

## Sermon

### Pentecost 14 Year A

#### Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus said, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, **whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.** Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

**Prayer:**

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

Psalm 19:14

**Sermon:**

Today's Gospel, is a small piece of a long lecture<sup>1</sup>  
that Jesus gave to his "disciples".<sup>2</sup>

Jesus mentions sin. A lot.

He says that unrepentant sinners should be  
universally despised and treated like Tax Collectors.<sup>3</sup>

That's the "harsh" Jesus.

Folks don't like to talk about him these days.

In his lecture Jesus set up a complicated program,  
About how to handle the problem of "sin"  
amongst those who "believe in" him<sup>4</sup>.

He tells them, as already told Peter:<sup>5</sup>

**"whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and  
whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven".<sup>6</sup>**

It's a striking statement. It's a bit odd. Actually.

**"whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,**

**And whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”.**

Some churches see this conversation  
as the foundation for the Sacrament of Confession.

I think they’re right.

But they barely touch the surface.

You can’t tell who Jesus’ was talking to.

The Bible mentions Jesus “disciples”. But that’s vague.

The word “disciple” means “students”. So, Jesus was a teacher.

Like any good teacher, He could have been talking to anyone. 7

He was talking to folks back then, and

He was talking to us.

**What does it mean to bind or to loose in Heaven and earth? 8**

Scholars don’t agree.

Jesus didn’t go it any detail.

But his audience knew what he meant!

If your friend wrote you an email explaining

that he was late to your birthday party because

a tire “blew out”, you’d know exactly what he meant.

Someone, 21 centuries ago, wouldn’t.

It is hard to translate and decipher, the Bible,

because it was written in a hugely different world.

Details. Details. Details.

The Bible *is* sacred. The Bible *is* Holy. *I know that.*

But I also know that the Bible isn't magical.

We have read it carefully and thoughtfully.

*Very carefully.*

We have to carefully consider the culture and the history  
of the people who wrote the Bible.

We can't just pick one phrase or another that suits our need.

We have to look at the whole Bible.

So, I wonder what Jesus meant when he said his disciples

Could either "bind" or "loose"?

To begin, the concepts of "binding" and "loosing"

were common themes in ancient Jewish legal thought.

It was familiar to the people listening to him preach!

Even though Jesus was born in the City of David,

he was way down the social scale.

But, still, he got a particularly good education. Somehow

He amazed people when he spoke in the Temple

and taught in the Synagogue?

**Binding or loosing was about what people *did or did not do*.<sup>10</sup>**

To “bind” or to “loose” someone focused on human *action*.

Jesus knew that, in ancient Jewish law,

Any person who had the power to either Bind or to Loose,  
Also had the power to determine that some *action*  
was either forbidden or allowed.

*What we do, reflects our heart.*<sup>11</sup> Jesus knew that.

What we say and what we do reveal  
how we view the world that God created, and ‘  
left in our care.

What we say and what we do reveals,

how we chose to use the Lord's greatest gift:  
our brief time here.

We possess eternal souls.

But our time here, on this beautiful blue and green globe,  
is contingent and uncertain.

We are all here, for the blink of an eye. <sup>12</sup>

Life can be tough.

The Virus, for one example, is a pain in the neck.

Still, the ancient prophet Ecclesiastes, went overboard,  
when he wrote:

“the hearts of ... men are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts,  
while they live; and then they die.”<sup>13</sup>

*Poor Ecclesiastes! That is just way too bleak.*

*Didn't he ever see the sunrise in the blue desert sky?*

Evil comes in all kinds of packages. *We all know that.*

You don't need me to go through the headlines.

There is nothing new under the sun. <sup>14</sup>

Evil thrives on the slippery slope.

Recently, in the Austin Statesman, I read that someone said:

“I'm a strong Christian. I know I am going to heaven.

So, I don't care if the Virus gets me or not”.

*But someone else might care.*<sup>15</sup>

*Mom. Dad. Brother. Sister. Grandma. BFF. Me.*

*The Lord's gift of life shall not be discarded, like yesterday's trash.*

When Jesus gave his disciples the power to bind or to loose,<sup>16</sup>

he instituted the Sacrament of Confession.

And he sent his people a message:

*Your lives really matter.* <sup>17</sup>

*What we do here... and what we think here ... matters. 18*

We are not merely consumers, or taxpayers or voters.

We are God's beloved.

You are God's beloved. Wherever you were born:

England. Puerto Rico. Afghanistan.

The Ivory Coast. Nigeria. Russia. Korea.

Canada. Nebraska. *Texas.*

You are God's beloved.

His Son has shared with you, as he has shared with me,  
the power to bind and the power to loose.

He calls each of us, as we are able,

to bind what is evil and to let loose what is good.

Just like he did.

That is our assignment from Jesus:

Let loose the power of good will and Godly love.

Build a garden. Write a check. Make a phone call.

Hold someone's hand. Lift someone up!

God has called each of us, to bind evil and to let loose a flood

of love and of kindness, of generosity and forgiveness.

Right here, in our home:

## Killeen and Harker Heights. Central Texas. USA. Planet Earth.

*What we do here... really matters.*

### **-AMEN**

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1 from Matthew Chapter 18.

2 We don't know who they were. Apparently, that wasn't important to Matthew. What is important is that when Jesus said it to his followers, they heard it, and passed it down to Matthew. Or maybe Matthew was there.

3 Remember, Matthew wrote this Gospel. Matthew was a (reformed) Tax Collector.

4 Matthew 18:6, 15-19

5 Apparently, he spoke to whoever was there to hear it!

6 Ibid., 6:19 N.B., it may be that Jesus first said that to Matthew, or to Simon, later aka, Simon Peter (who then told Matthew), and then, later, Jesus the same thing to his disciples. No one really knows.

7 i.e., "disciples: were person who would carry his message. I imagine that the groups included the 12, all of whom, except for Judas, were later known as his "Apostles" ("messengers").

8 See, the Koine Greek, and our alphabetic iteration, below:

δώσω σοι τὰς κλεῖδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, καὶ ὃ ἐὰν δήσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, καὶ ὃ ἐὰν λύσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

Dōsō soi tas kleidas tēs Basileias tōn Ouranōn, kai ho ean dēsēs epi tēs Gēs estai dedemenon en tois Ouranois, kai ho ean lysēs epi tēs Gēs estai lelymenon en tois Ouranois. [from an unknown internet source, but the author -- no linguist --checked this and it looks right to him.]

9 See, inter alia, Mark 1:21-28, 12:35, Luke 4:23, 31-37, John 6:22-59 (verse 59 states that Jesus had taught this doctrine in the Capernaum synagogue.)

10 It was important. Jesus knew that.

11 Jesus often spoke about what people felt and thought. But he cared as much about what people thought, as he cared about what they did.



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12 We just don't want to outlive our children.

13 See, Eccles. 9:3, my loose interpretation, based on NIV, NRSV, and KJV.

14 What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again;  
there is nothing new under the sun. Ecclesiastes 1:9 (NIV)

15 *I hope. I'd care!*

16 ... in Heaven and on earth.

17 There is a link between here, and heaven. That link is the Lord.

18 Both here and in heaven.