

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday, August 27, 2011 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, August 28, 2011 at 8:30 a.m. & 10:15 a.m.

“Doing That Which is Difficult”

Matthew 18:1-20

Our lessons today offer numerous topics for discussion. As we have renewed the school year, I could fill three sermons with what Jesus says concerning the place of children and the need for child-like faith within the Kingdom of God. With the 10th anniversary of September 11th coming next week, it would be easy to preach on the Epistle lesson and the role of earthly authorities in the struggle for peace on earth.

However, in our Gospel lesson, Jesus talks about more than just children and He reminds us there is a greater and more difficult battle we are waging than the one we hear about in the news. Dealing with evil-doers and law breakers is a difficult task. But Jesus gives us instructions on how Christians are to deal with other Christians, which is often an even more difficult task.

There is one constant in life, among Christians and non-Christians alike: We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. Every person sitting, or standing here today has been guilty of offending someone else by something we said, by something we have done, or by something we have left undone. We are all very much in need of forgiveness.

Throughout the Bible, the Lord is very clear, not only about

our need of forgiveness from Him, but also our need to forgive one another. From days of old, God has taught His people how to forgive. As I said last week, God spoke to His people through the prophet Jeremiah and said: “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sin no more” [Jer. 31:34]. True forgiveness is to have a short memory.

But in addition to forgiving one another in your heart and mind, Christ also gave to us instructions on what to do when a fellow Christian has sinned against you, and it is something that is serious enough that it eats at you. If it is truly no big deal – an unintentional faux pas – you forgive, forget and move on. But if it is something you can’t let go or is a situation where this person is remaining unrepentantly comfortable in their sin. Christ says: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.”

As unpleasant as this may be for us to do, Christ says that we need to show them their sin. Christ tells us that we are not doing our friends or loved ones any favor by glossing over or looking past their sins. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, don’t give up on them. Take one or two others along, and pray that they see the great weight of their sin. If they still refuse to listen, only then do you make anything public by telling it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, then you are to treat them as “Gentiles or tax collectors.”

Unfortunately, when someone sins against us or does something that we find offensive, it seems as if our first reaction is

to immediately begin treating that person as the proverbial pagan or tax collector. That is not what Christ desires us to do.

When difficulty arises in our personal relationships because of sin that is or remains harmful to us physically, emotionally, or spiritually, there are two typical, common responses: One, is that we immediately condemn the person, publicly humiliate him, and treat him as a pagan or tax collector. As we said, that is not the desire of God.

The second common response is to make excuses for the person's behavior and gloss over their sins: "It's not that big of a deal" – even though it is a big deal. "Everybody does it." "Compared to what other people do, this isn't that bad." Or, "what they did was wrong, but I don't want to make a fuss over it." Or "I don't want to get them in trouble."

Neither of these common responses are the way in which Christ dealt with people in His life. In John chapter 8, when the woman who was caught in adultery was brought to Jesus, He said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the one to cast the first stone." Not only did Jesus not stand in judgment and condemn her, but He convinced the other people not to condemn her either.

However, Jesus did not make excuses for her or gloss over her past sinful lifestyle. He says to her: "Go now and leave your life of sin."

If we want to be like Christ, we cannot take either of the easy paths. We cannot hypocritically cast the first stone and stand in judgment, and we cannot excuse people's sins and allow them to

remain living comfortably in their sin. We must love them enough to do what is difficult and unpleasant. We must show them their sin, show them the need to repent, and admonish them to leave their life of sin.

What Christ demands of us here in Matthew chapter 18 is not easy for us to do. When people in our lives, especially friends and loved ones, offend us or stumble into sin, we don't like to rock the boat. Our human nature says: "Just let everything go away smoothly and quietly." However, until repentance and forgiveness have occurred; and if it is a continual sinful situation, until that sin has been abandoned, it will not go away smoothly and quietly. Satan will never allow that to happen.

The typical, easy ways of dealing with people's sinful situations will only lead them to destruction. If we condemn them, we will chase them away from Christ and His mercy. If we excuse their behavior or gloss it over, they will remain comfortable in their sin; they will never see a need to repent; and they will remain ignorant of their needs, never experiencing the wonderful grace and forgiveness that Christ paid for with His blood on the cross.

I encourage you to love your family and friends enough to do that which is difficult. If they are erring in sin or have sinned against you in some way, admonish them firmly but gently. When they repent and leave their life of sin, forgive them and remember their sin no more. That is the way God has treated you, and that is the way God would have you treat one another. Amen.