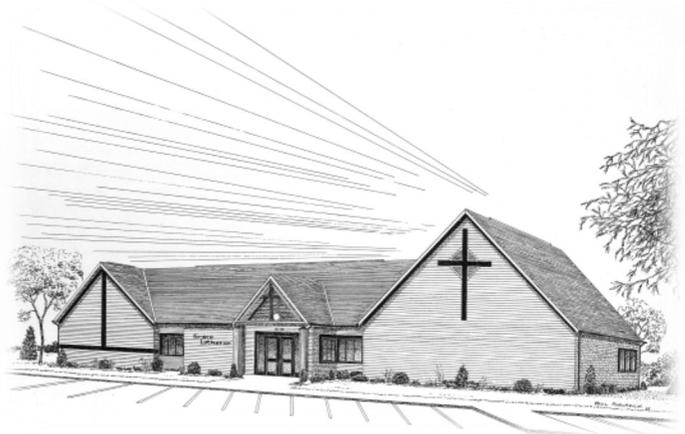




The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
September 28, 2014  
Pastor Daniel Naumann  
Ezekiel 33:7-11  
**TURN AND LIVE!**



The elder stands next to the pastor on the doorstep of one of the most difficult home visits he has ever attempted. His knees shake together as the moisture leaves his tongue and the beads of sweat roll down his brow. He thinks to himself, “What will I say to this man living in open sin?” He’s gone over what to say a hundred times in his head and in

meeting after meeting with the other elders, and in one last attempt to bring the hardened sinner to repentance, they have gone to his house for one final meeting. Yet no matter how many times he has gone over the words to say, somehow they still seem impossible to speak. He remembers thinking as the door opens, “I’m just glad Pastor is going to do the talking.”

Talk about intimidating! Whenever we think about Matthew chapter 18 and what Jesus directs his people to do there when it comes to church discipline, our minds immediately go to the situation of excommunication, don’t they? Someone has sinned openly, and has refused to repent privately, and despite warning after warning, he has refused even to the point of an entire congregation telling him that he is in danger of losing his faith. So one final attempt is made to show the seriousness of sin, and that attempt is excommunication. Talk about intimidating!

It’s a situation that no one relishes. It’s a situation that we don’t exactly pray God to present us with. It hurts. It makes us wonder—what’s the point? Why does God give us such a difficult task when it comes to excommunication?

Before we ever examine a case of excommunication, there is a far simpler question for us to ask than those. Is any preaching of the law ever easy? Is telling someone about their sin ever easy? No. Whether it’s telling dad

that he shouldn’t have gotten so angry, or informing a co-worker that his language is inappropriate, or telling the parishioner that he’s going to be excommunicated, confronting sin is never easy. But it is most certainly necessary.

Yet so often we treat it as though it were not. The people Ezekiel was warning needed to hear the same thing. Ezekiel was such a unique prophet in so many different ways. Ezekiel was a prophet who was an exile in Babylon preaching to the remnant in exile. But Ezekiel is unique because he preached to the exiles even before Jerusalem was destroyed. You see, Babylon had taken the brightest and the best out of the country of Judah already, and Ezekiel was among them. But God was still calling his people to repentance, telling them about their sin, and hoping that they would change while threatening them with the destruction of Jerusalem. Ezekiel, taken captive with that first group from Jerusalem, warned God’s people about the pending destruction.

Ezekiel’s message was harsh because it showed that God was serious about his threats against sin. But it was a message that went against what other false prophets were saying. Others said, “God loves us, he won’t destroy his temple. We’re fine, there’s nothing to worry about. God can’t be angry about our sin, we’re his chosen people. Everything will be fine.” But Ezekiel, like a faithful watchman on the walls, proclaimed the truth. “Repent, or God will destroy you and Jerusalem.”

Does that scenario, does that message of warning, sound familiar? We are God’s faithful watchmen sent to warn people about impending judgment against sin, yet too often that is not how we see it, and that is not how they see it. Too often we question God’s motive and make him out to be the bad guy as though he were an angry God who simply can’t wait to punish and destroy eternally. We waver in doubt and question, “How can a loving God send people to hell?” So we reason one of two things: either God isn’t going to send people to hell, in which case we can stop telling people about sin, or

God isn't a God of love at all. What a distortion of the truth! Yet every time we fail to proclaim law, every time we fail to confront sin, this is what we do! We fail to call sin, sin—we also fail to let God be God.

We know that God is not an angry God who relishes death in hell, yet we know that God is serious about his threats to condemn. How do we reconcile these truths? Where do we see God's heart?

See the heart of God as he loves all mankind as only God could love them! See him proclaim law with tears in his eyes, with hurt in his heart, and with love held out to the sinner by the Savior. "Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" Does God relish and enjoy judgment? Never. Hear his words through Ezekiel to a people who had turned their backs on God for centuries as he pleads with them out of his love. "Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'" When God proclaims law through his prophets it is never in anger or in malice, but it is in love because he wants to bring the sinner to repentance and he wants to forgive.

The very same love is found in the Savior's words outside of the great city: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." With that same heavy heart that hates preaching law and takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, we, God's people, have been charged to tell the sinner about his sin because that's what love drives us to do. And it's that love—that bare, bleeding heart of God—that we take to the world. Because it is this heart of love that drove God to punish his Son instead of the sinner.

See the bleeding heart of God nailed to the cross to take away sin. God doesn't want anyone to die, anyone to perish, anyone to go to hell. God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. He wants it so much that he was willing to come down to us, to take our place under the law, the demand to be perfect, and to be condemned to die even though he had done nothing wrong. See the bleeding heart of God, a heart of love, a heart that would stop at nothing to take away all sin of all time, in the heart of the Savior of the world. See

God's heart stop on the cross for us. See the true heart of God in Jesus who died for us.

It's this picture of love that we get to take to the world, to proclaim to the ends of the earth. It's this heart of love that drives us to faithfully proclaim to the sinner the seriousness of sin and the greatness of God's grace as it covers over a multitude of sin. It's this heart of love that forgives every one of our sins, every time we fail to proclaim law and gospel, every time we distort God's attitude, all of those sins too have been covered over by the heart of God that beat and bled for you on the cross. See God's heart in Jesus your Savior. See God's heart in full and free forgiveness.

It's that same picture that drove Ezekiel, the prophet, to proclaim God's Word faithfully to the remnant in Babylon. Those people needed to hear about their sin

and sin's consequences. But God didn't just preach law to them because he sadistically enjoyed it. He preached law to them to prepare them for his grace and for his gospel. Ezekiel, the prophet, was a faithful watchman who sounded the warnings of God's law, but who also proclaimed faithful gospel to God's people. It's because of Ezekiel that faithful men like Nehemiah, Ezra, and Daniel were preserved even in exile so that God could restore the nation of Israel and send a Savior through them.

Why does God have us preach the law? Why does he have us tell people about their sin? Why does he give to us a difficult teaching like excommunication, such a difficult task to carry out? He gives us this because he so desperately wants people to be

his. He gives such tasks because only when we see sin do we see the need for the Savior. And the Savior is exactly who God gave us to proclaim and to show to the world.

The elder stands next to the pastor, knees snug and stance confident with a smile on his face and joy in his heart. He stands on the doorstep of the very same parishioner who has repented of his sin and who has sought God's forgiveness. This parishioner knows his need for the Savior. And the elder and pastor are there to reassure him again of God's complete forgiveness and to acknowledge his full acceptance back into the congregation, into the family of believers. As the door opens, the elder remembers thinking, "I can't wait to remind him again that God has forgiven him and that he loves him." Amen.

