

PENTECOST 17 2008 [PR18]

Matt 18:15-20 "Love is the Fulfillment of the Law"

Welcome to Rally Sunday. We begin the new church activities year with many programs for all ages in the congregation. Why all this activity? The purpose of all church activities is to help you grow in your faith and relationship to God. We are here to introduce you to Jesus as our savior and to then help you grow in faith and understanding. We have Sunday School classes for all ages. I invite you to participate (especially adults) in these classes. Your faith will mature and grow. Trusting in Jesus as our savior is simple enough for even a child to grasp but the implications for living are anything but simple. In classes and in worship each week we attempt to plumb the depths of what it means to live in faith and obedience. We do this best in the company of and with the encouragement of fellow Christians. Thank you for wearing your name tags. It really helps us get to know one another in this family of faith.

"[Blest Be the Tie That Binds](#)" is a well known hymn of the church. Family is one of God's greatest gifts to us. It is the source of life's greatest joy. The church is also a family.

But whenever I sing that hymn, "[Blest Be the Tie That Binds](#)" I am reminded of Erma Bombeck's humorous book titled "[Family Ties that Bind and Gag](#)". Sometimes family relations can be the source of trouble and heartache as family members fight with one another and marriages break up.

We all would like to have families that are havens of peace in the turmoil of the world. I've never married a couple that planned to fail in marriage. And while we will never find perfection in this life or in family we are not left without guidance from scripture about how we might attain peace in the family and success in relationships.

In the text for today Jesus tells us how we are to act when there is disagreement in the family. You will note first that Jesus was never one to be afraid of conflict. But you will also note that Jesus consistently took with him into a conflicted situation an attitude of reconciliation. For example: The woman caught in adultery he did not condemn (Jn. 8:3-11). Among his disciples, Matthew was a tax collector and Judas was a Zealot and Jesus called them both "friends". But in his own circle of disciples, Peter disowned him and Judas betrayed him. The disciples are the beginning of the church and even at the very beginning there was discord in the church. But Jesus didn't give up on his family. His goal was to reconcile and make peace in the family.

The key to family peace is forgiveness. Jesus modeled this best of all. He gave his life on the cross to forgive us and make us right with God. His practice of forgiving is what knits together the people of God even today. We gather under the symbol of forgiveness...the cross. The practice of forgiveness in our everyday lives is what allows us, sinful and stubborn human beings, to stay in relationship with one another. Holding on to disagreements and grudges will eat away at the fabric of any family. Forgiveness is the vital ingredient in keeping a family together. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." God's forgiveness enables us to forgive others as we have been forgiven.

But the first cousin of forgiveness is amendment of life and that is where the gospel lesson takes us today. We all need to be corrected now and then. If you have done something wrong most likely your family will forgive you, after all, they love you. But if you continue to do the same irritating thing over and over again, pretty soon forgiveness is harder to give. So forgiveness and amendment of life are linked. You can forgive your spouse for leaving dirty clothes on the floor. You can forgive your children for not cleaning up their rooms. But you'd like to see some change in behavior also. And so you, as a spouse or as a parent, will speak to the offending party, pointing out the problem. That's how you work to get things changed. That is what Jesus told his disciples to do and what he challenges us to do even today.

The church, like your own family, has potential to be the source of great joy and comfort. You can find friendships within your church that overcome differences of economic status, educational achievement, age, gender, and employment status. A church that is full of people who love one another is a strong witness to the community. In fact, the early church had a reputation of caring for each other, "see how they love one another!" While that is the goal of every congregation, to be a loving place, it doesn't mean that there will never be conflicts in the church family. No family is perfect and that goes for the church family too.

So then, how can this text help us live together in our church family? There is practical advice from Jesus on how we should deal with conflicts.

When there is strife in a family or in a congregation it is important to talk about it openly. Jesus said in the text for today... "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone." In other words, don't go spreading rumors about the faults of another. If you have a conflict with someone take it directly to that person.

The goal is to return the erring brother or sister to the faith and to do so in love. The reason we confront one who has strayed is that God cares about our lives and the consequences of our choices. As the O.T. lesson says, **“As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live.”** And God sent Jesus into the world to live and to die that we might be forgiven. We are called to be children of the light, disciples eager to live as people committed to the good of all and obedient to God’s word.

As parents you have a responsibility to raise your children in as safe and nurturing an environment as you can. A large part of your responsibility as a parent, is to train up your child in what to believe and what values to hold, so that the choices they make in life will be in accord with the will of God. As Xian parents we have a calling to be watchmen over our children's faith and development. Being a watchman in your family can make you seem mean. To say "No" isn't something that any parent loves to say. Yet it is essential to say if you love your children. To never correct your children would be the same as not loving them. In fact, correction is a form of love...tough love. God showed his love for us even when we rebelled against him in our selfishness and sin. That’s the kind of love God shows us in Jesus...**that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”** (Rom. 5:8).

Today is Rally Sunday. We begin the Sunday School year with activities that are aimed at helping parents with the important task of being watchmen in your family. We are here to help you and your family grow in faith, knowledge and fear of the Lord. I invite you to bring your children to SS and to attend the adult classes we offer here at Zion to learn how we might live as the people of God.

In your baptism you were adopted into the great family of God. God has given you the church as your family of faith where you can grow in faith, love and obedience to the will of God. May God guide this family, our congregation, to that end this year.
AMEN