. Jesus must have known from the start *that the church* would be composed of sinners who would occasionally sin one against the other.

Here's what Matthew's Gospel says, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one." I have seen those who are "wounded" by an offense that occurred 10 or twenty years before. They have allowed this sense of being offended brew for years. And because they harbored that offense, the unkind word, or being short-shifted in some way it becomes a poison, that can hurt or even kill a marriage, a friendship, a partnership, or even a church.

I need to note though, that this passage comes in the midst of Jesus teaching about protecting the vulnerable like children. And it may not be safe for someone to go alone and confront someone about a sin they have committed against you. Then, it only makes sense to have one or two others along with you. Being offended is not the same as being wounded. This morning's message is about positively confronting offenses and the offender before it turns into the poison of woundedness and bitterness. I believe that God wants us to adopt a pattern of behavior in which we continually deal with offenses in a positive and reconciliatory way. No one said this was easy; we may flinch at the idea of this. Yet, it is Jesus' instructions to His church, so we can't ignore it. The reason I say this is because there will always will be issues, there always will be offenses by something some brother or sister says or does. Offenses that cause us to stumble are all around us, because our pride is so easily offended. Offenses happen in families, at the work place, on the playground and even at church. I can guarantee you that sooner or later people will say something or do something that will offend you, that will cause you to stumble, to feel offended, to feel sinned against.

Take the initiative. First of all, one must assess: is this really something that needs to be attended to; or do I let this pass? Sometimes we can and should let some slight pass. Forgive and forget. Meanwhile, If we believe we do need to go forward: Jesus asks us to take the initiative. Don't wait around until your brother or sister comes to you, you go to him or her first. Otherwise, we could wait forever. Perhaps our brother, or sister, or our spouse, or fellow worker, may not even know that they offended us. Sometimes, we need to have a little faith in people, a trust that they don't really want to offend us personally. Some would call it: "the benefit of the doubt." Give people the benefit of the doubt. Have a little faith in them. Yes, they offended us, they sinned against us, but perhaps they did it inadvertently. So share your feelings with them and see what

happens. “I feel hurt because....” Most likely they will apologize and will say that they did not realize what they were saying or doing was hurtful toward you. Notice what else this means: This teaching counters any temptation to go and talk to a third party about someone. You and I are not to go to a third party and talk about the person who has, we think, sinned against us. To do that is hurting ourselves, and the relationship. While it is only too common, we must resist this tendency with every fiber in our being! Because the goal is reconciliation. Matthew teaches us the better way. Instead, after honest prayer, honest reflection; with humility, but clearly and convincingly, speak to that person. Listening....it is crucial that we listen. That we listen, whichever side we are on in a conflict. We need to listen and try to understand, and not get defensive.

The next step: If this doesn't lead to repentance and reconciliation. Jesus tells us to take 2-3 others along. Today Christian counseling; marriage counseling are closely related. They can be a powerful, powerful means of bringing resolution and reconciliation.

These are not to be partisans, who are only sympathetic to us. These are to be good-hearted, unbiased fellow Christians who will be able to help mediate and listen. They'll be concerned for both parties. The goal is reconciliation. Regaining this one into the fold – and friendship. This may also serve to protect one who is wrongly accused. Perhaps the one who feels offended is really in the wrong. i.e. perhaps we are in the wrong, ultimately by our actions, more than the other way around. Instead of allowing people to fall by the wayside and drift out of fellowship, we are called as a congregation to keep reaching out to them in a reconciliatory manner. Even if they are the ones that bring the offense, even if they refuse to reconcile we are called to continue to reach out to them. Many, many years ago, as a young pastor, when someone in the congregation was gossiping about me in a malicious way, I decided to follow Matthew 18's advice. I was upset; I was angry. I had to muster my courage to go to this person and talk to them about it. I met them at their home and offered up what I had heard, and why it made me angry. I was very direct. The offender confessed that he shouldn't have done what he did; he had sinned; he repented, and apologized; and went on to tell me about many problems his own family was experiencing. It proved to be the best thing I could have done. I felt relieved. I thank God I had the courage to do this. I ended up praying with this brother for his family situation; which he thanked me for, and we got along better thereafter.

I don't share this as a way of exonerating myself, or putting myself on platform. Just as an example. The Holy One wishes for our conflicted relationships to be reconciled. Therein is new life! Jesus died for us, that we might have life abundant with our fellow believers. God longs for us to be rightly related to one another. Hopefully we don't have to get to the third try: Tell it to the church; more likely part of the Council in our larger churches of nowadays.

Let them be as Gentiles or tax collectors: What about the lines about “let them be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector....” If the offender does not repent, which is to lead to forgiveness. The key here, I think, is it's okay at this point to “let it go” or “let them go” if you haven't won them back at this point. Meanwhile, we can also eventually give it a try again. Gentiles means “unbeliever” in the Greek. So, we will eventually hope that they will be restored, and we shouldn't give up. Forgiveness is a key in this whole thing to. As is given evidence a few verses after this when Peter asks Jesus” “Lord, if someone sins against us, how many times must we forgive them? As many as seven times?” Jesus responds: Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.”

Friends, we have a great and precious promise in the midst of this instruction. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Notice again, this statement is made in the context of a situation of conflict. It takes courage to do this. If we know God is with us, and will be right in the midst with us: it makes all the difference in the world! When we must deal with conflict situations, and prayerfully enter into seeking reconciliation and healing, God promises to be with us, in the heart of it. The cross of Jesus, the Spirit of Jesus, the healing power of Jesus, are present with us. He gives us courage for this action! If two of you agree on anything, and it will be done for you. Thanks be to God....

Please Pray with me... Healing God, be with us in the midst of difficult conversation, helping us to see each other through your eyes, and move us towards repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Amen.