

All Saints Anglican Episcopal Church

Steenrijk

Leidenstraat at Heelsumstrat

Willemstad, Curacao

The Episcopal Diocese of Venezuela

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 18A

September 7, 2026

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

“The people of Christ”

DRAFT

The Holy Gospel according to

Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus said, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell

you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Dear Lord, give us a heart to be your church for your people and for your purpose. Amen.

I walked down East 46th Street the other day in New York and found a small thin woman sitting on her ‘butler’, a sort of a walker with four wheels, and sobbing profusely. I stopped and asked her what was the matter, and she said, “Can I ever be forgiven? Can I ever be forgiven?” and of course I placed my hand on her head and pronounced forgiveness. Christ frequently did that, and we can forgive also; one does not need to be ordained or a church official to be a forgiver. Just forgive. And often we may feel that we too cannot be

forgiven for something, don't we? And today we may be carrying something that we may feel was unpardonable, but, no, Christ can forgive all for everything.

The unforgiveable sin is the sin for which we have not asked God for forgiveness. "Ask and you will receive," Jesus said. No one can live a perfect life, and all of us come before the presence of God with our lifelong sins completely exposed, all of them. But we have faith as Christians that our Lord and Savior will forgive us of everything when we ask him; and that is true on our last day,

regardless. Jesus is indeed our Savior, and that means he saves us all from our sins, doesn't it? Jesus doesn't save us from selective sins, but Jesus Christ saves us from all of our sins. We actually take the Holy Bread and Wine, the Holy Food and Drink, each Sunday to remind us that we have a Savior, and we are to recall that Christ knows our inner thoughts and all of our deeds, secret or otherwise, and forgives each one of them. If, perchance, we can do some sort of restitution, some act that will restore us in the graces of another

person or persons, let us do that; don't
aver, don't hesitate to try to make
amends if possible with someone we
have offended. But sometimes it is
simply not possible; the person or
persons we offended or sinned against
may be long dead or missing, or
whatever; but when we can seek
forgiveness from another, when we are
able to seek forgiveness from another,
don't delay; do it now; and if they accept
our act of seeking forgiveness, we are set
free from whatever guilt we are carrying
around as a big burden on our backs and

in our minds. And if they refuse to forgive us, Christ forgives us anyway; we have done our part. Maybe today we are carrying around a big or small burden of guilt. Jesus said he did not come to heal healthy people but sick people. Jesus came to preach to sinners, not to the sinless, and if we have guilt for anything that is holding us back from being a fully functional Christian, let us take that in prayer to the one who always forgives, Jesus our Lord. Ask and we shall be forgiven.

Scholars like John Howard Yoder and Mark Alan Powell have argued that the language in our gospel today of binding and loosing was used by rabbis to describe whether or not a particular scriptural commandment applies to a specific situation.

“Binding and loosing” is language of ethical discernment, of determining right and wrong in a given case. According to Mark Powell, Jewish rabbis “bound” a law when they determined that a commandment applied to a given situation, and they “loosed” a law when

they determined that it, though eternally valid, did not apply under certain circumstances.

Individual people are not bound or loosed. The “whatever” in today’s gospel lesson is the religious law which is bound or loosed. Note that the gospel does not say “whoever” but “whatever”. Whatever we loose or bind is loosed or bound. And that even includes our own deeds and actions; how many have been unwilling to forgive themselves? when is the act we may have committed that we are seeking forgiveness for, forgive even

our own selves for what we may or may not have done. The priest announces forgiveness each Sunday to remind us that we have Christ's forgiveness, forever. Amen.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus “binds” (or tightens) the law against murder to apply even when we are angry with or want to insult a brother or sister. It applies to the disposition of our heart and not just to the actual commission of the deed. Yet even such a thought will be forgiven by our Lord if we ask him.

In other places, Jesus “looses” (or liberalizes) the law of the Sabbath so that it doesn’t apply to the hungry picking grain or to helping someone who is ill. “Binding and loosing” is shorthand for scriptural interpretation and application to a particular case.

Jeremy Troxler, pastor of Spruce Pine United Methodist Church in Spruce Pine, North Carolina, says that “A divided world does not need a church free of conflict and sin but a church that models how conflict and sin can be transformed into peace.”

[http://www.faithandleadership.com/sermons /jeremy-troxler-the-tie-binds](http://www.faithandleadership.com/sermons/jeremy-troxler-the-tie-binds)

Pastor William J. Carl, III, President of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, writes: “It never ceases to amaze me how periodically someone joins the church thinking with great naivete that he or she has now left the imperfect, money-grubbing, power-hungry secular world and entered some holy, monastic community where everyone is good and kind and loving and no one ever gossips or spreads rumors or disagrees on any subject. When this happens, I usually

watch to see how long it takes before this person's whole idyllic image of the church comes tumbling down like the proverbial deck of cards.

“Usually, all it takes is serving on one committee or doing one job for the church. Whatever it is, sooner or later it happens. And then I watch what comes next: either total loss of enthusiasm and withdrawal, maybe a little sabbatical to regroup and reevaluate or more church hopping, ever in search of that ever elusive, ‘perfect’ church or, with some, it's complete abandonment and a return

back into the more predictable secular world.”

[http://www.sermonsuite.com/free.php?
i=788019605&key=hkiy0cuvVftQd0pm](http://www.sermonsuite.com/free.php?i=788019605&key=hkiy0cuvVftQd0pm)

Lutheran Pastor Edward F. Markquart says, “The temptation today is always to replace Christ with success. Many people think, ‘I don’t want to be part of a Christ church; I want to be part of a successful church.’ It is a very easy trap to be caught by in American culture. ... Now, for many people, they want to be personally successful, so they also

unconsciously want to be part of a successful church. Successful churches are to grow bigger and better, with pretty sanctuaries and pretty music and pretty programs and pretty people and pretty preaching and pretty talented leadership. The good news is subtly replaced by good times. The gospel is replaced by pretty and vacant preaching. The cross of Jesus Christ which invites us to love and suffer with people around the neighborhood and globe is replaced by colorful programs. It happens very subtly. The cross is replaced by

programs and activities. The social compatibility becomes more important than Jesus Christ. Social compatibility becomes more important than the gospel that Jesus Christ came to this earth as a human being in order to die for your sins and mine so that we can live with God eternally. Many people want to be part of a successful church. In fact, they are more interested in a successful church than a Christ-centered church. They want a church that will meet their needs” for success.

Martin Luther wrote: “O Lord, deliver me from Christian churches with nothing but Christian saints in them. I want to remain in and be part of a church which is a little flock of faint-hearted people, weak people, who know and feel their sin, their poverty, their misery, and they believe in the forgiveness of God.”

Church researchers found that “if a new person at church has seven new friends within a year, one hundred percent of those people stay. If a new person has four or fewer friends, ninety-two percent drop out of the church.” You

may observe this also here at your church. We seal others with the forgiveness of Christ as we befriend them, so let us be aware of those who come to us seeking forgiveness, and a new start, and a new community of forgiven sinners.

http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_a_the_church.htm

The term ‘church – ekklesia’ (meaning the ‘called out’) is used only twice in the gospels. Here in our Gospel lesson in Matthew 18 and at Jesus declaration after Peter’s statement that

Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, a few verses earlier in Matthew 16:18. It is significant that Matthew does not use the word “synagogue” to describe a gathering of Christians, even though “synagogue” means “to come together or to gather together.” What is intended here is the beginning of a new community called out from worldly entrapments, a community which was the parallel revelation to Peter's revelation about Christ in Matthew 16:16, that the

professed believers in the Lord will be saved.

<http://www.lectionarysermons.com/Sep99@05.html>

Pastor John Jewell wrote, “The church lives its life on earth, but its roots are in heaven. When we are truly being the church, we are an outpost of the Kingdom of God on earth. And what we do on earth has an impact in heaven.”

(from “The Hot Potato of Church Discipline,” John Jewell, 1999.)

<http://www.lectionarysermons.com/Sep99@05.html>

We are the hands, feet, minds, hearts, and bodies, and love of Christ in our world. We are the ones to announce forgiveness; we are the ones to take up the slack of others who do not take their forgiveness seriously. When we see a person in need, we are the ones to care for them. We are the Good Samaritans of life; we are the ones Christ has lifted up to be his family, his disciples, his followers. As we give up our sins to our Savior, let us take up our crosses and serve others since Christ has so graciously forgiven us by his death and

resurrection. Let us take the forgiveness we all have as Christians and give that to those around us and all whom we can benefit. Then Christ will be known in all the world.

Amen.

“The people of Christ”

Matthew 18:15-20

Proper 18A

September 7, 2026

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Description:

The followers of Christ are the forgiven ones, the ones for whom Christ has announced eternal forgiveness. May we take this gift of forgiveness to others and release them from burdens which no one should carry. Let us be the hands, feet,

minds, love, and heart of Christ to the hurting and suffering world.

Tags:

Jesus, Christ, God, forgiveness, loose, bound, bind, world, church, synagogue, eternal, ask, community, Peter, American, sanctuaries, music, programs, Episcopal, Lutheran, Markquart, Jewell, crosses, whatever, whomever, crucifixion, resurrection, Pittsburg, theological, seminary, Holy, Bread, Wine, Body, Blood, priest, Samaritans, Jewish, rabbis, restitution, conflict, sin

St. John's Episcopal Church

61 Broad Street

Elizabeth, New Jersey 07201

The Seventeenth Sunday after

Pentecost: Proper 18A

September 7, 2008

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

DRAFT

The Holy Gospel according to

Matthew 18:15-20

This week has been an exciting one for me. We have some inkling of how God will help us save St. John's Church, and it's a wonderful feeling. The details are yet to be discerned, but I must say I feel much more positive today than a week ago. To me, I and we here have been living a miracle.

In three different English cathedrals I visited during my recent trip there for the Lambeth Conference, I was overwhelmed by the majesty and magnificence of these mighty structures. As someone noted a couple of days ago,

even St. John's could fit easily inside of one or two different Roman Catholic churches in Jersey City. We are large, but not "that" large. And when I compare us to those magnificent Anglican structures in England, we could fit probably every Episcopal Church in Union County inside one of them. They were mainly built by kings centuries earlier, from what I could learn. Our tower is nearly as tall as part of Canterbury Cathedral, but Canterbury has maybe six or eight towers as tall as or taller than ours. Bishop George

Councell and I stood looking up at Canterbury Cathedral during the Lambeth meetings in July, and we remarked how that Cathedral's fifty-million-pound restoration goal would serve us nicely both as a church and as a diocese. We could “get by” on that sum of money—a hundred million dollars. I do note St. John's Church itself is valued at a bit over ten million dollars, and for a mere two to four million in an endowment we could serve here for at least fifty to sixty more years—of course finding that two to four million is the

“trick”, but we have real prospects now of doing that.

The cost of running the Canterbury Cathedral is over 3,000 pounds a day, over \$6,000 per day, if you can imagine that. And when I went to Bath, England, where there is another beautiful cathedral built in the twelfth century, its running costs were 1,500 pounds a day, three thousand dollars a day. So we at St. John's are running a very meager budget at about \$500 dollars a day, about average for an Episcopal Church according to Bishop Cuncell even

though we have the largest Episcopal buildings in the state of New Jersey. We are about a third or fourth the size of the Bath Cathedral, and we run our programs on a sixth of their budget, pretty good!

The church every where is under siege, it seems. Fewer people in the “First World” attend church, although when surveyed, nearly ninety percent of Americans say they pray at least once a day. Maybe those prayers are mostly, ‘Lord let me catch that bus, or train, or elevator’! I guess we have reduced God

to being the god of elevator buttons and train and bus schedules.

This week I felt I had to do something about the gaggle of Jehovah Witnesses who congregate on our sidewalk out there in front on Broad Street to give out their literature. I asked them to give out their bible, but they refused; only their Jehovah Witness booklets were available it seemed. I asked them why they could not see Jesus Christ when they read their Bible? The Jehovah Witness Bible has the New as well as the Old Testament in it. Maybe they shade some of the verses

about the crucifixion of Jesus, but dying for our sins is not a part of their theology. So, to me it seems they are witnessing to a quite different God than the one who loved us so much he died for us on the cross. What kind of religion would we have if the cross is robbed of its power? What was the purpose of Jesus' death on the cross if it were not to save us from our sins, to be the perfect sacrifice that substitutes for our shortcomings? How can someone preach a gospel that has no Jesus in it?

But the Jehovah Witnesses in front of St. John's do.

The internet encyclopedia, called Wikipedia, says about the Jehovah Witnesses, that “they believe that Jesus was not God in a human body, but rather that he was God's firstborn (created) Son created before all other creation.” In other words, they are the Arian church that the Christian church broke from at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.

One of the problems that Jehovah Witnesses face is the ridding oneself of sin after one dies. If Jesus Christ did not

take away our sins, then we can never appear before a holy God. And if Jesus Christ was not the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, then all will die in their sins, with no sins being forgiven in any ultimate sense. Thus, the heaven of the Jehovah Witness is an earthly creation, governed by an earthly Jesus, and populated by a few chosen ones, 144,000 to be exact, though that figure goes in and out of popularity when the numbers are counted up and there may be 6 million Jehovah Witnesses

worldwide, with over half a million in the United States.

But it seems to me that God is speaking to us as Christians here at 61 Broad Street, St. John's Church, that if we cannot preach a good and truthful Gospel, proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Savior of those who put their faith in him, then everyone walking up and down Broad Street out there will ultimately die of their sins because the only gospel they will hear there will be the false gospel of the Jehovah Witnesses. So, in a profoundly meaningful way, we are the

hope of the little world here in midtown Elizabeth, New Jersey. The fate of the world here in our little microcosm on Broad Street is in our hands, so to speak. Will we continue to witness to the saving power of Jesus Christ who was sacrificed for us on the cross, or will the Jehovah's Witnesses get their way and convince all around us that their only hope is in something that is unapproachable, a far away unreachable Jehovah, who has distanced himself from us in such a way that we will never be able to come close to him, we will never be able to praise

him in heaven, we will never be able to see again the faithful baptized who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and have gone before us.

Can we go our merry ways and leave 61 Broad Street in the hands of the Jehovah Witnesses? Can we agree with them that Jesus' death on a cross was not necessary for anything other than to make a journey from life to death, that his sacrifice has no effect on our ability to be seen as heirs with Jesus Christ in the eyes of his heavenly Father and, by adoption as brothers and sisters of Christ,

who makes his Father our heavenly Father.

A few years ago a Methodist international interdenominational meeting was held at Park Avenue Methodist Church in midtown Manhattan, and I attended it. One of the special events they hosted was a tour of some of the major worship sites in Manhattan, such as the Armenian cathedral on Second Avenue, the Cathedral of St. John the divine, and several other large churches, but also Central Synagogue on Lexington

Avenue. That Synagogue's roof caught fire a few years ago, and the synagogue was seriously fire and smoke damaged. But the insurance settlement was huge, and it was able to refurbish itself magnificently. There are possibly the most beautiful mosaics in all the world on its ceilings and walls now, beautiful blue and gold workings everywhere, and immaculate lines and columns covered with mosaics everywhere. It is gorgeous, and I was only able to get a tour of it through the good graces of the United Methodist Church. But the guide that led

my group through the synagogue told us a bit of lore about how the various threads of Judaism had formed. In about 1926, when there were only Reform Jews and Orthodox Jews, one group of Orthodox persons ate some shrimp at a dinner party and were ostracized by many other orthodox Jews, since shrimp is not a kosher orthodox food. So, the Conservative Jewish tradition was formed as a third thread of Judaism in the world, along with Reform and Orthodox. Did shrimp do it?

Sometimes Christian groups split over just such trivial matters. A running joke is that two churches decided never to speak to one another again because one used a plexiglas pulpit while the other used a wooden pulpit. In that situation, clear plastic was what divided the church.

Among the Episcopal Church there are those who insist on using incense at every service, but others who say incense causes them breathing problems or is a distraction. So those two groups ‘split’ apart, for worship services, and one calls

themselves “high”, while the other is called “low”. They all use the same Prayer Book, however, but they ‘punctuate’ the service differently by bows and Sanctus bells and incense, or the lack of bows and Sanctus bells and incense. That is why we cannot ever seem to be able to get together with St. Elizabeth’s Episcopal Church just five blocks up the street here, as they are “high” and we are “low”, or actually, “middle”, since we do celebrate the Holy Eucharist on every Sunday as our principal service; we do not opt for only

Morning and Evening Prayer as St. John's did for many years from about 1850 until about 1976 when it moved to two Eucharists per month instead of once a month. However, before 1850, I suspect St. John's had a loyal following of those who did receive Holy Communion here every Sunday, perhaps not at the "principal" service but at an earlier service, as we have a number of Roman Catholics buried here in our cemetery. There was no Roman Catholic Church in Elizabeth until St. Mary of the Assumption was constructed in 1855. So

our congregation has a broad history of serving ‘all comers’; Roman Catholics as well as Protestants worshipped here from 1706 until about 1855. And one of our city’s Roman churches is a small ‘spitting image’ of St. John’s. The Anglican Church is one denomination that is comfortable with both ends of the catholic spectrum, from the Capitalized Catholics to the ‘lower case’ catholics, the groups we now refer to as High Church and Low Church. St. John’s has a unique history of being the church in the middle that does not forswear or push

out the ‘ends’; all are welcome here, really, but we do take a stand for the fact that Jesus Christ is indeed God from God, true God from true God, begotten, not make, quite unlike what the Jehovah’s Witnesses try to convince people about on our doorstep and sidewalk. St. John’s is and never has been a place where “anything goes”. We do stand for interpreting the Bible to say that Jesus’ death on the cross did have a purpose, that Jesus did not die to leave us bereft for all eternity, except for some fictitious 144,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses.

We proclaim Jesus crucified, buried, raised on the third day, and ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of his Father and our Father.

We do not need to rewrite the Bible as the Jehovah's Witnesses have, as the words are quite understandable. Jesus is Lord; Jesus is not just some nice guy that God suddenly took a liking to. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, who did exist at the beginning, who was God's Word creating the world from nothing. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are all huge events in every gospel, and for

every writer of the New Testament. We do not have to create a mythical world as do the Jehovah's Witnesses in which Jesus will rule on earth for all eternity, not in heaven. But there is nothing in the 'original' Bible that in any way supports the claims of the Jehovah's Witnesses to the contrary. Yet just because we see the Jehovah's Witnesses lost in their sins just as much as any other unsaved sinner, we still love them and try to show them the true way to the Father who is in heaven. We do not want anyone to be led astray by false doctrines. We stake our

reputation and our lives here at St. John's on the truths of the Gospel. We do need to create a new gospel that leaves out the divinity of Christ, and his miraculous birth from a virgin, and his marvelous rising from the grave after three days. By Jesus death, our sins have received the necessary forgiveness that only a sinless person's sacrifice could have given. And by his rising to life, we too will rise with him and be ushered into the heavenly realms of Paradise, when on that day we will see him face to face, and

he will lift us to his Father who is in
heaven.

Amen.