

Pentecost 14, September 6, 2020 (baptism of twins; communion)
Matthew 18:15-20; Eze 33:7-10; Ps 119:33-40; Ro 13:8-10

Today's reading from Ezekiel is a scary passage for pastors. God tells the prophet it's *his* job to warn the people of their sin. If he fails to do that, they'll die in their sin, and God will blame Ezekiel.

If he warns them and they refuse to repent, they'll still die in their sin—but Ezekiel will be off the hook, because he spoke God's truth to them. The whole point of this passage is contained in the last words: **As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. What I desire is for the wicked to turn from their ways and live.**

I cringe at the thought that I may fail in my calling! If I don't challenge you to grow in your faith, the first thing St. Peter will say to me when I knock at the Pearly Gates is, "Gail, look at how many people just didn't get it, all because you let them get away with lazy faith."

It's not *wickedness* I worry about. It's *stagnant* faith, faith that's content where it's at, without growing in relationship to God, to fellow Christians, and to all our *neighbors* in the world. Faith that's taken for granted. Faith that's content to say the Creed and pray the Lord's Prayer, but doesn't exert itself to *live out* God's good and gracious will in daily life.

So I want to ask you, *what does it mean to you to "be Christian"?* For me, being Christian means following Christ the Lord, our Savior and Redeemer. Not only *following* him, but actually trying to live as he commanded, walking in the way he led by example. Listen to his words.

You've heard it said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:43-45).

Any who want to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (Matt. 6:24).

A Pharisee asked Jesus, "Which commandment in the Law is the greatest?" Jesus answered, **You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and the greatest commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:35-40).**

And who is our neighbor? According to Jesus, our neighbors are the poor, the lost, the lonely; people of different color, creed, gender, sexual orientation. Our neighbors are the refugees trying to cross the border, the homeless, the differently-abled, the addicts, the oppressed, those discriminated against or persecuted for any reason.

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt. . . . Do unto others as you would have them do to you (Lk 6:27-31).

I am grieved beyond words by many things that are going on in this “one nation under God.” It’s a time like no other in all of history, with a culture of technology that seems capable of doing almost anything and yet is unable to stop, or even hinder, a miniscule virus. Weapons of war, of mass destruction, are available to nations we would call “unprincipled”—just as some of them would say the same of us—and a planet-destroying war is no longer unimaginable.

At the very core of my heart I believe the world has no chance at all to survive in any healthy, life-sustaining way unless leaders in every place take Jesus seriously and begin to live by his death-defying words.

Do your thoughts align with the amazing grace of Jesus, who died to love the world into wholeness? Then love God, and love your neighbor.

Amen.