

September 10, 2017

NEVER HAVE TO GIVE UP LOVING, CARING...SALVATION

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

SERMON

A lot of my colleagues have gone on sabbatical before and many times when they come back for their first service, the gospel reading is something like the prodigal son or the feeding of the 5,000 (Laughter). And I get if a member of the church sins against you. When I saw that I thought I don't really want to preach on that my first Sunday back. But you play the hand you're dealt.

The more I thought about it, the more I thought how true it is that we don't always get what we want as the church. What we would really like is for everybody to agree. What we would really like is for the church to truly be that community of faith, that kingdom of God in Heaven where the people love and care of one another.

They don't sin against one another, they don't hurt one another. But even as Jesus was putting together the disciples, even as he was putting together this community of faith called the church. He warns his disciples that that is not going to be the case. That we are going to be dealing with one another as

human beings who are flawed. Who hurt one another, who fail to follow God with all our heart, with all our mind, and in all our soul, and all our strength. That there are going to be times in the church when we don't agree.

And yet, Jesus stresses that we need to make some kind of a gesture to try to mend the relationship. We are supposed to go out. We are supposed to go to that one who that we feel have sinned against us and try to mend that relationship. To seek forgiveness, to offer forgiveness. And it goes through a whole scenario if you go to that person alone and tell them what you are feeling about how you are hurt. And that person hears that, understands that, accepts that. Then forgiveness can take place and that community breach is mended. The relationship between the two of you can be whole again.

But he goes to another step, if that person doesn't listen. If they don't accept what you are saying as true, if they don't accept that forgiveness needs to be offered and received then you take a couple of the other members of the church with you and you confront the person. I don't know about you I've never done that before. If I can't work it out between the two of us, a lot of times it just never gets worked out.

And then the third, extreme step if then they won't listen to the other people of the church. Then you take it before the whole church. Just lay it out for the whole congregation. How many of you are in favor of that right now? (Laughter) Not so much. And then if the person still doesn't accept that they have done

wrong, then you treat them like a Gentile or a tax collector. And at the time of Jesus there wasn't anything worse than those two. A nonbeliever, or collaborator with the Romans.

Again, this is not what I was hoping to have as the gospel reading for my return. But what it does stress and what I believe needs to be the word that we need to hear is that we are committed to the relationship of the church. As much as we work for that as much as we work to be part of a whole not only the congregation, not only within a diocese, not only within a denomination but the whole church. Our goal as a church is to be a reflection of the kingdom of God. To live according to what God would have us do and to be.

And unfortunately, we can't all agree on what exactly that is. And for over 500 years we have been split into all these different denominations. Still trying to recognize it as a whole as the church. But knowing that we are splintered, knowing that we disagree, knowing that some believe we should do this and others believe that you should do that. And that we take that to such an extreme that sometimes we condemn one another. You are not really the church. We are the true church and you should be like us and if you're not like us than you're not the church. Hard to have that kind of confidence when the church began not agreeing.

We are individuals and yet we are a community that is searching to live out what it is to be the kingdom of God. Paul had an understanding of that. Paul tried to speak to the early

church as it was going through these pains of self-understanding. What is it to be the church? Certainly, if you read the letters of Paul to the churches he started, he's dealing with the difficulties, the different opinions about what the church is and how the church should be. How we should gather, how we should celebrate, how we should forgive one another, how we should view the church as a body and each member of the church being important no matter what status they have. That they are important as a part, that they have something to offer that is unique.

In the Epistle for this morning we hear, Paul writing to the church in Rome. A church that he did not begin, a church that he did not seek his advice. The letter to the Romans is a letter introducing himself, trying to clarify what they might have heard about who this Paul is. You know that Paul's identity went through different manifestations. First, he was Saul Paul who was against the church, who was working vehemently against it. Until his road to Damascus, the event with the risen Lord, that confrontation. Then he became an evangelist, and he had to explain to people that yes indeed, he was the one who was working against the church. But he came to know the risen Lord and now he was an evangelist. Now he was working for the church and he was trying to build it up.

He was trying to establish it through all these different lands. Preaching to the Jews, preaching to the Gentiles. Bringing them together as one community. Many times, he was stoned,

thrown out of cities either by the Gentiles or by the Jews because they disagreed with his message with what he was doing. But he is trying now as he writes to the Romans to explain who he is and what he is about. He is planning a trip, a missionary trip to Spain. He needs the help of the Roman church and so he's writing explaining not only who he is but what he believes.

And then that small section that was read today sounds very much like what Jesus said about the summary of the law. And it is love that is most important. That we are called to love one another and that when we live that out. When we seek to love our neighbor as it is defined by the parable of the Good Samaritan. When we seek to love our neighbor than we are fulfilling the law. How exactly we do that well that may still come under different definitions according to who you speak to.

But Paul emphasizes that we are called to seek out one another, to care for one another, to have compassion for one another. And even when we disagree on some of the finer points of what it is to be Christian and how we are called to live our lives. We see that that is more geared towards living it out myself and not demanding that others live according to what I see as being Christian. To allow some space and some room for differences of opinion. But if we can care for one another, if we can love one another, show compassion for one another. No matter what their status, no matter where they are, no matter

what they are doing, then we are inching closer to being that reflection of the Kingdom of God that Jesus was trying to establish.

Then we are reaching out to the poor and the hungry. To the widowed and to the orphan children. When we are caring for those who society sometimes forgets or neglects then we are being that Kingdom of God. And that's what's most important. That is what it is to be the church. That is what it is to live out faith in the world. A world that is still broken, a world that will always be broken.

Jesus warns his disciples that there will be divisions. There will be disagreements, there will be times when no matter what you do to help mend the fences, to offer forgiveness or to seek forgiveness when they just don't work between one another. Or between different parts of the church. There will be times when you have to admit defeat but you never have to give up loving. Never have to give up caring. Never have to give up on moving forward to reflect Christ in the living of our lives. And to reflect the kingdom of God to a world that needs to know that there is one who watches over. One who offers presence. One who offers forgiveness, and care, and protection. One who offers salvation.

Father Gregory Hein