



# Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

## September 6, 2020

\* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude

### Gathering

Welcome and Lighting the Christ Candle

Acolyte: May the Holy Spirit unite us in worship, point us toward Jesus Christ, and inspire us to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God. Come, let us worship God.

\* Liturgist: Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, sing his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.

**All: Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. Let them praise his name with dancing and making music with the timbrel and harp.**

Liturgist: For the Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory.  
*Psalm 149: 1-4 adapted*

**All Singing: 572 “Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above”**  
*Singing verses 1, 2 and 5*

Minister: To God’s people gathered in hope: Grace to you, mercy and peace, from God our Creator and Christ our Redeemer, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

**All: Amen.**

Passing the Peace at a Distance

## Reconciliation

Liturgist: You see, at the just the right time,

**All: when we were still powerless,**

Liturgist: Christ died for the ungodly.

**All: Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.**

Liturgist: But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

*Romans 5: 6-8*

*Silent Confession and Lament*

**All Singing: 667 “Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies”**

Liturgist: Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!

**All: For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!**

Liturgist: Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

*Romans 5: 9-11*

\* **All Singing: 833 “There is a Redeemer”**

Liturgist: Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another,

**All: for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.**

Liturgist: The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command that may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

**All: Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.**

*Romans 13: 8-10*

## Proclamation

**All: Prepare our hearts, O God, to accept your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own, that, hearing, we may also obey your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Scripture: Matthew 18: 15-20

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

Sermon: Practical Jesus

\* **All Singing: 862 “Take Us as We Are, O God”**

## Dedication

Prayers of the People

\* **All Singing: 927 “God, the Father of Your People”**

Benediction

Praying with Elders – If you have a concern or joy that you’d like to talk or pray about with an Elder, one or two will be available in the shade near the sanctuary entrance following the service.

### Worship Leaders

Pianist: Lynn Hollender  
Vocalist: Lori Evenhouse  
Vocalist: Corenna Roozeboom  
Sound Engineer: Schuyler Roozeboom  
Minister: Roger Nelson

### 9:00 AM Service

Acolyte: Evelyn Evenhouse  
Liturgist: Dorothy Wassenaar  
Prayer: Rick Boonstra  
Vocalist: Jim Kwasteniet  
Violin: David VanderWeele

### 10:15 AM Service

Acolyte: Bruno & Violet Brumirski  
Liturgist: Randy Van Kuiken  
Prayer: Josh Larsen  
Vocalist: Russ Hollender  
Violin: Frances Boerman-Cornell

Hymns are from “Lift Up Your Hearts” (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013)  
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Text: Matthew 18: 15-20  
Title: Practical Jesus  
Date: 09.06.20  
Roger Allen Nelson

This is Jesus at his practical best.

Wherever two or three are gathered in his name, Jesus promises to be there, but there also promises to be conflict. Toes will be stepped on and offense will be taken, so he offers a simple practical process to pursue healing and reconciliation.

Jesus says that if someone in the church has sinned against you – which is gonna happen sooner or later – you should go to that person and point out the wrongdoing. If that person receives this news, then Jesus says you have “gained” or “won them over.” If they refuse or push back, even after you have lovingly, humbly, and clearly pointed out their sin, then you are to share the dispute with one or two others. And then, if there is still no resolution, if they still won’t listen, you are to share it with the church and the church is to work for reconciliation between the offender and the offended. And if that doesn’t work. Well....

William Hawkins graduated from seminary and went to serve a rural church. He loved the picture of a little country church standing faithfully against the winds of culture and creation. He loved the idea of time to study and read that he might preach to hungry souls longing for heavenly bread.

As it turned out, there were just a few extended families in the church and few years earlier a vote by council tore those families asunder. Half the church picked up and went to another church on the other side of the county. Since then they been separated by acres of soybeans and miles of silence. They hadn’t spoken since the vote.

So, Rev. Hawkins decided to address the matter head-on. He preached on this morning’s text and he took Jesus at his word. At the close of the sermon he said that they would now process together to the homes of those who’d left the church so that they might talk and be reconciled....

And they did. In their Sunday best they went to confront the other families with their sin.

Turns out the conversations were midwest-polite, but nothing came of it. Those that left weren’t coming back.

And as Hawkins wrote later,

*Membership dropped. The disappoint over the congregation’s failed attempt at reconciliation had damaged its spirit in ways that no one wanted to admit. Everyone, including this wet-behind-the-ears pastor, walked on egg-shells.*

I feel like I’ve been walking on egg-shells.

Maybe you do too. Everything feels politically charged. There’s a palpable sense of anxiety, unease, and uncertainty. I’m conflict avoidant so I’m not eager to engage in conversations about presidential politics, pandemic protocol, or concerns about policing

and systemic racism. We're awash in information, misinformation, and disinformation and I'm mindful of the line in Judges, "and everyone did what was right in their own eyes." I had 3 friends tell me recently that they were thinking about upgrading their guns so that they'd be ready for a coming armed struggle. As one said, "I'll be fighting in the streets." I didn't have the heart to tell him that he'd be shooting at his pastor.

I could go on. Maybe you know something similar. The idea of talking through points of dispute, even between brothers and sisters in Christ, feels fraught with uncertainty and the potential for profound hurt. Some of you have fractured relationships because of disagreements with friend and family. We're walking on egg-shells. And the instructions of practical Jesus seem as out of reach as those of hyperbolic Jesus. (Surely, he didn't mean to actually turn the other cheek, or love our enemies, or sell our possessions and give to the poor. Surely that was hyperbole. This must be similar?)

Dear friends, what are we to make of these instructions of Jesus?  
Are they practical or hyperbolic?  
As those who want to walk in the way of Jesus how might we follow?

Let's start with this.

This is one of only two places where Jesus uses the word: *ecclesia*. *Ecclesia* often gets translated as "church," but it means "assembly," and it was usually used for a gathering of people or a political body. The root word is "called," so it literally means, "the called-out ones." *Ecclesia* is a people called out...

Called out from others.

Called out from the predominate culture.

Called out from the way of the world.

Called out to follow....

You are called out by God.

You may think of yourself as a Republican or a Democrat; you may be a "Never-Trumper" or be all in with the President. You may find belonging in clan, career, or college; you may find identity in your neighborhood or your hobby. But, according to Jesus you are also called out....

You are called out into the community of Christ, into the way and will of God.

You are called out into a people whose primary allegiance is belonging to God in Christ – of which your baptism is a sign and seal. And, therefore, any ethic, any way of relating to one another, any point of contention or convention is rooted in that primary reality.

So, no matter what happens in the next few months or years, come hell or high water, our belonging and our calling will remain unchanged. No matter the political, pandemic or post-election reality you will still be called out by God in Christ.

In December of 410, word of Rome's fall to the Visigoths reached the city of Hippo (in what is present day Algeria). The empire was collapsing and their demise was inevitable. The Hippo-ites (?) were deeply shaken, worried about what would come next, and wondered how God could allow this to happen. Saint Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, said this to them,

*God does not raise up citadels of stone and marble for us; outside of this world he raises up citadels of the Holy Spirit for us, citadels of love which could never collapse, which will forever stand in glory when this world has been reduced to ashes. ... Rome has collapsed and your hearts are outraged by this. Rome was built by men like yourself. Since when did you believe that men had the power to build things that are eternal? Your souls, filled with the light of the Holy Spirit, will not perish.*

Dear friends, you belong to God in Christ. You are called out by God in Christ. And nothing will shake or change that reality - eternally. And it is precisely because of that reality that Jesus establishes a process by which to resolve conflict....

Because there will be conflict.

From the get-go there has always been conflict within the called-out ones. According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity there are approximately 41,000 different Christian denominations and organizations in the world. That suggests that faithful well-meaning Christians can't always find common ground or work things out. That suggests that we often move to the other side of the county and settle for soy beans and silence.

I'm not sure what "sin" Jesus means for us to point out to one another. It surely means more than disagreements about politics or ways to understand race and systems and history. And it must mean more than theological disputes. But, in the context of those discussions there is certainly opportunity for hurt and broken relationships. Most of the time it's easier to vent to a few friends and hold onto our sense of being right. It's hard work to first check the log in our own eyes before pointing out the splinter in another. And then thoughtfully-prayerfully mustering up the courage to say to someone, "Could we talk...."

But, Jesus calls us to the hard thing,  
this is what you do as the beloved-called-out-community,  
these are the ties that bind,  
this is what love demands.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that, "Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to ... sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a (sister or a) brother back from the path of sin."

May we have the compassion and courage to follow the practical ways of Jesus because we called out together.

One more thing....

What if the hurt is too big, or the offense is too serious, or the wrongdoer refuses to listen and work for reconciliation? The list is long of those who have abused power in the church. There are some hurts that don't get patched over and put back together. What then?

Jesus says that after we have tried the first three steps we are to treat the wrongdoers as tax collectors and pagans, or outsiders. (The word here is *ethnikos*, one from the nations, one from outside of the commonwealth of God.) So, historically the church has read that as putting people out. At some point you have to excommunicate, or break off relationship, or kick them to the curb. Treat them as you would tax collectors and pagans....

Except that Jesus was always getting into trouble for eating with tax collectors and sinners.

And, right before Jesus gives this practical advice he tells the parable of the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep to search for the one lost sheep.

He doesn't give up.

He doesn't shrug it off and walk away.

He doesn't let one go, but he pursues and pursues and pursues until he has found the lost-least-last sheep.

And right after our text Jesus says that we're to forgive not seven times but seventy-seven times.

So, while I'm sure there are reasons to create boundaries for church it seems to me that the overwhelming thrust, or hope, or spirit of Jesus here is about

forgiveness,

and unity,

and the hard work of holding together those who called out by God in Christ.

Dear friends, may we have the tenderness of heart and the strength of character to forgive and love one another as embodied by Jesus – even at his practical best.

Amen.