

Sermon: 15th Sunday After Pentecost/Pr. 18 - "Jesus says, Go!"

Date/Time: Sunday, Sep 5th 2026 – 7:45a, 10:00a **Service:** Holy Eucharist Rite I & II

Here in the South, we've developed a really sophisticated way of dealing with difficult situations - & maybe difficult people.

We say, "Bless their heart."

Now, "bless their heart" can be entirely sincere.

It can be tender and loving and compassionate.

And - if you've lived in the South for more than fifteen minutes - you also know that it can be the pinnacle of cattiness.

But - there's another way we use it.

Sometimes, "bless their heart" allows us to acknowledge that something isn't right without us having to do anything about it.

Somebody's behaved badly. Somebody said something hurtful. Somebody made a mess of things.

And we can shake our heads and say, "Well...bless their heart."

And keep a comfortable distance.

We don't have to say the difficult thing.

We don't have to risk the relationship.

We don't have to get involved in anything messy.

Bless their heart - and move along.

Except - that's not what Jesus tells us to do.

Jesus says:

Go!

"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone."

Go.

Move toward the person.

And I don't know about you, but that's probably not my first instinct.

There's a very human part of us that would much rather avoid conflict.

We tell ourselves that we're keeping the peace.

We don't want to make things worse - we don't want to cause a scene.

And sometimes - of course - restraint is wise.

Not every irritation needs to become a confrontation.

Not every slight needs to be litigated.

But sometimes we avoid confrontation because we believe confrontation creates conflict.

Jesus knows the things we sometimes forget - of course!

Sometimes the conflict's already there.

Something's happened.

Someone's been hurt.

Trust has been damaged.

A relationship's already been distorted.

And silence doesn't necessarily preserve the peace.

Sometimes silence only preserves the brokenness when someone's sinned against you.

Our Prayer Book has a really helpful definition of sin.

In the Catechism - y'all remember when we dug into the catechism a couple of weeks back? In the same place, it asks, "What is sin?"

And the answer is:

"Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation."

I love that definition because it moves sin beyond just keeping a list of things we're supposed to do and things we're not supposed to do.

Sin distorts relationship.

With God.

With one another.

With this good creation God entrusted to us.

And if sin distorts relationship, then pretending that the distortion isn't there can't be the Christian response.

That's why Jesus says:

Go!

And this thing Jesus asks of his disciples continues a long and hallowed biblical tradition.

It's what the prophets had been doing for generations.

They spoke uncomfortable truths.

They called out injustice and oppression.

They confronted kings who had abused their power.

Religious leaders who had lost their way.

Communities that exploited the poor.

People who perpetuated lies and violence.

And they didn't do it because calling people out was somehow virtuous in itself.

The prophets weren't interested in condemnation for condemnation's sake.

They spoke because God desired something more.

And Ezekiel tells us what that something more is.

God makes Ezekiel a sentinel - a watchman.

Someone who stands where he can see danger coming.

And God tells him that when he sees it, he has a responsibility to speak.

To “warn the wicked to turn from their ways.”

The sentinel doesn’t create the danger.

The sentinel doesn’t punish anybody.

The sentinel can’t make anybody turn around.

But the sentinel can’t simply see what is happening, whisper “bless their hearts”, and walk away.

He has to speak.

And then God tells Ezekiel why.

& this is really important:

“I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live.”

And then God pleads:

“Turn back, turn back...for why will you die?”

There it is.

The prophetic word names what’s broken because God desires its restoration.

The prophets call people out because God is calling people back.

And generations later, Jesus stands firmly within that same tradition.

Something’s gone wrong between two members of the community.

A relationship has been distorted.

And Jesus says:

Go. Speak. Tell the truth. Listen.

And, if necessary, bring others into the conversation.

But see what Jesus says happens if that person listens to you:

“You have regained that one.”

Not:

I won.

Or:

I was right.

Not:

I showed them.

Not even:

They got what they deserved.

But

“You have regained that one.” That’s the goal.

Ezekiel says: Turn - and live.

Jesus says: You have regained that one.

The goal is restoration.

The goal is reconciliation.

The goal is life.

And that means Christian reconciliation is not conflict avoidance.

Nor does reconciliation mean pretending that nothing happened.

The prophets make that impossible.

Sometimes love has to say, no.

Sometimes love has to name injustice.

Sometimes love has to confront an abuse of power.

Sometimes love has to say, what happened here was wrong.

Because restoration without truth isn't reconciliation.

It leaves the distortion intact.

Now, there's another word that sits beside reconciliation - restoration.

Christian hope is never just that a wrong's identified and consequences are given.

And, those things may be necessary because accountability matters.

But we also believe that people can turn.

People can change.

People can be restored.

But restoration doesn't mean pretending that something never happened.

But it also doesn't erase consequences, and it doesn't automatically restore trust.

Trust may have to be rebuilt slowly, over time.

But it leaves room for resurrection of relationship.

It leaves room for the possibility that what someone's done doesn't have to become the final word about who they are.

But, there's an important boundary to all of this.

The instruction Jesus gives to go to someone privately should never be used to require someone experiencing abuse, or coercion, or harassment, or someone placed in danger to confront an abuser alone.

That is not what this Gospel asks of us.

Christian reconciliation never requires us to place ourselves - or another person - in danger.

But in the ordinary brokenness of human relationships, Jesus does ask something difficult of us.

A love that moves toward.

It's much easier to love humanity in the abstract than it is to love the actual human being who has hurt us.

Or disappointed us.
Or angered us.
Or gotten on our very last nerve.
“Bless their heart” can keep them safely over there.
But, Jesus says:

Go!

Because sometimes love means getting close enough to get messy.
And Paul tells us why.
“*Owe no one anything except to love one another.*”
Sometimes we imagine that love means overlooking what’s wrong.
The prophets knew better.
Jesus knew better.
Because this is what God has been doing all along.
The God who tells Ezekiel to speak because God wants God’s people to turn and live -
is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, who tells us to go toward one another because God
wants us to regain one another.
This is the God who gathers us, again and again, around this Table, where none of us
comes because we’ve gotten everything right.

We come because God keeps calling us back.
Back to God.
Back to one another.
Back into communion.

The prophets call us out because God is calling us back.
Jesus tells us to go because love refuses to remain safely at a distance.
And maybe the next time we find ourselves tempted to shake our heads, keep our
distance, and say - *well, bless their heart* - we might hear another word.
One little word from Jesus:

Go!

Because the goal is not winning.
The goal is not punishment.
The goal is life.
The goal is reconciliation.

Amen.