

Sunday Sermon September 24, 2017

Sermon Text: Matthew 18:15-20

Sermon Theme: We are our Brother's Keeper

1. We Speak the Truth in Love: Sin Leads to Hell

2. We Speak the Truth in Love: To Lead to Repentance and Forgiveness

¹⁵ *"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. ¹⁶ 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.'* ¹⁷ *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.*

¹⁸ *"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.*

¹⁹ *"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. ²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*

We know the Bible lesson of Cain and Abel well. Cain was jealous of his brother Abel and was angry at him and God. We know that God warned him not to let his anger lead to further sin. But Cain allowed that jealousy and anger to live in his heart and he killed his brother Abel while they were out in the fields.

Even though he had killed his brother, God called Cain to repentance, "Where is your brother, Abel?"

Cain did not repent. Instead, what he said has become well-known for all the wrong reasons, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Cain tried to cover up his sin. He did not want the privilege and responsibility that God had given to him to love his brother and watch out for him. Instead, Cain used this phrase as an excuse that he was not responsible for what his brother did, where his brother went, or what happened to his brother.

There are many times that we can have the same attitude as Cain. 'It's your life, do what you want to do. I am not supposed to look after you. It's not my responsibility' While this is our attitude towards many people and what they do, is this how God instructs his people to act towards others, especially those who are caught in sin?

In our readings for this morning, God has sent a very strong message to us: We have the privilege and responsibility of being our brothers and sisters keepers. We are responsible to speak the truth in love pointing out sin and then leading people to Jesus' forgiveness.

We live in a hands-off world. In general, people want to do what they want to do. They don't want anyone to tell them anything, they want to be left alone to do what they please. There are examples of this all around us. We no longer have front porches where we greet people walking by, we have walled backyards for privacy. Many people no longer make a phone call to discuss a problem or issue, instead they send a text or an email so that they don't have to speak with someone face-to-face. Often, we find ourselves avoiding situations where we might get caught up in something that we don't really want to get caught up in.

With all of this hands-off, we have lost the basic ability to communicate and converse with one another. Many have lost the ability to have a comfortable conversation with a stranger. Others have lost the ability to communicate in meaningful ways outside of a computer or a text message. But, the biggest communication ability we have lost, is the ability to disagree with other people and still be able to be friends.

Many today, think that if you disagree with them or what they do, you must hate them. Think about it, anything that is said that is not politically correct or might possibly be offensive to someone under some sort of circumstance somewhere on the earth is immediately branded as hate speech. People who raise valid points about problems of society and issues of community are labeled as hateful bigots or racists.

We have lost the ability to disagree with others and be civilized about it.

What does all this have to do with our sermon text? It has a lot to do with it. People have always wanted others to be hand off with sin. Sin is not something that people have ever wanted to talk about. People have never wanted their sins pointed out to them. Pointing out sin causes conflicts and disagreements. That is the reason that Adam and Eve hid, it is the reason that Cain lied to God, it is the reason Pharisees hated Jesus so much. In those cases, God was pointing out sin in the lives of the people and trying to lead them to repentance, but they refused.

God doesn't tolerate sin. God never says in the Bible that he will overlook a type or group of sins because people think they are more enlightened than he is. He doesn't say that there will be an end-date for a certain type of sin; after that date, it is no longer a sin. God is very clear in his Word: He will either punish sins or he will forgive them for Jesus sake.

Still, sin infects our world. It is sin that often brings the Christian into conflict with the world. In a hand-off world where people want to do what they think is right and don't want anyone to tell them anything different. When we stand on God's definition of what is right and wrong, God's definition of sin, it often causes problems and causes a dilemma for Christians. Are we our brother's keeper? Are we supposed to point out sin and stand on God's Word, which may cause problems, or are we supposed to let it go and allow people to live as they want, and have no conflicts?

God said to Ezekiel in our first reading, **"You are a watchman over the house of Israel, I will hold you accountable if you do not warn the wicked to turn from his ways."** Those words are loud and clear, but do we hear God speaking them to us?

God has given each of us the same job he gave Ezekiel. While we may not be a prophet going to the king or speaking to a nation, we are our brother's keeper, to speak the truth in love about sin, that it is dangerous and that it separates us from God.

Often, we don't want to be the keeper of anyone. We don't want to be put into the place of causing an argument, having a spiritual discussion, or being labeled as a Christian if we don't have to. Often, in this case we commit sins of omission.

Sins of commission and sins of omission are both sins against God. But it's often the sins of commission that are easier for us to see. Sins of commission are the sins we do. We commit sins in our thoughts, words or actions. They are the lying, cheating, stealing sins that we often get caught doing. Sins of omission, on the other hand, are the sins that often slip by without our noticing. Sins of omissions are things that we don't do, even though God commands us to do them. These are the sins that we often commit when we are asked to be our brother's keeper. We refuse to point out sin because it may bring us in conflict with other people.

The situation between Peter and Paul in the second lesson, must have been extremely awkward for anyone involved. Two pillars of the church, and one of them is telling the other that he has sinned. By his own fear, Peter had not only sinned himself, but had led others to sin as well. Paul could have let it go, he could have avoided conflict, kept the peace and let the sin continue, but instead, where sin was involved he had to point out that sin and call Peter and the others to repentance even it caused further conflict.

God doesn't tell us to point out sin because we enjoy it. We are not a sin sheriff, "Aha, I got another sinner who is not following God's Word." He doesn't want us to point out sin so that others can enjoy it. We are not a tabloid show where we are airing the juicy secrets of others. We are not to point out the sins of others to make ourselves more important or to show how good we are.

God tells us to point out sin because we have a heart of love for someone else. This is the same kind of heart that Jesus has for us. Jesus' heart of love moved him to call us to repentance and shows us the forgiveness that he has won for us. This is the heart of love that God says that we have to be our brother's keeper. That we are to speak the truth in that love to point out that sin separates from God and to lead people to repentance and forgiveness.

What are we willing to sacrifice for someone's soul? When we don't confront sin, we are allowing that separation from God to continue unchecked. That sin, any unrepentant sin, can and does separate from God and his love. This is why God had Ezekiel call out to the people. This is why Paul called Peter and the others to repentance. Are we willing to sacrifice our own comfort to save a soul? Are we willing to sacrifice a friendship or relationship to save a soul? To be the keeper that God's wants, we must look at the greater picture of eternal life, rather than look at the immediate consequences of our pointing out the sin. The person may go away angry with us, but maybe those seeds are planted, and maybe they will someday grow into repentance.

In our Gospel for this morning, God has given us a template for being our brother's keeper. This template is good in all cases where sin is involved to lead people to the forgiveness of Jesus.

If someone sins against us, don't make it a big deal, don't blow them up on Facebook, don't go destroy them in your circle of friends and neighbors, go to them privately and show them what they have done, just

between the two of you. Maybe they did not realize they had sinned against you and will apologize when shown their sin. This first step, offers a Christian conversation and resolution to the problem.

If they refuse to admit that they sinned against you, if they continue to do it, or they refuse to repent of the sin, then Jesus gives us a second step. We take someone along with us who can be a mediator. Maybe we didn't hear that apology in the way we wanted it or maybe the other person really is holding onto their sin. In either case this extra person(s) can help. Either they can bring an end to the conflict with some peaceful words and actions or they can validate what may be a lack of repentance from the sinner.

Finally, if the small group doesn't work then we must go to the church and let them handle the heart of one who refuses to repent or to stop sinful actions.

What are we seeking to do as we take these steps? We are not Pharisees who are telling someone they are going to hell, we are not trying to be mean to anyone, or kick them out of anything, we are speaking the truth in love in order to lead people to the feet of Jesus for the forgiveness that he gives.

Jesus doesn't want any of us to go to hell. When he walked the earth, we see him being the keeper of his disciples, of the Pharisees, and sinners like us. He called out to all sinners, including us, in order that we would know the forgiveness that he gives.

Repentance and forgiveness go hand in hand. Where there is one there is the always the other. Jesus does forgive sinners, even sinners like you and me. He wants to give rests for troubled souls, broken by sin. But how can he forgive, if people do not know what sin is, or if they do not know they are sinning?

God has given us an amazing privilege and responsibility. We are our brother's keeper, we are God's watchman to point out sin and lead people to the love and forgiveness of our Savior, Jesus.