

St. Paul: On The Same page

for 09.07.14 Pentecost 13a

Day One: Ezekiel 33:7-9

"So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ⁸ If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. ⁹ But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

Want to get in big trouble? Just do what God says in Ezekiel and warn your neighbors about sin. Go to your neighbor who never attends church and say, "O wicked one, you shall surely die." What do you think would happen?

Their first reaction will be, "Who do you think you are?" Their next reaction might be to call the police because they would think you're nuts.

Our society makes light of sin. We call Las Vegas the "Sin

City," but we are not offended by it. The sin of Sin City is our entertainment. We talk about "sins" of famous folks, but we wink at them as long as no one gets hurt.

God, on the other hand, takes sin seriously, because every sin has one terrible result – it separates us from him.

Imagine the person who tries to kidnap your child. Think about the forces that would try to pull apart your family. How you feel about those things is how God feels about sin. Sin kidnaps God's kids.

If you love your neighbors, as God does, you want to warn them against that harm. But how can you do it without looking like a judge? Perhaps start by being honest about your own need for God's forgiveness. Instead of pretending to be a stranger to sin, recognize that this is a danger to you too.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I thank you for those who have warned me and helped me back to the right path. Over and over again I have strayed. Lord, give me a compassionate heart for those who stumble. Amen.*

Day Two: Romans 13:1-10

¹Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴for he is God's servant for your good.

The overthrow of a government is not ancient history. In school we may talk about the “Revolutionary War era,” but actually every era has many wars of revolution. And even now there are countries around the world in the throes of revolution.

Should people overthrow their rulers? Our own country was born out of a rebellion against King George III. The founders wrestled with the verses from Romans above, and before many would participate they had to be sure it was consistent with God's Word.

They were convinced that rulers and subjects are both bound by God's law. And so

they that it was right for them to rebel against King George because they believed the king had broken his part of God's compact for government.

But do we take God's law so seriously today – do we bother to wrestle with such questions - or are we quick to excuse any action, as long as it “works”? As long as it gets us what we want? Do we easily find reasons to disobey, disrespect, and disparage our government (or our boss, or our parents or teachers) because it makes life easier?

You might like to rebel against the school, or the company, or the tax man, but what would happen if we all did as we wished? The Bible describes such times in the book of Judges. They are full of violence and hurt. And they look familiar.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, you gave me parents, magistrates, officers, and presidents. I often struggle to respect them, but they are your instruments. Lord, help me to know how to follow, and how to lead, in doing right. Amen.*

Day Three: Matt 18:1-20

¹ *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"* ² *And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them* ³ *and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* ⁴ *Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* ⁵ *"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,* ⁶ *but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me 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.*

Children hold an important place in our society. They are pampered and protected and provided with lavish gifts. Children are also targeted, abused, and twisted by the sellers of evil ideas.

Jesus did not say that children are better or more valuable than anyone else. Contrary to songs, Jesus does not love children more than he loves adults. And the red and yellow, black and white children of the world in the song includes people of all ages, because God desires them all to be his children.

But there is one thing about children that is a lot less true of adults. Children depend upon others to care for them.

Because they don't know the way to places, they have to follow someone else. They even need to hold an adult's hand in order to be able to follow through a crowd. Because of their weakness, they have to have others carry their burdens, and sometimes even carry their whole body because they are so exhausted. Because they are too small to make or earn their food, they have to trust others to provide for them.

But Jesus says that we are weak, like children, ourselves. We depend upon Jesus for our salvation. We need God's help to follow, and God's help to faithfully lead. We need to teach our children, and we need to learn like children at Jesus' feet.

Prayer: *Dearest Jesus, I am only a child, but you have given me adult responsibilities. Help me to remember my helplessness, and by depending upon you let me lead others in the truth. Let me lead them to you. Amen.*

Day Four: Matthew 18:12-15

If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ...¹⁵ "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

Many people quote the last verses of chapter 18 to justify their criticism and judging of others. They feel they are entitled to go to someone and tell them all their faults because, after all, Jesus told us to tell our brother how he has offended us.

But these verses are only the conclusion of what came before. These words were spoken to people who were supposed to be like little children, humble and trusting.

Jesus points out that we may sometimes have to point out a person's sin or failure. But why is that?

Only because we love them and see them walking into harm and danger. Like one child might yell to another child on the playground who is about to step in front of a swingset.

Is that what you are doing when you point out your neighbor's sin? Is that what you're doing when you criticize your spouse or your parents or children, or a stranger? Is it love for them – or love for yourself – that motivates you?

Jesus has given us the tools to heal others. But healing tools, like scalpels and probes, can be used to hurt.

"If your brother sins against you..." it is your brother in Christ who is hurt, not you. If your sister in Christ has sinned against you, she is the one who needs help and understanding and patient correction. And you are the one whom God calls to bring that healing – not hurt.

Prayer: *Lord, I complain about others, but it is seldom out of my love for them. Fill my heart with your love, so that my words and actions may be transformed. Amen.*