

### Prayer of the Day:

Our Jesus Christ, preserve the congregation of believers with your never-failing mercy. Help us avoid whatever is wicked and harmful, and guide us in the way that leads to our salvation; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### Verse of the Day:

God wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:4)

### Sermon Text:

Jesus transfiguration was still etched into the minds of the Disciples as they walked along the dusty roads of Israel. Jesus was not some magician, it was plainly obvious that all this Son of God talk was real. It was killing some of the disciples and they had to ask the question, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Then you can almost read the signs flash in their eyes, "Pick me! Pick me!"

At that moment perhaps we would expect Jesus' shoulders to drop a bit. "These guys still didn't get it did they." So he tells them faith, faith like that of a child is most important. And then he speaks of 99 sheep left so that the shepherd could find the one that strayed. After that Jesus spoke the words of our lesson today.

What's the point? The disciples were busy after the transfiguration to scramble after their own glory. That's the old man fighting inside of them. Jesus tells us the new man does not care about grasping for glory but rather grasping for souls, caring for your neighbor.

Jesus has concern for his sheep. Note the focus in our lesson today. Jesus tells us to look for a brother, a fellow believer in the family of our God. Note also what is going on here. This is no misunderstanding. It is not a petty argument over who should run a committee or what is or is not proper to wear. Jesus tells us to seek a brother trapped in sin, one of his lost sheep.

When a brother is trapped in sin there is only one action that can be taken. Jesus says "go!" We go to that brother and admonish their actions, we do so privately at first that the brother might repent and turn from sin without the entire community pointing and laughing but we do go. Go! Don't wait for them to come to you. Seek the Lost!

Then, Jesus reminds us we might need help. He says, "*But if he will not listen, take one or two others along...*" Maybe they didn't want to listen to you but they will listen if James says something. Maybe two or three people just might help the brother or sister to see that this is no petty squabble or a vendetta but a real concern for a real sin. If it doesn't then two or three people become witnesses to the fact that this sin is rooted firmly in this person's heart.

"*If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.*" The church is the Supreme Court when it comes to church discipline. Now the person is confronted with the fact that the church recognizes that they are living in sin. There is no escaping it. This is a real problem. The results of disobeying the church are terrible. Pagans simply don't have a place in the family of God. The sheep is left to the wolves. Hopefully they will wake up before the jaws sink in.

Notice something here though. This isn't "elders work" or stuff the pastor needs to get going on. At its final level sure it probably becomes that but until that point Jesus says GO! He doesn't say sit back and talk behind their backs. That's the easy thing to do isn't it? "Did you hear about John Doe and his wife? Did

### Text: Matthew 18:15-20

<sup>15</sup> "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. <sup>16</sup> But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

<sup>18</sup> "I tell you the truth, 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 tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

you know that so-in-so's daughter is living with someone?" In Catechism, during the study of the eighth commandment, we learn that false testimony is anything, true or untrue, that comes from evil intent, in short Gossip.

Discipline is really the opposite of that. It's love in action. When you discipline your children you tell them, it's all out of honest love for them. That is a true statement, even though they may not think so at the time. The same is true when you confront a believer trapped in sin; often, the reactions are not unlike a child's. If you love your brother or sister in Christ, then you will not allow Satan to steal them away without a fight.

I know exactly the feeling that turns in your stomachs right now. That fear over the idea of confronting a fellow Christian. The anxiety that develops when you realize that their might be a battle here. It is not the most beloved act of ministry to seek the straying and I wish that we never had to look after them because it simply would never happen. The simple reality, however, is that our fellow Christians are sinners in need of our support and if it hadn't been for someone watching out for us, then we would have left the faith a long time ago.

God is serious about seeking the lost. In Ezekiel, He tells us that He will hold us accountable for the sheep we let stray. Christians do the work of the shepherd, no matter how hard it may be, but we don't do it alone either. We have a helper, a support that will never let us down.

Jesus, God, gives us his keys. You and I sometimes fail to acknowledge the awe-inspiring nature of that statement. As people who would rather talk behind our neighbor's back, as people who would rather walk away from someone's "personal" life than dive in and discipline, we should have never had keys to the kingdom of heaven. In fact, for our sinful attitudes, we should have been locked out of heaven itself. Someone else should have used the keys, especially the binding key, on us. We deserve hell for our actions. We certainly do not deserve heaven or authority in it.

Thankfully Jesus acted. He got up and did not turn the other way nor did he talk behind our backs, he faced our sin head-on, placing it upon himself and carrying it to the cross, to the grave. He pointed out every sin and used the keys with absolute perfection. He demonstrated true love for his neighbor, his sheep, us. He took all our sins away and gave us righteousness instead and with it came the keys to the kingdom of heaven so that we could open its gate to others. Ah, and don't forget that truth. Forgiveness is to underpin every aspect of our discipline. It's what we really want to be able to announce. What we yearn to get too.

The Keys come with the backing of God. He would not have given us them if he did not expect us to use them. So, Jesus promises that the Father will back our actions. *Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.* When we use the keys faithfully, the creator of the universe itself lends his authority to our words.

At the end of the section Jesus gives us the greatest promise of support. He promises himself. He says, *"For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."* That's a promise! The very one who was willing to give himself for our good, promises to stand by our side when we use his keys, when we discipline.

Jesus comes with the power of God. Jesus carries the power to make our words work. Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit into the hearts of his people. When Jesus comes with us none of his children, none of his sheep will ever be lost.

I know the apprehension that comes with the thought of confronting sin and the closer the person is the harder the task becomes. I know that we often feel inadequate for the task wondering if we will have the right words to speak. In Matthew 18, Jesus comes to us and calls us on our failures to help our neighbor and instructs us to show uncommon love. So often as we discuss this section in catechism classes Adult or 7&8 grade we will talk about what this would ultimately look like. If someone had a problem with anything they would simply go talk to the person and work it out. No drama, no backbiting or gossip, just people loving one another enough to say the hard thing, enough to bring them back to reality, back to the truth, always with the goal with the hope of being able to announce forgiveness. Sound better or worse than the reality that we live in now? Matthew 18, a body of believers that loves each other so much that it isn't afraid to say the hard things when needed. Well, what a wonderful world this would be! Amen.