

14th Sunday after Pentecost
September 6th, 2020

“God’s loving strategy to gain your lost brother” (Matthew 18:15)
By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Today’s text is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 18:15

“Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.”
Here ends our text.

We’ve been hearing these past few weeks from our Gospel readings how Jesus is building His church. Jesus builds it on the rock-solid confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

In short, Jesus builds His church on Himself, THE Rock. How is Jesus the Rock, the Chief Cornerstone? We heard last week that Jesus told His disciples what He MUST do...go to Jerusalem, be killed and be raised again. That is the principle teaching of the Bible called the Gospel that Jesus died for the forgiveness of the entire world. He lost His life that we would find life in Him! In today’s Gospel Jesus simply says, **“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.”**

And today, our Gospel emphasizes that there are none in this world that He didn’t die for...especially the little ones. Jesus places a young child in their midst and said, **“Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”**

How precious are God’s people to Jesus that He doesn’t want to lose any who believe in Him. But Jesus warns:

“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!”

Jesus in His wisdom and foreknowledge tells us that offenses will come in this evil world. Although we are surprised, we shouldn't be. The devil is like a roaring lion seeking who he may devour, knowing his time is short. (1 Peter 5:8, Revelations 12:12)

The devil wants to tear down Jesus' church by tempting His people to sin and cause offense.

The devil wants people to believe that there is no solution after an offense has been committed. He wants people to think that they are not worth the effort because they are just a lost cause.

But, that's not God's thinking. And that's not the thinking He wants His people to have. We are never to give up praying for a lost brother or sister, seeking a lost sheep! One lost soul is absolutely important to God.

God's loving strategy first begins by simply going... going and seeking out the one lost sheep.

I. God tells His people to "Go" to restore the one lost sheep

"If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? 13 And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

God's strategy is one of love and compassion. He doesn't want anyone to perish. He rejoices when a lost sheep is found. His strategy involves diligence and effort. He makes a deliberate decision to go after the one sheep who has strayed. He doesn't say, "Oh, I still have 99, what's one lost sheep?"

And, God in His great wisdom involves His people, you and me, in His strategy to gain the lost. This is not an option that Christians can choose to do or not to do. It involves you, because it involves YOUR dear lost brother.

"Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother."

Yes, offenses will come. You mean people in the church sin? Do I really need to even answer that one? God's people know the weight of their sins that we confess to Him as we begin each service. Our Psalm for today, Psalm 32 describes our daily confession and absolution from God.

**“When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long.
4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.
5 I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden.
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,”
And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.”**

**“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
2 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit.”**

You notice that the first step is a personal step. Jesus says, “Go” and make this a personal one on one conversation of law and gospel. In love, you have to point out his fault. It’s what’s tearing up his or her soul and it needs to be honestly repented of to be healed with the gospel...much more of that in a second!

You go with the humble, compassionate attitude that I too am a sinner also who has been graciously found by Jesus when I was lost. I’m no better, but I don’t want my brother to harden his heart against God and go to hell. Jesus’ church is built through the steps of His people in a loving personal and deliberate going to the lost.

Let’s get this clear also. Anyone who has committed an offense and is unrepentant is lost.

So, if you see an offense committed what should you do? Well, some could take the Sergeant Schultz from Hogan’s Heroes approach. “I see nothing!” No, God doesn’t accept that as we heard in the Old Testament reading. Go. The offense doesn’t have to be against you personally. If a member of the Church sins before my very eyes, then he has sinned against me, he has violated the honor of God, which is the chief concern of the believer. What is done to a believer in Jesus is performed as against Jesus.

Of course, if you haven’t seen the offense and someone comes to you and says, did you hear what so and so did? Then, you should say. No, I haven’t heard. Is this offense something that you have seen with your own eyes? If the answer is yes, then say. You are obligated by God’s word to go in person and try to restore him or her with God’s word.

Your first step is not to tell me or anyone else about the offense, but tell the offender!! Go gain a brother or sister. And, yes, I’ll be praying for you. Now, if he doesn’t listen to you, then come back to me and we’ll go together.

Now, if the person with news of an offense answers you, “no I didn’t actually see the offense, but I heard about it.” Then you should say, “then I won’t hear another word of what you’re saying, because what you’re saying is gossip, as was listed in the epistle as sins which do not “love your neighbor as yourself”. “Go about your day and don’t speak badly about this person anymore, but put the best construction on it.” Oh, how the devil uses gossip to tear down Jesus’ church!

But, why should I go to a lost sheep, if this is the pastor’s job? Well, it could involve the pastor in later visits if the offender doesn’t first listen to you. Yes, the pastor will go with you together to try and gain a lost brother. But, Jesus isn’t talking to just pastors here. He’s talking to any Christian who sees an offense. You’re first step is to go alone and restore an erring brother or sister.

How? Well, this is the best part! Jesus has given you, yes you, the power to forgive sins!

II. God tells His people to forgive offenses

This power, this key to open heaven belongs to the church! To you, dear brother and sister! Yes, the pastor uses this power publicly in the absolution on behalf of the people, only because the people call the pastor him to do so. The power to forgive is given to Jesus people directly. A couple weeks ago, Jesus told Peter and His disciples about this power.

17 Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Jesus repeats Himself in today’s Gospel two chapters later.

“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

What's especially important here is the phrase "you loose". Why? Because it is in the plural... "You all loose."...all God's people loose. All God's people have this gift, this power, to use when an offender repents.

You tell him or her the Gospel! You're sins are forgiven! If the offense was personally against you, you say, "I forgive you!" And what is loosed on earth is loosed in heaven! And you have gained a brother! Is that not the best motivation for you to go to your brother or sister? You want to tell them that their sins are forgiven! You want there to be rejoicing in heaven. You want the forgiven sinner to know that the kingdom of heaven is indeed open to him or her. Thanks be to Jesus!!

This is Jesus' strategy for gaining a lost brother. It is the only strategy.

Where two or three are gathered God is present. One, two...you and the lost brother and or sister and God is present. He is there with you in private, helping you by His power to give His promise of salvation to a lost sheep. And nobody else needs to know because God knows.

Nobody else needs to know unless the erring brother won't hear God's word. Then, others go, and go and go. If the offender still remains hardened, then the church tells him or her that he or she is a heathen in their eyes. You'd better wake up before it's too late. And the church still prays for the unrepentant and continues to go, as long as the offender receives them.

The winning strategy involves going, not waiting. If you wait for the erring brother to come to you, it will most likely not happen. It is always best to go in person. Sure, you can send a text or an email. And that might open the door to an "in person" conversation. The Holy Spirit will guide you!

Don't be surprised if you need to approach a fellow Christian for the purpose of pointing out a clear case of unrepented sin in his life. The devil has so confused the world, that what is clearly wrong in God's word has now been accepted by world. Want some examples? Same sex marriage, living together, and all the rioting, obscenity, shooting, lawlessness toward policemen. People will justify their actions with all kinds of excuses like "I needed to rob because I was hungry". Seeing it on TV desensitizes people. It often becomes the norm. Go, knowing that the Holy Spirit has sent you to speak His word clearly.

God will bless your efforts. His word never returns void. (Isaiah 55:11) God's will is that all be saved. He is sending you to that lost sheep that strayed away from the 99.

But who am I? You're an under-shepherd of God, to your family and to your congregation. "We're in this together" is a phrase that people have been saying about the Coronavirus. How much more true is this for God's church!

Does God's winning strategy involve work? Of course. The forgiveness that Jesus won on the cross did not come without great cost. And the giving and applying of this forgiveness comes at great cost to His people.

What motivates you to go to an erring brother? Love. Love for the poor lost sheep who will spend an eternity in hell if not restored. For if he refuses to change, what does God through His church call him? A heathen and a tax collector.

God had compassion on you. In humbleness we admit that we are no better than the lost sheep we pray to gain with the Gospel. We can easily stray as well. And if I do, I pray that God would send someone to me to wake me up before it's too late. And He will, because that God's loving strategy to gain the lost, in Jesus. Amen.

"The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Amen. (Philippians 4:7)