

Collect: GRANT US, O LORD, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Lessons: Ezekiel 33:7-11

Psalm 119:33-40

Romans 13:8-14

Matthew 18:15-20

Sermon: The lessons for today are about harmony, keeping the peace and keeping things running smoothly. In the Old Testament lesson, God tells a man he has posted a sentinel, a lookout to give warning to the Hebrew people. Whatever God speaks to the sentinel, he must speak it directly to the people. If they heed his words and turn from their wicked ways they will be saved. But if they ignore the words and do not change, they will die. If the sentinel does not speak the warning, the people will die but the blood will be on the hands of the sentinel.

God then says he doesn't want the wicked to die, he wants to save them. He wants them to live, but they must change the wicked way they are living and be obedient.

Paul's lesson in Romans talks about keeping the law, the 10 Commandments. He says his discourse can be summed up in the words, "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you have difficulty in defining who your neighbor is, just simply love others as you love yourself. Also, things you don't want done to you, don't do it to others. Paul tells us to lay aside the

works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Paul is telling us to stop doing what is wrong and endeavor to do what is right at all times. Now you know this takes some work, sometimes a lot of effort.

You, may forgive someone for what they have done to you, but you may not forget. You may be on alert to be certain it doesn't again. And the reality is that **some people are harder to love than others.**

In the Gospel, Jesus also talks about harmony and keeping things peaceful, where all can get along. Jesus talks about something I am sure is dear to our hearts: How to get along in church. Restoring the peace. Or it may be how to deal with a trouble maker. Jesus doesn't want us to throw the rascal out, he wants us to resurrect him or her and restore them to good fellowship.

Jesus tells us if there is someone causing trouble in the church, there is a way to deal with them.

Let me say it is not hard to figure out who the troublemaker is, most of the people are already talking about them and many are trying to keep their distance from them.

Jesus tells us that we should talk to the person one-on-one in a discrete manner. If the person listens, good he or she will correct the behavior and all will be well. However if the person disregards your effort and continues the bad behavior, then it is time to take one or two others along with you as you discreetly talk to the person. These people will be your witnesses to what you have discussed with this person and the efforts you have tried in order to restore him or her to good fellowship.

I think the witnesses should be persons you know to be trustworthy and who can keep the proceedings confidential. If these efforts don't work and the offender refuses to listen and correct the problem, then it time to reveal the offense of the offender and the efforts you have taken to resolve the problem to the church body. At this time, I think the offender should be encouraged to find someplace else to worship.

The offender may tell you, that you and the church aren't Christian. They may tell you that Jesus said to forgive a person as often as they have sinned or done something wrong. Indeed he did. He also said to turn the other cheek. However, Jesus spoke in parables about good stewards or stewardship. I think Jesus would want us to be good stewards and not saps.

Not saps, continuing to let someone or something destroy the sacredness of worship and disrupt the harmony. To get that loving feeling back in the congregation it may be best that someone moves on. Now it could be a church member, a church leader or it could be the minister.

I believe if you pray on it, involve and listen to the counsel of others and deal humanely with the offender, Jesus will be there in the midst of it all. It might take a little time for people to digest what has gone on. However, if done properly, the church will be spirit filled and continue on,