

Pentecost 15 – September 10, 2023  
Text: Matthew 18:15-20  
Theme: It's Not Easy Being Right

**It's not easy being right. We live in a nation of pluralism and egalitarianism where some people oppose any absolute right and wrong and everyone is supposed to decide for him or herself what is right for them. Who am I to say that someone is living his life wrongly? Isn't that up to every individual to decide for himself? It's not easy being right in this nation. But so long as you are repeating the word of God, you are right, and according to God in the book of Ezekiel, our Old Testament reading today, according to God, you have the responsibility to tell people when they are wrong.**

**There is no privacy clause for God. You do not get off the hook because it is personal. All sin is personal and all sin is destructive to you and to the community in which we live. Letting people sin without repercussion is bad! And being afraid to confront sin is bad. That is why Jesus gives us Matthew 18 to help us confront sin and sinners.**

**Notice a couple things about this text. First where does Jesus start? He does not start by condemning anyone for some appalling breach of conduct. He starts with childlike faith. If any of us are ever going to overcome any sin, we must do it with faith, childlike faith, not faith which we have manufactured, not intellect, not experience, but faith given from the Holy Spirit through God's Word and His Holy Sacraments.**

**Second, Jesus comes at this not as a war to be waged, but as a rescue mission. There is a lost sheep that needs to be rescued. I have**

**never had much contact with a sheep but I have wondered, do they know that they are stupid? I have heard stories from people who have had sheep and they seem to be about the dumbest animals on this earth and I wonder, do they know? So often when a brother or sister goes off the rails and begins sinning in earnest, I think we have false expectations. We think they are spiritually wiser than they are. There is a reason Jesus refers to us as sheep and it is not complimentary. You know, when I see a homeless person begging on the street, I never think that anyone intentionally pursues homelessness as their life goal, but there have often been a series of very poor choices that have landed the person where they are. Likewise, no one ever chooses a sinful path so that they will alienate God and kill their faith. We just think we know better, or are stronger than we are, or are arrogant enough to believe that we can keep a foot in the Church and a foot in the World and we will be fine. We are sheep, wandering away in search of something, thinking that the ravines, and flooded streams and wolves will not bother us. We need to be rescued.**

**Once He has established that we need faith to overcome sin and that sheep need to be rescued not beaten down, then Jesus gives us the method for rescuing a wandering sheep. First go to him privately and tell him of your concern for him. "Hey brother sheep. There is a flooded stream on the path you are walking and I do not want you to drown!" "Hey brother sheep, you are breaking the fourth commandment when**

**you demean and degrade our elected leaders and you're teaching children who are listening that disrespecting authority is ok if you don't agree with them." Then, when you have aired your concern: listen. This is a dialogue with your fellow sheep not a lecture from a more advanced species. You have much to talk about. You may have been down a similar path, or even the same path. You will need to listen carefully to his story so that you understand his path and why he is on it. Then once you have listened, you have earned the right to speak and you can warn your fellow sheep of the dangers he is going to encounter. If he listens and returns to the fold, you have won a brother, found a sheep, discovered a great treasure and there is much rejoicing in heaven.**

**If he does not listen, get creative. Find a couple people who might really resonate with him. Maybe they have had similar struggles. Maybe they have a closer relationship with him. Seek out someone who can break through to the wandering sheep. Find a way to rescue him.**

**Finally, if the sheep insists on wandering, DON'T GIVE UP! Enlist the support of the whole Church. I am amazed at how many families suffer in silence rather than enlist the prayers and support of the Church. Stop trying to hide the fact that the wandering sheep is wandering. We do not care about where they wander. We do not blame you because they wandered. We just want them to come back. But if there is still no success, well, then treat them as though they are outside the family of God because if they keep wandering, that is where they will be. We do**

**not want that to happen and we will do all that we can to stop that from happening, but that is where they are headed. So, this wandering sheep becomes a primary evangelistic target for the whole Church. We pray for him without ceasing. We do whatever we can to warn him and we wait and watch like the father of the prodigal. We constantly scan the horizon for the return of the wandering sheep. WE NEVER GIVE UP, because as long as the sheep is alive, we have the opportunity to be the conduit of the Holy Spirit into their lives. It is not easy being right. You might take a great deal of flack for saying that you are right. However, Scripture shows us what is right and what is wrong. If we follow Scripture, we are right, and we are God's mouthpieces in this world. And we never give up. Do not give up and do not be like the ostrich sticking his head into the sand. God is being attacked all around us. Washington state has a law that makes it a crime for any counselor to encourage a person to leave the LGBTQ lifestyle. Michigan is passing laws to make all schools; even Christian schools, conform to parts of the LGBTQ agenda. This nation is drifting farther and farther from the truth and while we cannot fix the nation, we can fight in our communities, our schools, our libraries to demand that while you have the right to be wrong in this nation, you do not have the right to force anyone else to be wrong with you.**