

“DON’T JUDGE”

Pastor Mike Corwin

TEXT: MATTHEW 18:15-20

GOD’S WORD: ROMANS 13:8-14

I – MOUTH ISSUES:

When I was in my previous profession I was sometimes called to the homes of people who had unruly children. What I found when I got there was that this usually involved “mouth issues.” It became very clear, very quick, that this young man or young girl had not been taught to be civil or in the proper etiquette of how to speak to adults...especially their parents. Unfortunately it was also usually evident that they thought this was OK because the adults around them were doing it.

I would share with you that this problem, which used to be the exception, seems to have now become the norm. Have you listened to the kids walking up and down the sidewalks of your city? Have you listened to how the people inside some of our homes treat each other and speak to each other? Our teachers get their share of disrespect and back talk as do other people in authority.

And again let me make this plain. THEY LEARNED IT SOME PLACE! Children learn what they see, what they live. Books such as the Bible may well instruct them against such actions but they look at the adults around them for such lessons. If they see physical violence they will repeat it. If they witness people being uncivil to others they will repeat it. And even kids who don’t see it at home learn it from other kids from other homes. Their video games display it. Their cartoons and television shows, and movies all show it like its acceptable and normal. Why would we expect them to be different?

The people who are supposed to be setting the example are falling short of doing their job. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a local, state, or federal government you look in on you see back biting and name calling. School board meetings have turned ugly. If a football season gets cancelled that calls for protest, and if our kids don’t get to do what they want we see more protests. We even see protests against protests and they end up with people on bullhorns belittling one another across a police barrier.

Even churches and pastors have fallen prey to this uncivility. If you don’t agree with some they will judge you, put labels on you, disavow you, write open forums about you, and belittle you to others.

II – ROMANS:

In this morning's reading we see that this is not the way it's supposed to be. This is not how people, especially those who call themselves Christian, are supposed to be. It's supposed to be about LOVE and love doesn't deal in such actions. Paul's message of love has to do with behavior instead of feelings.

In his letter, Paul is pointing out that Love builds communities – it doesn't tear them down. Love is more than a sentimental feeling. It's an action. Faith communities are supposed to be characterized by practices of radical love and hospitality – not who can cuss the most or tear more people down. Not who has more power, more money, or more status.

He recounts the laws that all the people knew, the commandments as given to the people by God. He reminds them that they are all summed up by the commandment Jesus gave them to "Love your neighbor." That all of the commandments about how to treat one another, how to respect one another, are all encompassed in this one. He also says that we should not have worldly obligations like debts – we should pay them – but that we should have the heavenly obligation of love. This is a debt you cannot pay off. It's a debt we owe to God for our Salvation and it is continuous and ongoing.

And this is supposed to be real love. Not just lip service. Love is something we receive and pass on. Love is a gift of God's grace, poured out on us in Christ. It is the sure power and presence of the Spirit at work in our lives. As such we are called to live as citizens of heaven, not as persons with special privileges, but as people with special responsibilities for spreading God's love through the whole world.

III – TEXT:

Then, carrying this a step further, in this morning's text I see the way this love is supposed to show itself in the Church of Jesus Christ. It's his church. He brought it to us as he poured out God's love on us from the cross. The church is certainly one place I would expect to find this love. Here's what Matthew has to say about it...

Matthew 18:15-20 (NLT)

¹⁵ "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. ¹⁶ But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

¹⁸ "I tell you the truth, whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.

¹⁹ "I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. ²⁰ For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them."

This Chapter in Matthew started with the image of how welcoming Jesus is to everyone. We read the first part last week during youth Sunday. When the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest Jesus put a child in the middle of them and said that only those who turn from their sins and become like a child with an open heart, open mind, and able to love would get into the Kingdom. And that anyone who welcomes such a child – IN LOVE – was also welcoming Jesus. And woe to those who mistreat that love and leads the person into sin.

Jesus was leading us to Paul's later description of how the Body of Christ should work. All together in Christ's love. The church is not a voluntary association of like-minded individuals that regulates it's corporate life by the will of the elite, the powerful, or the majority. It is a fellowship of believers united with one another in Jesus Christ under his headship and love. The church is not an institution or even a denomination. It is anyplace where two or more people live together in mutual love and understanding through Christ.

This section of Scripture has been referred to as "The sermon on the church." It deals with how the Christian community conducts it's life. It is guidelines for the congregational life. It strives to answer the question, "How do you deal with unpleasant sinners who are disrupting the life of the church?"

No matter the church...there will be stubborn people...there will be sinners...there will be those we disagree with...those who have different opinions than us...those we just don't like. The way we tend to deal with such things is to turn our backs on them, disassociate ourselves from them, shun them, and my all-time favorite...talk about them. It amazes me that the church I serve could be falling down around us, or someone can be dying in the hospital and I don't hear anything about it. But let me say something that somehow offends someone and I'll hear it from numerous people as it gets passed through the church gossip vine. Others have had this happen to them as well. Matthew tells us how we are supposed to handle it.

1. You personally go to that person one on one. You don't do it publically or in any way that would embarrass them. You have a private conversation. If you are true to the commandment Jesus gave us then you are trying to offer God's grace and forgiveness.
2. If that doesn't work then take a couple of other members with you and repeat the exercise in love. Maybe you're not as innocent as you thought you were in the matter and a couple independent witnesses may be able to point things out that need to be handled.
3. If that still doesn't work and it's a matter of sin then you can take it to the whole congregation in an attempt to get the person to repent and find the grace and forgiveness so they can move on in their faith and be a continuing member of Christ's Church. If that still won't work then they are expelled from the church.

The community as a whole needs to be concerned with the ethical and moral behavior of a person. It's our job to turn them away from the sin and reunite them with Jesus. If the loving talks of others doesn't accomplish this then action should be taken to maintain the church's holiness.

This passage tells us that it is the congregations business when someone has sinned, that the integrity of the Gospel and the church is at stake. It also repeats what Jesus started in Chapter 16. That the church has the authority to forgive sins, or to retain sins. Before it was an individual thing, now he makes it a church/congregational thing.

And the final image is that when we are doing this work, Jesus is there with us.

IV – JESUS STARTED IT:

And Jesus started it all. What if he would have acted the way the churches do now? What if instead of saving people like the woman at the well he would have just waited until supper and told the disciples what a worthless person she was? What if the woman caught in adultery would have been stoned instead of saved so Jesus could have pointed out how evil she was and had something to talk about to his followers that night?

What if God would have just sat in heaven and demeaned us all for the repeated sinners that we all are and just let us get our just deserts so he could have laughed with the angels and said, well they made their bed – let them lie in it. Or, they can't say I didn't warn them.

But he didn't. Despite all that humanity had done against him and his wishes. Despite that he had come to us numerous times in the form of his prophets. He never quit. When it was time he sent his Son in the virgin's womb and gave us a Savior. Gave us Jesus who grew up and gave us the directions to live by and then died on a Roman Cross. God's love was poured out on us through the blood of his Son. He didn't tell us...he showed us. That's God's love in action!

V – COMMUNION:

We are going to go to communion in just a moment. First...before we do the liturgy I want you to close your eyes. I want you to confess your sins to God. I want you to concentrate this morning on those sins where you have not treated someone fairly...where you gossiped about someone...where you did not follow the teachings of the Gospel this morning. Now tell God you are sorry for treating his children this way. Then tell Jesus you are sorry for treating his body, the church, this way.

Lord in your mercy...hear our prayers.

Lord in your mercy let us know we are forgiven and help us to live with one another truly loving one another.

To communion.

AMEN