

Lesson: Romans 13:8-14  
The Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
September 6, 2020

“Cooperating with Others”  
Sermon Preached by Lowell D. Nelson  
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Practical advice from Jesus - the Scriptures are full of advice, of instruction, of decrees. We use the term law and Gospel. Yes, the law convicts us, because we often and always fall short in the long run, but instructions on how to live is another way to say the word law, and we hear in the Gospel reading. We heard in the reading from Romans, from Kathy's words, this statement, "To love one another." I'm not hearing that very much these days. I'm getting to a point where I just chuckle about the political commercials, because they're back to back. It's almost like they should have a timeout. Okay, here's one person's view, now we'll take a time out, and now here's the other person's view. It's to me almost hilarious that you have the two people right next to each other. What, what are we supposed to do? Who is the person that is leading with the phrase, "I want to love you as Jesus loves me. I want to love you."? Now I understand that doesn't work so well politically as the current understanding is go negative. That seems to be effective, because many people have already made up their minds politically, and so there's a small group of people that are trying to be, dare I say, manipulated? Maybe I can say educated, whatever words that you want to use, and the rest of us are saying, "Why does it need to be so brutal?" It's brutal because this phrase "love one another" is the activating mission. That's the purpose of life is to love one another, and yet it gets drowned out by all the other demands of life. It's like something over to the side, but to me, brothers and sisters, it is the summary to love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. You love Jesus. You're tuning in to learn more about the love of Jesus. Jesus loves you. You hear this message, the confession, forgiveness of sins, the gift of the sacrament of holy communion, the gift of baptism, these gifts to help us along the journey of life, to know of God's presence in our life, but the words of Scripture are meant to be encouragement to us.

Psalms 119, that's the longest Psalm - I used to tease my confirmation kids, if you're going to memorize a Psalm - 117 - shortest one, 119 - ooh, don't try it, and it's an acrostic one using all the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and it uses that as the theme starting with their a and their b and their c and working the way through. It's a beautiful, beautiful Psalm, and it speaks about this longing for instruction or commandments, decrees, statutes, words. I'll just say this. The word of God to give us encouragement, to enliven us by your righteousness. Enliven me is the phrase, "by your goodness Lord help me to understand a path," and Paul dedicated his life in writing in the book of Romans to people he had not yet met. He's writing to people he had not yet met, but he wrote one of the greatest books of Scripture to describe the love of God. He says this, "Owe no one anything except to love one another. The one who loves another has fulfilled the law." I love that phrase "one another." The sermon today for this to cooperate with one another. If love is our ultimate mission and purpose, cooperation is the key. Love your neighbor as yourself by cooperation. I remember getting the report cards from preschool, the Gingerbread House back in Omaha, and on there was a line which was "plays well with others," and our kids were absolutely perfect except for a few times that they weren't playing well with others. We have to learn. We have to learn how to cooperate, how to play well with others, how to live well with others, and this idea of when is the moment to do it. Brothers and sisters right now is the time to live in cooperation with one another. We have a common mission, that is to love one another, so the way to do that is through the cooperation, and the Matthew 18 text is so vital for any congregation to understand. It's an escalation procedure which is if you have conflict, how do you handle conflict? So, let me tease

you just a little bit. It says this phrase, if another member of the church sins against you - oh brothers and sisters, that word should be when. When we live together, we are going to miss the mark, and that's what the word sin means here. In the Greek it means to miss the mark. It means to draw back and to fire that arrow but to miss the mark, and isn't that an interesting way to say it? If you ask somebody what were you trying to do, that's a little too accusative, but understanding that they're trying to live their life under this general mission of loving one another but they missed it, they blew it. The escalation procedure is as simple as anything in Scripture. Go and talk to that person. Often in church, often in life, we go to somebody else to talk about that person. A fancy word for that is triangulation, and you know it's been used, and it's one way to go through life, but we are members of a common understanding, members of the body of Christ. We are united in this mandate to love one another, and so we should, as people of faith, expect somebody to come to us and say, "Brother or sister, what you said, what you did, it hurt me, and I ask you just to stop that, and thanks for listening to me, and let's work together." Now maybe that's too simple. Maybe that's too idealistic, but the key is one to one, not two against one or three against one. This is great for family life. Husband and wife don't need to talk to the kids about their challenges. They talk to one another. Here in the congregation, if there's a challenge with another person, you talk with them, and the cooperation comes from as you would take the risk to speak to someone, expect that someone is going to take a risk to speak to you, because the mandate that we have is to love one another. The way that it works in Scripture, it talks about witnesses so that if your first time one to one doesn't work that you can bring others, but it's not you're bringing your three best friends and you're gonna gang up on the person, it's that there's witnesses to hear, there's witnesses to support, because it is not a court of law. It is to love one another and then it escalates that even if that doesn't work and it goes to this, a beautiful phrase in the Scripture, if the offender refuses to listen even to the greater church, let that one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. I don't know if you remember, Jesus loves Gentiles. Jesus loves tax collectors, so even the people we think are on the outs are the ones that Christ reaches out to, so it's loving one another. Truly I tell you what you bind, what we connect together or what we let loose, to forgive sin and to let things go, is an act of heavenly devotion, and this is an amazing thing if we could actually agree on something. It says it this way, "If two of you agree on earth about anything," In my Bible, I have a big smiley face. Wouldn't it be great if we just had two people agree on anything? Christ continues, "where two or three are gathered in my name," he starts expanding it two or three or four or two or three or a hundred. It's the expansion nature of the body of Christ, but it starts with one another.

The encouragement I have for you this week is to cooperate: co – together, operate is the love system known as the church. Jesus loves us. We love others. Open yourselves to the cooperation of the Holy Spirit during this pandemic time. If there is somebody that has felt isolated because of an action that you have done or left undone, now is the time the Scripture says, now is the moment for us to wake from our sleep, now is the time to take that step and to apologize and to bring that person back into good fellowship. It has been a brutal season of isolation. Wouldn't it be wonderful or if somebody comes to you and says I feel that you've left me neglected to be open to that encouragement and to ask for forgiveness and to start again? That's why today I had a tear in my eye as I proclaimed the words of forgiveness. I had a tear in my eye as I lifted up the elements of communion, because we are full of fresh starts because of the love of Jesus. We miss the mark. We draw back the bow, and we shoot that arrow, and we miss the mark consistently, but Jesus is the one who comes again and again and again and says, "fresh start." Aim true, aim to the heart of the other person with your love. This is beautiful, practical advice. We accomplish our mission to love one another by cooperating. I give thanks for all the fresh starts to allow us this privilege of being alive in this time in this place. Praise to you O Christ for bringing us through this time and moving us forward in mission together, loving one another and loving you with our whole heart. Praise be to God.