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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
October 19, 2014
19th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 7:36-50

Hymns: 2; 324:1-6; 531; 324:7-8

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 7:6-10

6 Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.

8 For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. 9 Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. 10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: What does one say?

Knowing what and when to say something can be difficult for us to discern. We are all familiar with Solomon's words in

Ecclesiastes 3:1 "To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven":

In that list of things that follow there is also this statement --

Ecclesiastes 3:7... "A time to keep silence, And a time to speak."

We do have problems both ways. Even as children of God there are times when we speak when it would have been better for us to keep silent. And there are times when we should have said something but we lacked the confidence to speak, or we were afraid that we might say the wrong thing. While we are so very conscious that we must speak only the truth in love, keeping silent can be very tragic when it comes to spiritual matters. We do possess the knowledge of the truth both of the law and gospel that can make a great difference in another person's life. Our flesh tells us to be quiet because we may upset another person. At times when we are out in the world and we can't say something to every person we see sinning in some manner. However when we are confronted with a brother or sister in Christ who is caught up in a sin, (and I use that expression carefully) when they are caught up in a sin, or seem rather bold in a sin, then we should speak.

Sin is a distressing thing. It burdens the heart. It should grieve us to see and know that one of our fellow Christians is in spiritual danger because of sin. When the devil takes hold of us in our lives and trips us up in our faith and we fall into sin, it is a matter that will distress us. Sin should distress our conscience and burden our minds when it has its way with us. But what we know in our hearts, and what the Spirit leads us to confess with our mouths leads us to--

THEME: Receiving Comfort from Sin's Distress.

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In our text we read of Paul both receiving and delivering comfort. He presents us with an example, a case study in how we should be

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I. Comforting One Another.

At the beginning of our text Paul is talking about his own distress. He had been downcast. The cause of Paul's distress was his concern for the Corinthian congregation to whom he had written this epistle. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Christians Paul had to address several matters that were of grave spiritual concern. They had adopted some very unbrotherly practices in their fellowship distancing the poor from the well-to-do of the congregation. They had become disorderly in their worship services, and had accentuated some spiritual gifts over others, and had behaved in a loveless manner. They had allowed some to come in and confuse them concerning the teaching of the resurrection from the dead. But the matter that upset Paul the most was the lack of discipline in a case of blatant adultery, adultery that went beyond what even the unbelievers of Corinth would tolerate. Paul addressed all these matter in a loving brotherly manner, but he was distressed concerning how the Corinthian Christians would respond. Would it be with repentance, or would it be with a disregard for the admonition of the Apostle Paul? He waited so long for Titus, who had delivered this message, to return to him. All that time he prayed for them and hoped that they might repent of their mistaken ways, and return to the right paths.

2 Corinthians 7:6-7 Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.

He was relieved and excited to have Titus return to him, but far more important than Titus' return was the message Titus brought back from the Corinthian Christians for Paul. They had taken Paul's words to heart. They possessed an earnest desire to follow the Word of the Lord as delivered to them from Paul. They mourned their sin. They cared for Paul in his distress and discomfort. This not only comforted Paul but it brought him joy. He rejoiced to know that these fellow Christians remained true to their Lord and the gospel of Christ.

So what is the lesson for us? We should have an earnest concern for our fellow Christians. We should reach out to them in loving concern when we see them falter in matters of faith. Some may tell

us that what others are doing is none of our business, but we need to reach out to them with as much earnest love as Paul did for the Corinthians. Yes, others' troubles should trouble us. We should love them even as Christ loved us. Even as our spiritual plight distressed our Lord Jesus so that He gave Himself for us, so we should be distressed for others and willing to reach out to them, even if we risk being rebuffed, or having our feelings hurt. Our Christian brothers and sisters should be on our hearts, so that we pray for their spiritual welfare, and make every attempt to reach them in meekness and love, that they might hear and respond to our plea for their souls.

You see it is not sticking our noses where they don't belong, or boastful condescending criticism that we have to offer. We can and should tell people when they are in danger so that their lives could be lost unless they stop and turn away from what they are doing. Some might think such a statement is overly dramatic, but if people think that another's physical life is worth saving when that lasts but a short 70 or 80 years or so on this earth, what about the eternal soul and how an everlasting life might be lost? Isn't that of greater concern? And we don't just criticize and tell others how evil this or that behavior is. We bring them --

II. Comfort for the Troubled Conscience.

Yes, Paul had written words to the Corinthians that made them sad, that made them sorry. He had written them words that made them cringe within themselves. That he had to deliver such a message to these Christian brothers whom Paul dearly loved, with whom he had spent so much time, well, that made Paul sad too. But Paul had no regrets, for while they were made sad it was only for the moment, as they realized not only their sin, but the seriousness of their sin. Titus was able to report to Paul that then they repudiated their sin and the evil of their slack ways, and dedicated themselves to walking correctly in the way of the Lord. Paul had not only led them to see their sin, but to appreciate more fully the wonders of the gospel, and the forgiveness that is to be found in a crucified and risen and living Savior. So Paul was able to write back to them in this second epistle:

2 Corinthians 7:9-10 Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Their sorrow was a godly sorrow that led to repentance. They were not spurning the gospel in impenitence. Paul distinguishes between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. They could have been sad to receive such a letter of admonition from Paul, and then been sad to think that they and Paul would be going their separate ways as they went out in the direction they determined was right for them. They could have been sorry that Paul didn't approve of their conduct but then continued to operate their congregation in a disorderly undisciplined, and unloving manner. Yes, they could have been sad, and still uncaring that they were offending their Lord and Savior by their manner of conduct. That was a real danger the thought of which had been the source of Paul's distress.

That was not the sadness that filled their hearts. They were sad that they had been so blind to their sin. They were sad that Paul had to point out to them how they had offended their Lord's love, and had disgraced the gospel in their midst. They were sad, but they were also determined to remove the offenses from their congregation. Titus was able to come back and report to Paul about the bold and decisive actions the Corinthian congregation had taken regarding each and every matter that had caused such heartache for the Lord as well as for Paul. And so Paul rejoiced! He rejoiced because such godly sorrow as they experienced leads to repentance and salvation.

Remember what repentance includes. Yes, of course it includes that one is sorry for what they have done, but that is only the beginning. It also includes a turning away from the sin (that means repudiating it, not continuing to embrace it in one's life). Finally it means turning to Jesus, not only confessing one's sin, but knowing in one's heart that Jesus is ready and eager to forgive. "**When we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**" (1 John 1:9). That is the gospel truth! God is **faithful** to forgive. Time and again we find that we need to turn to Him in confession. Yes, each and every day

we need to pray, “**Jesus Savior wash away all that has been wrong today**” (TLH 653:2). And each and every day our Father in heaven forgives us for Jesus’ sake.

He is faithful to forgive because it is the **just** thing for Him to do. That is the wonder of the gospel. Jesus’ body was given **for you** for the forgiveness of **your** sins. He paid the price of our sin when He shed His holy precious blood for us. God in His grace and wisdom made it so that since the debt was paid once and for all, the only right thing for Him to do is to forgive the sinner who turns to Him confessing his sin and seeking forgiveness for Jesus’ sake. When God forgives He makes us perfectly clean! There is no unrighteousness left. “**The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin**” (1 John 1:7). There is true comfort for the troubled conscience.

Conclusion: Comfort one another with this truth.

This is the message that we have for sinners. Yes, sadly at times we need to search for a way to bring another person, even a Christian brother or sister to realize their sin, but that is only the set up. What the Lord has given us to share with the world is that wondrous good news that God loved this sinful world and has sent His only-begotten Son to save us, that whoever believes in Him might know the joy and peace that comes to us freely from God.

There are so many people out in this world with distressed consciences. The Lord has entrusted us with the mission of assuring others that there is forgiveness with God, and their conscience may know peace, both now and forever.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.