

Joshua Willadsen
13th Sunday after Pentecost
Sermons
September 11, 2011

MATTHEW 18:15 - 35 - "CARING THROUGH CONFRONTATION & FORGIVENESS"

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Sin is serious. Sin is no laughing matter. Sin divides, separates, and isolates people from God and from one another. Sin is terminal; it brings certain death. Sin is prolific; all people have it and all of us will die.

Sin is not merely an isolated incident of breaking one of God's commandments, like stealing or telling lies about your neighbor. Sin is complete rebellion against God in body, mind, and spirit. Sin is in all of us corrupting and degrading our will, thoughts, feelings, speech, and actions. Sin is evil and sin only produces more evil. Sin cannot be cured. Sin must be killed.

God the Father sent His only Son, Jesus the Christ, to save people from sin. As the Christ and Son of God, Jesus took sin, which is common to us all but alien to Him, upon Himself. With our sin Jesus suffered and died on the cross to kill sin. On the third day Jesus undid death by His resurrection. In the name of Jesus, in the name that He has given to us in Baptism, the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Jesus has granted us forgiveness, a death to sin and a new life by faith to God.

Modern medicine has come a long way in treating sickness and disease. Modern medicine has not eradicated all sickness and disease, but it has allowed many to live full, long, and healthy lives. Take HIV for instance. In the 1980's anyone diagnosed with HIV was sure to develop full blown AIDS and soon die because it attacks and destroys the body's immune system, leaving the body unable to fight off other sickness that are not otherwise terminal. When Magic Johnson announced that he had HIV the world was shocked and assumed that the death of the legendary point guard was imminent. Thanks to advances in modern medicine Magic Johnson is alive yet to this day; he still has HIV, but it has not progressed into full blown and deadly AIDS. Thanks to the medicine Magic Johnson takes regularly he has been able to live a full and healthy life despite the disease he carries. If Magic were to stop receiving the treatment medicine his HIV he would be soon be in danger of becoming full blown and deadly AIDS. HIV and AIDS are deadly serious, but sin is more so!

Our situation as disciples of Jesus Christ is like Magic Johnson's situation, only far more serious, because sin unchecked in us leads not just to death, separation, division, and isolation in the present world, but to eternal death, separation, division,

and isolation from God. Our Lord Jesus is aware of our situation and the seriousness of sin that all His disciples struggle with. Jesus knows the weakness, neediness, and dependence of His disciples and He has provided care and treatment for our otherwise deadly condition.

In Matthew 18:15-20 Jesus gives the disciples further instruction for how they are to care for those who are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven/the reign of God, those who are the most needy, weak, dependent, and vulnerable at any given time. He says: 15 “And if your brother sins against you, go reprove him between you and him only. If he hears you, then you have gained your brother; 16 but if he does not hear, take with you yet one or two, that ‘on the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter might be established’; 17 and if he refuses to hear them, then speak to the church; and if he also refuses to hear the church, then let him be to you as the pagan and the tax collector. 18 Truly I say to you; whatever you bind upon the earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose upon the earth will have been loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you that if two from you agree upon the earth concerning every matter which they might ask, it will be to them from My Father in the heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am in their midst.”

Jesus’ own words reveal the seriousness of the situation. A brother or sister in Christ, His own disciple, needs to be gained, to be brought back because he has sinned, sinned against you. Jesus is not here referring to an isolated incident of selfishness and unkindness that anyone of us can easily become guilty of on daily basis (especially to our own family members), but to full blown deadly sin, unrepentant sin that divides a person from Christ and one’s brothers and sisters in Christ, a truly mortal sin. A mortal sin for a believer can potentially be any sin that is left unchecked, for which the person is holding on to in unrepentance. On the one hand all sin is equally repugnant and damnable by God, but some sin is more full blown and dangerous to a person and others because it can drive away faith. For example- lustful thoughts are sin for which we deserve God’s judgment for, but a ten year adulterous affair is lust full blown with great earthly consequences and potential eternal ones; likewise a person who in the midst of tiredness uncharacteristically makes critical and rude comments about another is wrong and sinful, but the person who daily spreads cruel gossip about another by phone, e-mail, or Facebook to friends is caught up in full blown unrepentant sin.

Sin is serious. Unchecked sin leads to death. This is why sin, especially full blown sin, must be confronted lest a brother or sister is lost to us and lost to Christ. When I as a pastor or you to one of your brothers and sisters confront another brother or sister in full blown sin, we always do so with humility and compassion, for we too are sinners and but for the grace of God we too would fall. Confronting such sin in a brother or sister is an act of love meant to gain and retain them in the fellowship of believers in Christ. How great it is; what a time to rejoice when a brother or sister repents of sin and receives the forgiveness of Christ again spoken from you or from the pastor!

Our Lord’s words here are not meant to be comprehensive, that is a basic three step process that must be handled in every situation when a brother is caught up in sin. Rather Jesus is teaching a gradual progression of care and confrontation. It may happen that you go and confront your brother for a while of his sin but he refuses to

repent. If that is the case then others who are aware of the sin at some point need to confront him along with you in humility and compassion with the prayer that he repents. If even after a time of this he refuses to repent then sadly the matter is to be brought before the congregation to confront the brother in love and warn him of the danger of his sin. When it becomes certain that there is no repentance and renewal despite the loving outreach, then the congregation is to speak the loving word of exclusion and excommunicate him, with the prayer that this finally will lead him to repentance. This is how care for the greatest is done.

Because we are not a large congregation caring for the greatest in our midst, especially the brother or sister caught up in sin that is full blown should be easier for us than for those congregations that have hundreds and even thousands of people. We can actually have a much better idea of what is going on in the life of our brothers and sisters in our congregation and seek to serve them where they need help. However this is not always the case in practice is it. Though we may be more aware of the problems and weaknesses of our brothers and sisters, we may not always address them in humility and love. We may simply ignore them; we may respond in a critical manner because we have been hurt by something they said or did; we may even be at a loss as to what to say or do; or we may simply be too distracted by our selves and the things going on in our own lives that we never really consider our brothers and sisters here. No matter what the reason, whenever we fail to love our neighbor, to care for the greatest in God's reign, then we are guilty of sin for which we need to repent and receive the forgiveness of Christ our Lord. Thanks be to God that He is gracious and merciful to forgive our sins for the sake of Jesus His Son and Christ who suffered, was killed, and was raised on the third day in Jerusalem!

God killed sin in the death of His Son and Christ, Jesus. God created the new life in the resurrection of His Son and Christ, Jesus. God the Father sent Jesus to suffer, die, and rise again for you, that you might have forgiveness of sin, so that you might die to sin and live by faith for God. God has given you forgiveness of sin in Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; He gives forgiveness in Christ's body and blood; He gives forgiveness in the Word of Absolution; and gives forgiveness now in the preaching of Jesus for you. Hold fast in faith to God's forgiveness for you in Christ and by His forgiveness forgive your brothers and sisters in Christ when they sin against you in any way.

Jesus instructs us not only to care for the greatest through confrontation, but also through forgiveness. Our forgiveness for our brothers and sisters is not to be limited. Our forgiveness for our brothers and sisters is not to be conditional. Our forgiveness for our brothers and sisters is to be all encompassing and free, because that is the kind of forgiveness we have received from the Father in Jesus' name. At first this may seem daunting and even impossible and in and of ourselves it is, but in Christ it is possible.

21 Then Peter came toward Him and said, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I will forgive him? Until seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you until seven times rather until seventy times seven. 23 On account of this the reign of heaven has become like a certain king, who wished to settle the account with his slaves. 24 And he began to settle (the account) which

was brought to him, one who owed ten thousand talents. 25 And because he was not able to pay back (what was owed) the Lord commanded him to sell also his wife and children and all things whatever he had, and to pay back. 26 Therefore when he had fallen down the slave began to do obeisance before him saying, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay back all things to you.' 27 And because the Lord had compassion upon that slave he released him and the debt he forgave him. 28 But when that slave went out he found one of his fellow slaves, who owed him one hundred denarii, and when he seized he began to choke him saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' 29 Then when he had fallen down his fellow slave began to plead with him saying, 'Be patient with me, and I will repay you.' 30 But he kept on not being willing (to do so) rather he came and cast him into prison until he paid back what he owed. 31 Therefore when his fellow slave saw what had happened they were very grieved and they went and explained to the Lord himself all the things which had happened. 32 Then the Lord summoned him and he said to him, 'Evil slave, all that was owed I have forgiven you, because you asked me; 33 is it not necessary then for you to be merciful to your fellow slave, as I also was merciful to you?' 34 And his Lord was wrathful and handed him over to the tormentors until when he paid back all that he owed. 35 In this way also My Father in heaven will do to you, if you do not forgive each one his brother from your hearts."

Jesus teaching in this parable is clear. If you or I do not forgive our brothers and sisters, if we hold onto our anger, hurt, and sense of injustice, if we do not act with compassion to our brother and sister then the Father shall withhold His forgiveness to you and cast you out. This may seem shocking at first to our ears, but it is perfectly in line with everything Jesus has been teaching. Having an unforgiving heart toward your brother or sister in Christ is full blown deadly sin, which needs to be repented of immediately! Whatever your brother and sister has done against you whatever they owe you in restitution pales in comparison to what you have done against God and owe Him. What you owe God cannot be paid back!

I, nor Jesus, am trivializing the hurt and pain that you have felt because the evil and wrong you have suffered from a brother and sister in Christ; it is real and very painful. And if you or I just think of our pain and loss, if we cling and hold on to our pain, loss, and how we were wronged, then we will never be able to forgive. We must look beyond ourselves, beyond our pain, suffering, and loss to the pain, suffering, and loss of our Lord Jesus who freely suffered, died, and was raised to forgive the debt that you owed God for your transgressions and could not pay. Only by dying to self and living by faith in Christ who died and rose for you can you forgive. Christ Jesus died and rose and thus so do we. Christ Jesus has forgiven you and so you too forgive, amen.