

Message September 10, 2023

Pastor Jeff

“Change & become like little children”

The Bible Readings are:

Ezekiel 33:7-9

Romans 13:1-10

Matthew 18:1-14

INTRO

Have you lost something important or needed on a practical level?

I lost my car based phone charge this week, in the church parking lot!

It took a while, cleaning out the trash, looking into the car from different angles...but I found it!

It feels good to find what is lost, and it was an insignificant thing really.

Now recall a time when you lost a kid in public, maybe a grocery store, clothing store, etc.

It is a terrible feeling right?

I lost my oldest kid when he was young at a park in Colorado. We lost him while helping another kid at the playground find his parents! It was a terrible feeling for sure! After searching, seeking, and looking from different perspectives, we found him - thank God!

I am talking about finding lost things, lost kids today because the Gospel mentions Jesus seeking the lost sheep and focuses on small kids in this reading. It shows us God can empathize when we lose kids, because he sees us as his lost kids when we lose our way!

MATTHEW 18:1-20

The reading begins with the disciples asking who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. They are surprised Jesus doesn't choose one of them!

It shows us God is not impressed with our decades long conflict trenches we maintain, our bickering, our focus on worldly achievements, and our overcomplicating a heart faith into an academic exercise or dissecting the faith by splitting molecules, or philosophizing.

The Scriptures were written to lead us into a heart to heart relationship with God, one based on God's unconditional love and trust. Like camping, with all its dirt, mishaps, and needed adaptations to whether, the ancients were not concerned with every little jot and tittle in manuscripts, but with the primary message!

Jesus says some harsh things about or toward those that lead little children to sin or drift from God. He indicates they have a special place in his heart and their angels have a hot seat before the Father in heaven! It is hard to hear that we have sinned or failed in some way.

The first reading, in Ezekiel (33:7-9) tells us we are accountable for trying to help others see their sin and need to turn from them. As a Lutheran Pastor, I am called to speak both LAW and GOSPEL to you. It is hard to do, but needed. We needed the law to help us see our sins, the things we need to try to change. Doing this makes room in our lives to love a little more :). Like peeling a tear inducing onion a layer at a time to enhance the flavor of meal we are cooking, peeling back our sins, a layer at a time, can enhance our ability to love others in action closer to the way we want to do in reality!

Our 2nd reading from Romans (13:1-10) mentions paying taxes and submitting ourselves to the government as much as we can without violating God's laws, which is a scripture I don't like. I don't like it because I simply do not trust our government. Heather asked me this week, "Why do you think it is in there?" It was a great question, thank you! Upon reflection, I think it is a way of saying keep the focus on the kingdom of God rather than creating distraction around things that are not going to last long anyway. By keeping our focus on Christ, we can work on being AGAPE, unconditional love, to and for all others. This is our light to shine so others can see Jesus!

Have you ever seen the movie Hacksaw Ridge? It is a true story of a man of faith holding to his faith and sacrificially loving even those that hurt him! He is a good example of this!

My daughter was treated poorly by some jealous skaters at one point while in her high school aged skating club. Thankfully, she maintained a friendly, helpful, and humble spirit among the girls and even those most irritated with her skills ended up befriending her because they saw a difference in her!

Let's circle back to Jesus's warnings to not lead little ones to sin or stray from faith. Like a medical staff person in a clinic preparing to draw blood through a needle, we need to endure a little pain. The "needle" is a moment to truly ask ourselves, "How have I been modeling sin or drifting from faith to the kids in my world?"

Is it a sinful behavior or attitude? Is it talking bad about church or God? Is it the lack of prioritizing faith in your life or the lack of having faith be a part of conversation about decisions or behaviors?

Whatever it is, own it. Whatever it is, peel it back, see it for what it is. Whatever it is, choose to let it go because it is harming the young ones in your life! If you are feeling bad, lay it at the cross by apologizing to God, accepting his forgiveness, and trust him to help you do less of what you are giving up and to be more AGAPE love to the kids and others in your life :).

By turning from your sin back to God, you are effectively changing and becoming like the little ones who trust Jesus again! You move from being one who is harming little ones spiritually to being a lost sheep Jesus is seeking to find and restore to his flock! Remember, he loves you, and is glad to have you back, like a parent who finds their lost child!

I am going to pray. If you want to restore the kid faith within you, pray from your heart, my words or ones like them in your own words.

“Jesus, thank you for peeling a layer of my sinful “onion” today. I see how I have hindered the faith and moral life of kids around me by my toxic examples. I am so sorry. I accept your cross as my forgiveness. I invite you to fill me with AGAPE love for all, and to help me be intentional about leading kids to faith in you by my words, actions, and priorities. I give myself to you as a sheep to a shepherd, a child to a loving parent. Amen.”