

# SEPTEMBER 6<sup>TH</sup> – Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost

## DIGITAL PRINT SERVICE: FIRST SACKVILLE PRESBYTERIAN

### Call to Worship

One: The Lord is holy and mighty over all creation!

People: **The Lord speaks and summons all the earth to listen!**

One: The heavens proclaim the justice of the Lord!

People: **God will gather all his people and show them grace!**

### Prayer of Adoration

O God, we come now to worship you in Spirit and truth. Send your love spilling into the world! In this time of worship reveal your Word walking among us! And we shall greet one another with the expectant joy and trembling of friends too long apart. We stretch out our hands to you. O God we pray, do not leave them empty! Amen.

*Hymn 253 Come, ye faithful, raise the strain*

### Prayer of Confession

O God, although Christ is among us as our peace, we confess we are a people divided, within ourselves and against each other. We cling to the values and habits of a broken world. The profits and pleasures we pursue harm creation and the lives of others. The fears and jealousies we harbor set neighbor against neighbor, and nation against nation. The freedom and abundance we enjoy belong only to a few, yet they are God's gift to all. Heal us, forgive us, and set us free, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Hymn 652 Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go*

### Mission Capsule – World Literacy Day

In Afghanistan, cultural norms dictate that men often play a more central role in public life, while women and girls have more significant roles in the home. Because of this, many girls do not have equal access to education. Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D), with the support of local partners, has been working to provide girls with access to high quality education. Through summer camps, girls are informed about human rights, gender, sex, and leadership and democracy. Sadaf and Nargi participated in this summer camp, where they were inspired and excited about the great things they could achieve in the future. For the two girls, access to fair and equal education is vital for their goals and dreams; it is also essential to allow their communities to flourish. **PWS&D supports equal education.**

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## READINGS for September 6 – God speaks through the Scriptures

READING	VERSE	Minister's Message of Reflection
<i>Old Testament</i>	Exodus 12: 1-14	Instructions for the first Passover
<i>Psalm</i>	149	Sing to God a new song
<i>Epistle</i>	Romans 13: 8-14	Owe no one anything but love
<i>Gospel</i>	Matthew 18: 15-20	Where two or three are gathered in my name

*Hymn 452 Jesus, stand among us*

### **SERMON: Life Together!**

Years ago, when I was studying for the ministry, my home Presbytery of Cape Breton had a number of ministers who were able to get a number of narrow and exclusive measures passed in Presbytery.

One of those measures was a rule that disallowed Presbyterian clergy from taking part in any service with a priest within a Roman Catholic church. The people in the Presbytery who opposed this measure claimed it was unbiblical, legalistic, and not in keeping with the spirit of Reformed doctrine. Those who favored the measure claimed it was biblical, and was in keeping with Reformed doctrine.

The motion was passed and it was not until sometime later that its directive was felt. A minister of the Presbytery, in fact he was the minister of my home congregation, was invited to take part in his brother's wedding. The wedding was taking place in a Roman Catholic Church and the fact that the groom was the brother of the minister created a problem.

In the end, the minister took part with the priest in the wedding, and everything went well. However, at the first meeting of the Presbytery after this wedding, the minister who moved the motion stood up just before the Presbytery was to adjourn, and moved a motion that stated:

**“The minister who took part in a recent wedding within a Roman Catholic Church be forthwith disciplined by the Presbytery.”**

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Another minister, who was in favor of the measure, seconded the motion. Then the debate, argument, discussion, or whatever term one might apply, was on.

In the end the motion was defeated, in no small part because the defendant was a Cape Bretoner, while the clergy who brought the motion to the presbytery were not. The main defence used by the minister who took part in the wedding was our gospel reading today.

**“If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him – work it out between the two of you.”**

Jesus is here trying to teach his followers about living together in community. The gospel tells us that the first step in dealing with an issue one might have with another member of the community is to go to that person.

That, however, goes against our culture. We don't confront things directly. If you go to that person you have an issue with, you may find that he or she feels you also were at fault.

So you should go to the individual, not to the session, not to the presbytery, but to the person you are having the problem with. The second step is found in the second half of verse fifteen.

**“If he listens you have made a friend..”**

The goal is not punishment but restoration. Many of the abuses and misuses of church discipline happen when church discipline is used to punish rather than restore, or when it goes straight to putting someone out of the church in the name of keeping the church 'clean'. This misses the goal, which is reconciliation where we are to be more gentle and humble.

We get a picture of how this works when Jesus tells the parable of the shepherd going all out to get back the sheep who strayed from the flock.

If it can't be worked out between you, if you can't agree on whether there was wrong committed or not, then what? Perhaps the binding and loosing didn't make clear what should be done. You might need another point of view, and that is when one or two others become involved.

Perhaps it is someone with more experience or spiritual wisdom. It might be a person who can listen to both sides carefully. If this fails, then we go to the

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church. But what sort of church does Jesus have in mind? It wouldn't be the type of church we usually see.

Jesus is speaking about a community in which people are sufficiently involved in each other's lives to notice spiritual and moral problems, and where relationships are strong enough to risk misunderstanding or offence.

Then, if the issue is still not settled, the gospel says:

**"You'll have to start over from scratch."**

Here, the offender, even when refusing to listen to the church, is not to be treated as a tax - collector or pagan. Jesus ate at table with tax - collectors and treated them as people in need of Good News, in need of reconciliation.

This may not happen but it is the hope and the goal to restoration within the community. In this context **"bind,"** and **"loose,"** were important words for the Jewish people. These words were used to describe the process of trying to work out how the law applied to a particular situation.

If a Rabbi decided a law did apply to a particular situation, he was "binding" it. Jews were obligated to apply it. If it did not apply to a particular situation, he was 'loosing' this law. Jews were loosed from the obligation to apply it.

In Matthew Jesus binds the commandment to 'love your neighbor ' as applicable also to loving your enemy. Jesus loses the ban on working on the Sabbath day to get food when you are hungry. He says that the way the Pharisees bind the law in the same situation condemns the innocent.

Jesus binds the commandment to honor your father and mother as applicable to caring for your parents in old age. Yet like the rest of the world, churches don't usually follow Jesus' words in Matthew eighteen.

So perhaps the next time we are having difficulty in getting along with someone else we might say to them,

**"We need to have a Matthew 18 conversation."**

Living together, living the Christian life, is about healing, creating life, not destroying it, about living in peace with God and one another. Amen.

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**Prayers:**

O God, you have blessed us in this life and we give you thanks. We are grateful for the gifts you give and in particular the gift of new life in Jesus. He is the one who redeems us, guides us, and is ever with us.

Hear our prayers today for the church here in this community and throughout the world. We pray for the church as it tries by your grace to deal with many needs. We pray for the world in which we live and share with so many people.

We pray for leaders in all segments of society as they seek to do what is right. Grant to them the wisdom and courage to do justly and walk humbly in their daily routine. We pray for all who are going back to school and university. To all students and teachers, grant patience and love for each other.

We pray for all who are homeless and hungry, for those unemployed and anxious in these times of uncertainty. We pray for those who are ill and in hospital; for those who mourn and are alone.

God of all life, we thank you for those who have travelled before us and shown us in their lives a measure of your love. Keep us in communion with you, and with your people from every time and place. Now we join together in praying the words Jesus taught us saying.... The Lord's Prayer..

**Hymn 486** *The church of Christ in every age*

**BENEDICTION / COMMISSIONING**

May we serve as we have been served. May we forgive as we have been forgiven. May the Love of God, the grace of Christ, and the fellowship of the Spirit be with us now and always. Amen.

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