



Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 6, 2020

Introduction

Conflict is a part of relationships and life in community. Jesus' words in today's gospel are often used in situations having to do with church discipline. Paul reminds us that love is the fulfilling of the law. We worship in the name of Christ, assured that he is present among us with gifts of peace and reconciliation.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity one God, Father, ✠ Son, and Holy Spirit,
whose steadfast love is everlasting,
whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation. **Amen.**

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Reconciling God,

**we confess that we do not trust your abundance,
and we deny your presence in our lives.**

We place our hope in ourselves and rely on our own efforts.

We fail to believe that you provide enough for all.

We abuse your good creation for our own benefit.

We fear difference and do not welcome others as you have welcomed us.

We sin in thought, word, and deed.

By your grace, forgive us; through your love, renew us;

and in your Spirit, lead us;

so that we may live and serve you in newness of life. Amen.

Beloved of God,

by the radical abundance of divine mercy

we have peace with God through ✠ Christ Jesus,

through whom we have obtained grace upon grace.

Our sins are forgiven. Let us live now in hope.

For hope does not disappoint,

because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

O Lord God, enliven and preserve your church with your perpetual mercy. Without your help, we mortals will fail; remove far from us everything that is harmful, and lead us toward all that gives life and salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Psalmody: Psalm 119:33-40

³³Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes,
and I shall keep it to the end.

³⁴**Give me understanding, and I shall keep your teaching;
I shall keep it with all my heart.**

³⁵Lead me in the path of your commandments,
for that is my desire.

³⁶**Incline my heart to your decrees
and not to unjust gain.**

³⁷Turn my eyes from beholding falsehood;
give me life in your way.

³⁸**Fulfill your promise to your servant,
which is for those who fear you.**

³⁹Turn away the reproach that I dread,
because your judgments are good.

⁴⁰**Behold, I long for your commandments;
by your righteousness enliven me.**

Second Reading: Romans 13:8-14

The obligation of Christians is to love one another and so fulfill the heart and goal of the law. Clothes make the person as we “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” and live today in light of the future God has in store for us.

Read the text [here](#).

Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus offers practical advice to his disciples on how individuals—and the church as a whole—should go about restoring relationships when one member has sinned against another.

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

Love.

Love makes the world go ‘round.

They will know we are Christians by our love.

Love one another.

Owe no one anything, except to love one another.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...

Jesus loves me, this I know.

Love is a concept we seem to know about, and sing about a lot, and watch movies about, and even about read in scripture. But sometimes, it seems like we are not very good at loving each other. We seem to be better at being mad at each other, or even hating others, rather than loving them.

Our gospel text, at first glance, seem to be mostly about how to keep the law. If someone disagrees with us, then do this, then that, and if none of that works, treat them like a Gentile or a tax collector.

It seems like a lot of work, when we could just ignore them and focus our energy on other things. In fact, I suspect that is what most of us do. It is easy. Just pretend they don't exist anymore and go on. But Jesus is making a point here. It is not about the rules of how to engage someone with whom you do not agree; it is about how important it is to try and mend the relationship. Ignoring them is easy; making up is much harder. But all of these steps are to get us to try and do just that – make up and repair the broken relationship. It is all about loving one another.

Relationships are hard, especially if you and the other person do not always agree and you have not worked out a way to discuss your differences without making each other mad. That is why marriage is such hard work – we don't always agree and we have to find a way to disagree without destroying one another. If we don't, we fail, and the relationship is gone. This is why Jesus spends time telling us how to mend our relationships.

Paul takes a slightly different tack in this passage from Romans. In fact, Paul is paraphrasing Jesus! Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your mind, and all your strength, and all your soul, and love one another.” Paul tells us “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:10).”

In his somewhat controversial book, **Love Wins**, author Rob Bell writes of how God loves us so much that he wants every one of us to experience heaven – both here on earth and in everlasting life. For many people, the concept that God might save everyone is problematic.

We want some to win and some to lose. We especially want ourselves to win. I wonder sometimes if that is why we like professional sports so much – there are clear winners and losers. And we love to back the winners.

But what if everyone wins? What is so wrong with that? It does not matter how good you are, or what color your skin is, or where you were born, how much money you have, what uniform you wear, or any of those things. All that matters is that God loves you!

Of course, if you truly believe that God loves you, then you should, transformed by that unshakable love from God, love one another. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love everyone you see. Love even those with whom we disagree, or those who vote for the wrong candidate. Love your neighbor. Yes, all of your neighbors.

Luther never discounts that possibility that God might save everyone, and in fact, there are several Lutheran scholars who believe that this is very likely what God intends. Of course, we will never know until that last day when Jesus calls us all home. We might have some surprises on that day!

Back to that Gentile and tax collector mentioned in our gospel text from Matthew. Do you remember how Jesus treats Gentiles and tax collectors? He loves them, too. He invites them to dinner. He calls them to be his followers. He sends Paul to preach to them. He dies on a cross for them. And for me. And for you.

In her song, *Love Wins*, Carrie Underwood sings these words,

*Love is power, love is a smile
Love reaches out, love is the remedy
Love is the answer, love's an open door
Love is the only thing worth fighting for...*

Love your neighbor as yourself.
For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.
Love, Love, Love – That's what it's all about.
For God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.
Love wins. Now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

Oh, That the Lord Would Guide My Ways

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Apostles' Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord.

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

Unite your church, O God. Grant us the gifts of repentance and reconciliation. Bless the cooperative work of churches in this community. Strengthen ecumenical partnerships; guide the work of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Protect your creation, O God. Teach us ways that do not harm what you have entrusted to our care. Renew and enliven places suffering from drought, flood, fires, storms, or pollution. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Turn nations and leaders from ways that lead to death. Shape new paths toward peace and cooperation, teaching us to recognize one another as neighbors. Guide legislators, civil servants, judges, and police toward laws that protect the well-being of all. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Tend to all in need of your compassion. Hear the cries of those awaiting justice and those yearning for forgiveness. Give community to the lonely and neighbors to the outcast. Shelter all who are vulnerable in body, mind, or spirit especially those we name now. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Sustain us in our work, O God, and give work to those who need it. Shape societies to ensure fair treatment for all who labor. Help us to love our neighbors in and through our work. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We remember with thanksgiving those who have died in faith. As you equipped them, equip us with your protection and power, until with them we see your salvation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn

Praise, My Soul, the God of Heaven

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ray Sipe.