

Topic: Preserving the Integrity of the Body

Rev. Terrance Jacob on Matthew 18:15-20 at SALC, 9/6/26

Theme Sentence: Jesus is interested in preserving His Body

Introduction:

Many years ago, as a young associate pastor, I had to go to a member of my church to ask him to leave the church, because he was intentionally hurting many of our innocent, unsuspecting members. It was not an easy conversation. In fact, we all cried, but it had to be done, for the sake of the part of the Body gathered as the local church. Topic: Preserving the Integrity of the Body.

The Gospel today is about the Body - the Body of Christ and those who threaten the peace and truth embodied by that Body, the Church. Let's look at that more closely: Matthew 18:15-20

15 If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.

It is not about showing that you are right and they are wrong. Now I know half of us are saying, "They sinned against ME. So shouldn't this be about me and how wrong they are?" No, it is about regaining the person to the body.

It is not about shaming but restoring. Yes, we do point out the sin, but that comes out of the person's heart and only the Holy Spirit can fix that.

Therefore, the pointing out of personal sin is secondary. Those that are straining at the leash to sink their holy fangs into the sinner, wait. You will have your day. But first breathe, check your motive for correcting this sibling, then go and have a talk. I don't know why everyone is reading that the Bible says, "Go and sit down calmly and have a chat." Does it say that? Go and point out their sin when you are alone. Sometimes, we are so afraid about how it will come out and how I may "let myself down" that we don't

say anything and let that person continue in sin, and perhaps sin against another sister or brother in the same way again. So Jesus is asking us to point out the sin against you for the sinning siblings sake and for the sake of the whole.

When a person sins against one person in the body, they sin against the whole church. Jesus wants us to preserve His Body the Church. Jesus does not want it to fall apart.

When we look at all the denominations of churches in Franklin alone, let alone the USA and the world, we would say that we are all failing poorly at maintaining the integrity of the Body. But let's not try to fix that problem. It was there from the 1st Century AD. Our is to do our best that the Body gathered here, the local church, St. Andrew Lutheran Church is a true representation of the Body of Christ, even as we relate to other churches. Jesus wants you and me to preserve the integrity of this Body, as best as we can, without compromising the Truth of the Gospel. Without compromising our faith.

16 But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

When someone refuses to accept the hand of fellowship and restoration, they are normally not to be trusted, therefore we need witnesses. Often the attack is not on the church as a whole, but the church as a whole needs to respond to such an attack on any one of its members with singleness of purpose: out of obedience to Christ for the sake of the Body.

No, we are not to just keep quiet in order to keep the peace. That is what is called, "keeping the pieces" - not keeping the peace. Remember it is not just a personal matter, it is a matter affecting the whole body. Someone will say, "we are Lutherans, the people with Grace." This is not all Law, it is all Grace. The offender is offered restoration through confession, forgiveness, repentance and restitution, when necessary. They may refuse all that.

Then Jesus seems to cement the process in talking about binding.

18 Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

The simple things we do on earth have eternal consequences – both good and bad. Simple acts of kindness are noted by The Lord. Even a cup of cold water will not go unnoticed. (Matt 10:42). All the good we do in Jesus Name, showing the love of Christ, have eternal consequences. Jesus wants us to loose that on earth and it will be loosed in heaven.

But sometimes we have to bind in Jesus' name. Sometimes we have to rebuke, chastise and even distance ourselves from those who are enemies of the Church. We say “All are Welcome” and we hold fast to that radical welcome that does not require you to be right and to so-called “have everything together”. Some people stay away from Holy Communion, because they say they are not yet right. Guess what? We all are not yet right! And the spouse is saying, “Oh y’all don’t know how not right this one is!” Then Grace says, “It’s not about our rightness through our effort.” God’s love is greater. God’s love is generous. Sometimes we have to forgive and continue to reconcile with those who are not enemies but defaulters (weaker brother/sister)

When your brother or sister is struggling, trapped in sin, turn to Jesus and set them free. Bind the sin and set the sinner free. In so doing, set yourself free in Christ too. For the sake of the whole, make loose!

20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

So once we are restored and centered on Christ and His Gospel, Jesus is there.

God is not in every church. Jesus may be with some individuals, who are real Christians, but His presence may not be felt in a church because those

gathered are not really gathered in His Name and all that that Name stands for. Name above all names. Savior. Lord. King of my life. God who is friend of sinners. Welcomes the migrant and marginalized and anyone in need. As we gather to encourage one another to good works and faith, Jesus shows up - and that is what makes mere human gatherings into gatherings of the Body of Christ, where the Holy Spirit lingers - you may feel that sometimes.

A Church that is not obedient and allows the leaven of hypocrisy to permeate it (saying one thing and living the opposite) is just a gathering of religious people, and God the Holy Spirit is not present.

Conclusion:

Let me end by going back to the story I started with. It was a sad moment for me and my leaders as we left the house of the offender. His family had become part of our family. But he was both misled as well as destructive. I was not sure whether to count him as an outsider of the faith (Gentile, as they were called in the New Testament times), or an evil doer (like "tax collector" is synonymous with). I was not sure whether I could label him as outside of the kingdom, but I believe that that was not my role. I had to simply protect our flock, the integrity of the Body - that church gathered as the Body of Christ.

Maintaining the integrity is not only the job of the pastor, we all have to watch out for each other, as well as protect the body as a whole. It may sometimes go against Southern kindness. It was not Southern to say, "Get behind me Satan" as Jesus said to Peter, but He had to, so that the Will of God and the purposes of God could be fulfilled and preserved. That is our brief. Amen