

Sermon Title: “Breaking the Cycle”

August 30, 2020 – 13th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Romans 12: 9-18



Theme:

What's in it for me?

Sermon Text:

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

How many of you regularly watch the evening news? How do you feel after you watch it? I don't know about you, but I find the news to be quite depressing. There was a terrorist attack at location A. Group B claimed responsibility for said attack and the victims vowed revenge. Then there are all of the political ads telling you what a horrible person candidate C is, so you should vote for Candidate D because he or she isn't as bad as C. Does this sound familiar? If you're not careful, TV News can ruin your whole evening and the next day. Instead, maybe I could check out the Tabloid newspapers at the supermarket, but I don't think they're particularly accurate. I mean, are we really supposed to believe that JFK is really alive somewhere, that a former First Lady is an alien cyborg, or that a Megalodon (a prehistoric shark), washed up on a crowded beach? And those TV Celebrities can't seem to get along with each other. Oh, well, I guess they aren't any better than the Cable News Networks, even if they aren't quite as negative in their tone.

As we are bombarded with “news,” it got me thinking about the 24-hour news cycle. Is this really the way we should live? Is this really how we should interact with each other? Is this really how we want our children to act and behave?

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Church in Rome, spells out how God would have us live and interact with each other. He tells us that we need to genuinely love people with our whole heart. He tells us to outdo each other showing honor toward others. Paul tells us also to

be fervent in spirit and patient in tribulation. We should support the work of God's Church and be hospitable. Sounds good so far. Are you with me?

Then Paul gets in the difficult stuff. He tells us that we need to bless the very people that persecute us. We should celebrate our neighbor's triumphs in life and grieve with him for his losses. We should live in harmony, preserve our neighbor's honor, as act honorably towards others at all times. So far, Paul has just summarized the 10 commandments, but the next thing is truly amazing. Paul tells us to refrain from getting revenge, instead letting God handle it. Paul tells us to repay evil with good. Sounds a lot like what Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount, doesn't it? Paul might be on to something here, so let's unpack this a little bit. How is this text speaking to us here at Faith? What is God saying to us?

In the first part of this section, Paul tells us that we should genuinely love our fellow Christians and our neighbors. We should do everything we can to help our neighbor and fellow brother, "save face." If our neighbor or brother has sinned against us, we should not only forgive him or her, but we should let them know that they are forgiven. We need to show patience. When we do that, sometimes people come around. I remember a kid I went to school with in elementary school liked to pick on me and I didn't think to kindly of him at the time, but when I ran into him in high school, I realized he wasn't the jerk I thought he was and we actually became friends. Patience can sometimes pay off.

Interpersonal conflict is inevitable inside the Church and outside of it. It's been going on since Adam and Eve, so how should we deal with it in a Biblical manner? First genuinely love people. Distinguish between your Christian brother or sister and the act or incident that is causing you so much pain. Be honest and give the other person the benefit of the doubt. Allow them to "save face." Pray. Pray. Pray. Seek God's help in resolving it. Be empathetic. How can this conflict be turned into something where "everybody wins?" Some of you may remember a time in Faith's history where there was a significant amount of conflict, particularly between the church and the school. There were disagreements over the use of scarce resources, who was in charge, etc. There were also people who were so disruptive to the Church that they were asked to leave. That was extremely painful time for all, whether you were directly involved or not. How did we get past this? Pastor Keogh helped refocus our efforts and got us thinking about who we were as God's people. We came up with a strategic plan that included The Whitney Building, a new sanctuary, and of course, The Faith Community Center. The Faith Community

Center not only served the School but served the community and the congregation. This building project helped heal those wounds and reminded us of who we were as a congregation.

Now I'm thankful that we have been blessed with several years of harmony within the congregation. For the most part, our meetings have been civil and productive. We are now in a period of transition. This gives us a chance to reset and reflect. Are we as friendly and forgiving a congregation as we should be? How can we move forward? How can we prepare ourselves and our congregation to welcome a new Pastor?

Paul gives us the answer right here. Show genuine love for your brothers and sisters. If you have a disagreement with someone, come to them in love and discuss it in the most loving and Christ-like manner you can. Forgive and ask for forgiveness. Give your brother or sister a chance to "save face." Have patience with one another. Don't hold grudges.

Doing these things will help resolve interpersonal conflict and help our congregation heal and grow stronger. Doing so, not only honors the Savior who died for us while we were still enemies of God, but it can turn an adversary into a friend. Paul concludes this chapter by telling us to feed our enemies when they are hungry, and give drink to them when they are thirsty. Looking through the Gospels, I see plenty of examples of how Jesus did this for us first. He fed 5000 families, healed the sick, and restored dead people to life. Many of these people were opposed to Jesus at one time, but by Jesus showing mercy, forgiveness, and grace, He transformed those former adversaries into allies. Paul himself was a prime example.

In a few moments, we will come up to the Lord's table to eat His Body and drink His Blood. We profess that we do this in a worthy manner by acknowledging that we are not holding grudges, that we have forgiven our brothers and sisters, and that we truly believe that Christ's Body and Blood are present in this meal. If this is your confession and you have been properly instructed on the significance of this meal, I invite you to come forward and receive the forgiveness that comes from this meal. There is no rush. It's your moment with Jesus. If you need Jesus' help forgiving others, that's ok too. I'm happy to give you a blessing as you come forward. Just let me know.

The bottom line is this. We are all sinners who mess up daily. We don't live like Jesus like we should, and we are all in need of forgiveness. Jesus granted us that forgiveness, even though we didn't deserve it. We honor Jesus by loving our brothers, sisters, and neighbors in

the same manner as He first loved us. When we do that, our lives are so much more peaceful and fulfilling.

Unlike the people on the TV News or supermarket tabloids, we have an opportunity to be an example to the world on how we can treat each other and care for each other. Doing so might not make the news, but you will be truly blessed by the God who loves you so much.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

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Quotations from Scripture come from:

Various Authors. *The Lutheran Study Bible*. Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.