

September 10, 2023: Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Main Idea: The beauty and power of the grace that God promises us is strongest in community. How can we name out loud that God is what connects us?

Have you ever heard the saying, “You can’t be a Christian by yourself?” This doesn’t mean that you can’t have a personal, one-on-one relationship with God, of course. It’s more to say that the full beauty of the grace that God promises us through Jesus is realized when we are in community—that God’s kingdom is supposed to be more than a kingdom of one. Our text from Matthew lays this out in the format of a contrast—in sins against you and agreements with you, alike, Jesus will be present as the binding agent between you and the rest of your community as you figure out your next, collective steps.

There are a ton of abstract implications of Jesus having come into the world as one of us and dying to redeem all of us. But this text really gets at the heart of the practical implication of him doing that. The day-to-day understanding of why Jesus’ life, death and resurrection matters to us. And that is because we now have one, common experience and witness that we would never have had before. And we can use that one, common experience and witness to center ourselves and our visions for our community. We now have something bigger than all of us that is, at the same time, for all of us. We don’t need to depend on ourselves for deliverance or redemption—we are integral parts of executing them, but the source of them is Jesus. When we say that we pray or gather or do anything else in Jesus’s name, this is really what we’re referring to.

In church, we often assume that God is our connecting agent—that God is what we know to be bigger than us, that Jesus is our common experience. But why leave that as an assumption? In this text, Jesus invites us to name, clearly and explicitly, that he is among us when we gather. This can give us new energy. New clarity. New vision. And the same thing can be said outside the walls of the church building, too.

Scripture Summary

Jesus offers some practical advice to the early Christian community, and reminds them that he is in their midst whether they are in disagreement or agreement with one another.



GOD'S WORD for Today

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First Reading: Exodus 12:1-14

1²The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. ¹²For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

Psalm: Psalm 149

Second Reading: Romans 13:8-14

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. ¹¹Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹²the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20

¹⁵"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. ¹⁶But 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. ¹⁷If 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. ¹⁸Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, 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. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."