

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
April 26, 2015**

The Mission the Good Shepherd Gives Us

- 1. The privilege of forgiving sins**
- 2. The importance of retaining sins**

**Hymns: 148 – 155 – Distribution: 360, 153 –
Closing: 436**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

John 20:19-23 –

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Delegation! Leaders will tell you that delegating is a wise thing to do. For example, I've coordinated the Men's Retreat here in the Pacific Northwest for a number of years. It would be very foolish of me not to delegate many tasks to other people. After all, with about 65 men attending, it could become a rather overwhelming job to coordinate everything. Therefore:

- Dormitory coordinator – Tad Doviak distributes and collects keys for the men. He also deals with any problems or needs that men might have with their dorm room.
- Evening snacks and beverages – Dan Smith and Brian Drinkwine purchase

and bring these for the two evenings of fellowship that we enjoy.

- Bible class coffee – Pastor Nitz, the coffee entrepreneur, always does a great job making our quality coffee.
- Worship – Every year one of the pastors preaches. Another presides over the service. One of the attendees sets up communion.
- Chauffer – One of the men picks up our speaker and drives him back to the airport.
- Golf – Bob Gronlund is the contact man for golf, if men would like to catch a round before the retreat starts.

Delegation is a wise thing to do.

In our reading for this morning, we see that our Savior has done the same thing. The Good Shepherd has delegated tasks to his people. It is not because he doesn't have the energy or expertise to do them. No, rather he has simply chosen to use his followers as he sees fit.

Therefore, today let's explore "***The Mission the Good Shepherd Gives Us.***" We'll do this by reading from John 20: "***On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."***"

1. The privilege of forgiving sins

The Good Shepherd gave his disciples a two-fold responsibility. A parallel Scripture reference to this is what Jesus said in Matthew 18: "***I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.***"

Jesus told his disciples that he was giving them "keys." That was a great honor! There is

honor in being given the keys to things. Have you ever been given the keys? Maybe your dad handed the car keys over to you when you were 17 so you could take your date out on a Friday night. Perhaps the camp leader had to go somewhere for a while and he gave you, a junior counselor, his keys to everything at the camp in an emergency. What an honor! What trust!

What important keys Jesus gives us. What are they keys to? Matthew's verses told us that they open and close heaven. Heaven! These are not the keys to the Tacoma Dome, the Showare Center, or the government buildings in Olympia. They are more important! These are the keys that open and close the door of heaven.

Let's take a look at the first key that Jesus mentioned, the one that forgives sins. We call this the "loosing key."

- Where does its power come from? To show them this, Jesus breathed on his disciples and told them they were receiving the Holy Spirit. He was the One that gave them the power and right to use this key.
- And what was the basis for this privilege that Christ was giving them? What did he show them? His hands and his side. His wounds. *"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).* Because of the wounds that he could show them on that evening, forgiveness could be proclaimed. He had suffered and died for the sin of the world. His redemptive work was complete! And your sin and guilt are gone.

This was also possible only because the wounded One was standing there alive. If the wounded One had stayed a corpse, God's seal of approval would not have been put on this picture. Romans 4 says, *"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to*

life for our justification." "Justification" means that we are declared innocent in God's sight. Jesus' rising from death is God the Father's stamp of approval that Jesus' payment on the cross was sufficient for sin. Forgiveness has been won! It is certain because Jesus is alive.

This assurance could be theirs personally for their sins; however, Jesus was saying more than that in these verses. He was telling them that they had the right to proclaim this forgiveness as they pronounce it to others. To whom were they to announce this? 1 John 1 says, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* When they were sinned against and someone would come to them and repent of what they did, they could say, "God forgives you, and I forgive you." They were not relegated to saying:

- I think God will forgive you.
- I hope God forgives you.
- It appears you probably will be forgiven by God.

They could say, "I forgive you and God does too!" even though they had not paid for that forgiveness themselves. Why were they to say this? For the great COMFORT of the sinner.

As Christians in your homes and in your congregations, what a privilege this is. You see this put into practice in many ways here at your church:

- You have heard the pastor say in the worship service, "I forgive you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."
- You have attended Bible classes where education in the Word gives us the comforting gospel message.
- Your pastors counsel people regularly who need to hear about their forgiveness of sins from a mess that they have made.

Yet we can take the application even farther today. You also can and must say these words in your personal lives, as the Good Shepherd has given you this key also. If you're a husband

or wife, think about how this affects your marriage. In a marriage, there can be misunderstandings, arguments, anger, hurt feelings, mistakes made, and selfishness exhibited. If you have been in the wrong and admit this to your spouse and confess it, they can tell you, "I forgive you, and the Lord does also." If they have been in the wrong and they come to you to tell you that they are profoundly sorry for what they did, you can tell them, "I forgive you, and the Lord does also."

Do you? Do you say those words out loud when they need to be said? I remember a marriage retreat that I did a number of years ago where we practiced! The wives looked at their own husband and said out loud, "I'm sorry." They didn't say what we were sorry for, they just said those words. And the husbands looked back in their eyes and practiced replying, "I forgive you." Not:

- You should be sorry
- OK, but don't ever do that again
- You can make it up to me this week
- Or worse yet, to say nothing at all and "punish" them with the fact that you have to "think about it"

No, we say, "I forgive you." From the feeling I got at that marriage retreat, it seemed that those words were not often said in their personal confessions to each other!

The same holds true in your parenting life, your work life, your life in your neighborhood, and your personal relationships with other church members. **The Lord Jesus gives us the privilege of proclaiming forgiveness!**

2. The importance of retaining sins

That's in only half the story, as you know if you were listening to our reading. Jesus has the flip side of forgiveness to confer on his followers as well that evening. He said, "*If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*" Jesus tells us there is a time not to forgive. We call this second key the "binding key." This is because the words "if you do not forgive them" literally say "if you hold them tightly." In other words, if you don't let it go, if you don't forgive

those sins. What? Why would we not forgive someone who has sinned?!

Looking back at 1 John, we read, "*If we claim we have not sinned, we make (God) out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.*" We cannot proclaim forgiveness to a person who has not confessed their sin, because confession is necessary to being forgiven in God's sight. In fact, the Lord had some strong words for Ezekiel when it came to pointing out the sins of the nation. He considered Ezekiel to be a watchman for his people and told him, "*When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood*" (3:18).

Why has God commanded us to retain (hold) the sins of the unrepentant? It is the clarion call of a WARNING that they are to heed. It is a call to repentance. Galatians 5 tells us, "*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*"

How important to use this key, as well as the first! This call to repentance is similar to what you would do if you saw someone walking on the railroad track with their earbuds in, and a train bearing down on them from behind. You'd speak quickly! Decisively! Frankly! And loudly!

This is a privilege and responsibility that God has given you as a leader in your home and clan. You are not to be nosy or intrusive, but you are to be observant and interested in the lives of those around you that God has given you a responsibility toward. Sometimes I fear that church members fail to use this binding key in their personal lives. I remember a time when my wife had a cousin (WELS) who was living together with her boyfriend. Word was that they were going to get married within a year. And we knew that we were even going to be invited, most likely. However, no one in her

immediate family or in the clan was speaking up about their situation. The feeling was that folks should just keep quiet and they would be married soon enough. In fact, her father took their pastor to task for bringing this up to them.

In your personal life, what would make us negligent in using the binding key?

- Fear of confrontation?
- Fear of difficult conversations?
- Avoiding “rocking the boat” in the wider family?
- Trying to keep the peace?
- The fact that such discussion is pretty time consuming?

As a Christian, you must remember the importance of such discussions and the reason that God has given us this privilege to speak. It is to lead a sinner to repentance. When we are neglectful in speaking up, a soul might even be lost.

In considering this, it's important for us to talk also about the life of your congregation. You will see this key in action and might even take part in its use. You might be familiar with Jesus' words in Matthew 18: *“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*

When a pastor and congregation get involved in church discipline, most often two situations are happening, either a situation dealing with morality (6th Commandment) or a despising of church attendance and God's Word (3rd Commandment). In love, people and also the church are to talk with these individuals and warn them. Unfortunately, if things take their course, the church may need to declare them to be a pagan (unbeliever) if repentance does not

occur. They might be excommunicated from God's church.

Yet I have some fears at times with elders and church leaders in our Wisconsin Synod:

- I fear many in our synod have a misunderstanding about judging, which might have them contend that we aren't supposed to judge and point out others' sins.
- If fear some would view church discipline as loveless.
- That some Boards of Elders in our synod's churches who don't want to have such difficult conversations with their sinning members.
- That some would want to keep “external peace” in the congregation instead of creating such waves.
- That some elders would see too much time and effort needed to address such things.

At a time like that, we need to remember the purpose for which Christ gave his disciples and us keys. It is for the wellbeing of eternal souls. **It is to warn and then – God-willing – comfort repentant sinners with the certain message of forgiveness that the Lord Jesus has won for us.**

Delegation! Our Good Shepherd has delegated some pretty serious things to us! This is none other than the proclamation of law and gospel to those around us in our personal lives and in our congregations. Yet don't forget that he does not send you out alone to proclaim the message of these keys. He goes with you. He speaks through you. He gives your words power. He blesses your sanctified efforts.

Therefore, may we be humbled and encouraged by the Good Shepherd's words today. And may we be faithful in proclaiming the messages he has given us to say! Amen.