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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
September 20, 2020  
16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Ezekiel 33:7-11, Romans 13:1-10

Hymns: 234:1-4; 324:1-4; 307; 309

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

Sermon Text: Matthew 18:15-20

“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. <sup>16</sup>But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ <sup>17</sup>And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

<sup>18</sup>“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.

<sup>19</sup>“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. <sup>20</sup>For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

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

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Accepting Responsibility --

We might say that accepting responsibility is part of growing up. With our children we encourage them to accept responsibility for themselves and their actions, fulfilling assignments from school or Sunday school or Catechism class. At church we look for spiritual growth, and expect people to behave toward the Lord and their fellow Christian in a loving, responsible manner. We look for faithful use of the means of grace in hearing the Word of God, and worshipping and honoring the Lord with our fellow believers. We expect involvement in supporting the ministry of the gospel with attendance, with offerings, and with involvement in church functions, organizations and projects. We aren't alone in looking for these things. The Lord looks for such a response to the gospel. It is part of spiritual maturity. It is part of growing up.

But it goes beyond that. We are not an island. One of the expectations that comes with being in a congregation is that someone will care enough to say and/or do something if I wander down those pathways unholy! When any one of us stumbles in our faith, falls into sin, (and we all do sometime) each and every one of us should be able to hope for another Christian brother or sister to hold out a hand and help us up, pull us out of the pitfall of sin into which we fell. Is that too much to ask? I don't think so, and more importantly, the Lord Jesus doesn't think so. It is part of Christian maturity to take on the responsibilities the Lord Himself has set before His children as we mature in our faith life. In our text Jesus sets before us the --

### **THEME: The Christian's Responsibility of Soul Care.**

This is one of the most difficult responsibilities we face as children of God. Most people are terribly uncomfortable in approaching another person regarding something that is amiss in their lives. Because it is difficult it is often emotionally charged, which makes it even more difficult, and leads to the upset that the child of God who makes the approach to his or her fellow Christian wanted to avoid. It's no easier for the pastor. It is very difficult for me to make the phone call or knock on the door of a straying church member. So then our action or inaction is often driven by the wrong emotion; it could be anger, or fear and apprehension, and it is all because we are focused on the wrong thing, or rather the

wrong person, or persons. We are focused on self, and personal discomfort rather than on Jesus and our Christian brother or sister. Jesus didn't step away from saving us because it might involve some personal discomfort for Him, did He?

Living up to this Christian responsibility needs to --

### **I. Driven by Jesus' Love for the Lost.**

The words of our text are often considered in isolation as a study on church discipline. We need to set these words of our Lord in their greater context. They follow after Jesus' parable of the lost sheep. It is a simple enough parable. If a man has a hundred sheep and notices that one is missing doesn't he go looking for that lost sheep? The ninety-nine are safe and sound in the sheep pen. He won't say, "Oh, well, I guess we lost one!" He will go to rescue the lost one, and if successful in that rescue will rejoice! Now consider Jesus' words immediately before and after that little parable, for they set the tone for our text.

**Matthew 18:11, 14** For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost." *And* "Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

Jesus came to save sinners. He reached out to sinners that others wouldn't touch! Yes, Jesus was criticized for reaching out to tax collectors and prostitutes! Saving them wasn't simply a matter of being nice to them. It required so much more, even as saving us required so much more. To save the lost Jesus had to suffer and die for the sins of the world. To save you from your sin Jesus had to endure the curse of His Father in heaven. Think of that to save you Jesus was cursed by His Father in heaven! This was God's plan to save us, because it was the only way that we might be saved. The **ONLY** way!

This underscores Jesus' words that it is **NOT** the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. Little ones doesn't mean only children in age, it means children of God who were bought at the price of Jesus' blood, and adopted as God's children, beloved children, by grace through faith. God cares for sinners. Jesus cares for His children that stumble in their faith and fall into sin.

Sin is not something to be ignored or taken lightly. Sin that insinuates itself into a Christian's life is perilous indeed. Yes, we all sin, and most often it is a sin of weakness that the child of God will not defend. Indeed, we all sin daily, and confess that freely. We all despise the sins that we struggle with in our lives. We have Christian brothers and sisters, and pastors to look to for help and encouragement from Scripture when we feel defeated by sin and the devil, or oppressed by feelings of guilt and even condemnation. That is a whole different aspect of how precious our fellowship is, and why it is important to build close relationships with our fellow Christians.

What Jesus was addressing in this chapter of Scripture is the danger for the child of God of wandering off into sin, and not caring, or perhaps not even realizing that sin has overtaken them in their lives. We live in a society with such mixed up morality that yes, children of God are deceived by the world, tempted by the devil, and wander off into sin that can overthrow their faith in Jesus. Sin can overtake anyone.

Now how is the child of God to respond? Should we be like Cain asking God, "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" (Genesis 4:9) Dare we pretend that it is none of my business what sins are overwhelming a fellow believer? It takes some gumption, gumption of love and concern and faith to say something. But that is the responsible thing to do. We warn one another of all kinds of other hazards in life, but the world intimidates us into thinking that we ought to keep silent when a warning about sin and its dangers are called for.

Jesus calls for action, but this is to be --

## **II. Conducted According to Jesus' Prescription.**

**Matthew 18:15-17** "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. <sup>16</sup> But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' <sup>17</sup> And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Right off the bat we should note that Jesus' calls for discretion. If we become aware of a brother or sister falling into sin we should take it personally. Jesus' intent isn't that we should wait to say something until it is a personal attack on us. When a brother has fallen, it's personal! This is **your** brother or **your** sister that has fallen into grave spiritual harm and danger. (If we don't feel that connection to our fellow church members we ought to work on that.) But discretion is called for. If at all possible keep it between you and your brother or sister. *"And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.'"* (1 Peter 4:8) Those words of Peter are not an encouragement to let it slide, but rather to deal with another's sin quietly, and effectively with the law and the gospel. No one else needs to know. Consider also Paul's words to the Galatians: *"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted."* (Galatians 6:1) The sins we need to beware of are pride, or self-righteousness, or gossip.

The one on one contact may be repeated, but if it becomes obvious that the brother or sister who has fallen into sin won't listen to you, then one or two others who are trusted responsible Christians may be of help. Maybe their presence or words will make the necessary impression. That is always our hope and prayer.

However if it still needs to go farther than one takes it to the congregation, the fellowship of believers where one is a member. If the congregation speaks with one voice calling for repentance that is a powerful testimony, not of hatred or self-righteousness, but of loving concern. The final action in seeking repentance is excluding the fallen brother or sister from the congregation. It is so important that the desire for repentance and renewal of faith and fellowship be obvious in this action to the fallen brother or sister. This is pleading with one who is loved by Jesus as well as the congregation, as though God were pleading through us: *"We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)

That really reminds us of the power of the gospel. We don't "write people off" as lost causes, or not worth the trouble. This Christian responsibility that the Lord has laid on our hearts is –

### III. Completed with Eternal Benefits.

Hear Jesus' words:

**Matthew 18:18-20** "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.

<sup>19</sup>"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. <sup>20</sup>For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Translating can sometimes leave false impressions. Jesus is not telling us that God will do whatever we think He ought to do. If we think someone should go to heaven then the Lord will have him go to heaven, even if that individual is impenitent, and contrary if we think someone should go to eternal death in hell then that is what the Lord will do, even if he is repentant. It is quite the opposite of that. We are to act with the assurance that what we are doing is an affirmation of what the Lord has already determined. By the time we declare that one's sin is bound to them it must be clear, absolutely clear that this is the case. In the Catechism Luther speaks of excluding from the Christian congregation the "**manifestly** impenitent." That means impenitence is as obvious as the nose on your face. Then they are excluded from the Christian congregation **BUT only** until they repent! Yes, we may affirm that their sins are bound to them, they do not have the peace of forgiveness, until such time as they repent. As soon as they repent the Lord is clear their sins are then forgiven, and we rejoice that a brother or sister has been rescued.

So we read in the epistle of James: *Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.* (James 5:19-20)

The Lord directs us in this Christian responsibility. It is to be taken on soberly. It is to be addressed with prayer for the restoration of the brother or sister. It is to be carried out with love and hope that is found in the congregation of believers. We need to understand that as we endeavor to fulfill our call as Christians that we do so with the Lord's presence, with the Lord's blessing, with the power of the gospel of Christ. May we proceed acknowledging our own weakness and sin in this area, and looking to Jesus for forgiveness and strengthening of our faith, even as we receive His body and blood today in the Sacrament of the Altar. God, help us in our weakness.

**AMEN.**

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