

Pentecost 15 9/10/23
 Matthew 18:1-20 18A

SERMON TEXT: GOSPEL READING FROM THE 18TH CHAPTER OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Today's reading really has four parts, each of which could be a sermon in itself. As I worked on the sermon, I found myself looking for the common thread throughout this reading. There is one words that stands out: SIN.

- *“Whoever causes one of these little ones to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”*
- *“If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out!”*
- The one sheep out of a hundred is lost, because of sin. And the shepherd searches for that lost lamb.
- *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him.”*
- Sins bound on earth are bound in heaven. Sins loosed on earth are loosed in heaven.

Yes today, Jesus is talking about sin. And if one thing is clear from all this, it's that sin is a big deal. It's a big deal for Jesus, and that makes it a big deal for us.

It's a serious matter. Yet, how seriously do we take sin? Our own sin? The sin of others? One of the things we sinners like to do is minimize the seriousness of sin. It makes us feel better to think that, especially, our sins aren't really so bad.

You know how we minimize sin? God says to you quite clearly, *“Be holy, for I am holy” (Le 11:44)*. But that's too hard. So, we minimize sin by comparing ourselves to other people, even with famous people. If they can

get away with it, why can't I? If they're not so bad, then I'm ok too. Or the other side of the coin -- I'm not as bad as so-and-so because my sins aren't as bad as his/her sins. Remember what Jesus said? The sinner should be concerned about the log in his own eye, before your neighbor's eye (cf. Mt 7:3-5). And, "*If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.*"

Another problem we have is that our culture has changed and, continues to change, its views about sin. In fact, the word "sin" is hardly heard any more in the world. This is just another way of minimizing sin. We hear about people's "mistakes" and "imperfections" and "character flaws" and "foibles". But don't say the "S-word" or you'll be seen as a Bible-thumping fanatic.

Maybe, someone should tell Jesus that. Jesus isn't afraid to call sin what it is, and to warn us of its grave consequences. And I mean grave as in, *the wages of sin is death*, and the fires of hell, where the *worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (Ro 6:23; Mk 9:48)*.

For who doesn't deserve the millstone treatment? You yourself have just confessed that you have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and cannot free yourself from your sinful condition. Who shouldn't be cutting off his hands, tearing out his eyes? Which of us isn't, in our sins, a lost sheep straying from the fold to go our own way, do our own thing? The problem is -- we can't swim hard enough to escape the millstone's weight. We can't find our way back to the fold precisely because we are lost. And we could cut off every member of our body involved in sin and we'd have no body left.

No, My Friends in Christ, a close and honest and Scriptural view of sin and the sinner shows us that we are in big trouble, because sin is a big deal to God, and so it is to us, too.

But thanks be to God! He does not treat us as our sins deserve and He does not leave us in our sins.

What manner of love the Father has on us poor, miserable sinners that He gave us Jesus, His own Son, to be our Good Shepherd, who seeks out the lost sheep. And we are all that one sheep out of 99. He came from heaven's high throne to seek and save us.

You see, Jesus is the one who takes our place when it comes to the millstone. He is cast into the depths of God's wrath for our sin, only to rise from deep, dark death that bright Easter morning.

Jesus Christ is the one who cuts off not only a hand or a foot or tears out an eye, but gives His whole self – broken body and shed blood – as the sacrifice for our sins.

Yes, sin is serious business for Jesus, and so much so that he goes to the cross, scorning its shame, bears the punishment of our sins, and defeats death head-on for us. That's how serious Jesus takes sin. Forgiveness is free for you and me, My Friends in Christ, but it is not cheap. For the price of our forgiveness was the very life-blood of Christ.

Baptized and living in Jesus, His blood has cleansed us from all sin and we are raised from the death of sin new in Christ. That means we are Christ to one another.

And, that means God wants us to forgive one another as He has forgiven us in Christ. We are to forgive those who hurt and harm us – being reconciling in peace for the sake of Christ. Jesus is teaching us this morning how God's people deal with each other's sins.

When your brother or sister sins against you, stop talking to him? No. When your brother or sins against you, put him on your list of enemies? No. Put it on social media so everyone will know what he or she did? No.

Go ahead and get revenge. Never. Jesus says when sins happen, Christians seek reconciliation. We seek out the sinner as Christ has sought us out. We win back the brother whenever possible, for the sake of Christ, who has won us back from sin.

And perhaps most importantly of all, Jesus teaches us that sins “loosed,” that means forgiven, are truly forgiven in heaven. When a pastor forgives the repentant sinner, it's as good as if Jesus did it Himself. When a Christian forgives another Christian, that forgiveness is real. You have Jesus' own promise on that.

Yes, Jesus speaks of sin today in Matthew's Gospel, but Jesus never leaves sin as the final word. He, in fact, is the Word, the final Word on sin, for He is the Savior from sin. What does God do with sin? He forgives it. And where there is forgiveness, there is life and salvation. Though we daily sin much, Jesus forgives freely and forever, as we hear His Word and eat His forgiving Body and Blood. Sin is a big deal. But Jesus is a bigger deal. Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ, who deals with sin for us, forever. In Him your sins are forgiven.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.