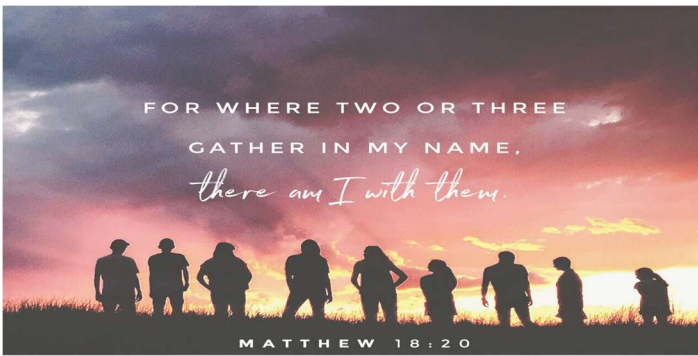


Pentecost 14-September 6, 2020
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Matthew 18:15-20

“Gathered , IN MY NAME”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad



Let us pray. Dear Lord, Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

In order for most organizations to officially hold a meeting, which also includes our church annual meetings, the first item of business is to establish a quorum. If not, enough people have gathered to satisfy the established number of people required to be present, not much can be done at this meeting. We sometimes skip over the second quorum requirement that Jesus established in the reading for today for business of His church to be conducted. The first requirement is usually remembered. I know that I have misquoted this simple quorum two item requirement by saying, “Whenever two or three are gathered, there I am there among them.” But two or three people can gather just to have a meal together. Two or three people might gather to watch someone they know participate in a sporting event. Two or three people can go fishing, two people can play the card game gin rummy. Three people can play the card game widow whist. Two or three people can gather to watch a movie together. But when the business that Jesus gave the church to do is carried out, not only is there a quorum of at least two people present, but these two people that gather must do so “IN THE NAME OF JESUS”.

This is why we began today’s service with the words and make the sign of the cross, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” This is called the Invocation. We are invoking the name of the Holy Trinity who promises to be among us whenever called and when at least two people are gathered. When these two things happen, Jesus promises the business of the church will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We just had a conversation in our home about forgetfulness and the importance of lists to help us remember what we are sent out to do. My son-in-law told my daughter, if there are only three things to remember, he doesn’t need a list. But as soon as there are four things to remember, he requests a text message listing each item. Maybe it’s my age or just my memory isn’t as good, but my quorum of items before requesting a list is even less. I say if there are more than two things that you want me to remember, you better make a list for me. This was once again proven on Friday when I had my list in hand of grocery items that my mother wanted. But my daughter-in-law called and asked if I would pick up a couple items for her. She texted them to me. When I looked at my phone, I only saw two items and so I never looked at the message again because I remembered the sour cream and shredded cheddar cheese. But when I looked more closely at the message, I realized that I hadn’t scrolled down far enough in the message to see there were five items. So I covered my mistake by saying that I needed to go to Walmart anyway and I got the three things I forgot, but nothing without looking at the list of three items several times.

Maybe that's why I became a minister. There are many things in the church that I can remember without a list because there are only two things to remember. For the business of the church to happen, two or three must gather and you must gather "IN MY NAME". There are only two things listed on my letter of call that are in the job description of a pastor. I have been called to this church to one-deliver God's word and two-rightly administer the Sacraments. God's word comes in only two ways. It can be heard by God's people either as a word of command or a word of promise. The bible is divided into two parts, Old and New Testaments. Only two things happen in a worship service. Either we are speaking to God in prayer or He is speaking to us by His Word. The gospel reading for today speaks about the set of keys Jesus gave first to Peter, then to all of his disciples and now he says that all members of the church have a set of these keys. There are two keys. One key to bind sins and one to lose sins or to we are more familiar with the term of forgiving sins.

*Jesus lays out to the members of his church how to use these keys. Since this can end up being a three-step process, I will need to refer to the list Jesus provides in scripture. You will be mentioning the use of this key when we pray the Lord's prayer today. It is the last part of the 5th Petition "Forgive us our trespasses, **as we forgive those who trespass against us.**"*

We rarely follow the steps that Jesus gave for forgiving those who sin against us. His first step is not the one that we usually take. Our first step that we take most often is to break the 8th commandment. Instead of forgiving sin, we sin by speaking against the one who has sinned against us. When someone sins against us, we usually want to discuss the matter with a third party. And we usually don't seek out an unbiased third-party member. We don't usually explain to this person what happened in the kindest way. Instead we want the third party to side with us and against the only who sinned against us. This first step that we usually take is nowhere on the list Jesus provides for forgiving someone who has sinned against you.

*The first step is to go directly to the person who has sinned against you. We don't often go here first for one reason because it makes us uncomfortable. Secondly, we may like using the key that binds the sin. We don't mind that someone may have to squirm in their sin a little longer. Another reason that we don't take this first step is the same reason that Jonah didn't take the same first step when God told him to confront the Ninevites of their sins--he didn't want the Ninevites forgiven and we don't really want them to be forgiven. We prefer to put them in "time out" and leave them there. If you have been a Christian very long, you are accustomed to confessing that you are a sinner and welcome the first part of the fifth petition of the Lord's prayer "**Forgive us our trespasses**", but we aren't in any hurry with the second part, **as we forgive those who sin against us.**"*

It is wonderful when the first step works as it should and you are listened to by the one who has sinned against you when you take this first step. When you are listened to, you have just used your "loosing" key and the sin is forgiven. When this doesn't work step two is not to talk to multiple people about this sinner. Step two is to bring witnesses with you the next time you meet with this person so others will be present to confirm your evidence. But when this step also fails, the last step Jesus says is to bring the matter to the church. Here, the name of Jesus has been invoked. It no longer is just your word against mine or other people confirming evidence, now Jesus is among them and whatever is bound on earth will be bound in heaven.

*There is no third requirement that the forgiveness of sins must take place in a church building. Since at least two people are gathered today either in the sanctuary or online and we have done so in the name of Jesus either Jesus will not forget and leave you in "time out". Jesus has no three-step plan of things you must do to forgive your sins. Jesus has taken the steps to the cross to forgive you of all of your sins. Jesus does not visit with you while you are in time out to make sure you have reached an adequate level of repentance before turning the key of forgiveness. Your forgiveness is complete in the blood of Jesus Christ who has come to you again today and in His name all of your sins are forgiven. This is why there is a minimum quorum of at least two for the business of forgiveness to be done. You cannot forgive your own sins. You must hear from a preacher or a fellow member of the church that you are forgiven. You do not have to wonder if your sins are forgiven today. As Jesus has promised whenever two or three are gathered, **in my name**, there I am among them. You have been set free. Amen.*