

Lost Sheep and Church Discipline

Matthew 18:10-22

Pastor Peter Hiett

October 3, 2004

Special Announcement Prior to the Sermon

Four and a half years ago I got a phone call from a man who invited me to come and spend the night with him on the streets of Denver. It was my sabbatical about that time, and I needed to do something, and I am always looking for sermon illustrations, and so I said, "Okay."

I went down to a place called Christ's Body Ministries and met Bruce McBogg. That's his picture. [A picture of Bruce was shown on the video screens at the front of the church.]

We spent the night under some bushes on Speer Blvd. In the morning I walked around with Bruce on the streets of Denver as he ministered to people on the street.

He was like a pastor to people living in dumpsters, living out of shopping carts, living in alleys. As I watched him I remembered thinking, "Oh, Lord, that's beautiful, that's You. What a picture."

After that we went and fed all sorts of people off of Colfax, out of a Best Buy. In the parking lot, Bruce preached a sermon.

I came back to church and thought, "Oh, I hope we can be a part of what He's doing."

Meanwhile, Bruce and his wife, Becky, became a part of our church. Over the years, Christ's Body Ministries became a partner ministry of Lookout Mountain Community Church. So many of you have been down to Christ's Body to help fix meals, and help do the worship services. Two members of our body, Steve Mercer and Sam Kimbriel, are on the Christ's Body board. Becky is part of our congregation.

Well, as some of you know, this last Tuesday, Bruce hung himself. We don't know the whole story. We know maybe a few factors here and there, but we don't know.

We don't know the whole story,
but we know the Plot.

We don't know all the reasons,
but we know the Reason.

So we really can't put our trust in our knowledge of good and evil.

We're going to have to put our trust
in Jesus —
the Plot, the Reason, the Word Himself.

The plot is Jesus, and He wins. He always wins. He still cries out, "Behold I make all things new." And so although we can't explain all the reasons, we can trust Him.

What Bruce did in that moment of despair doesn't negate the truth that he spoke and the truth that he lived because that truth is Jesus.

Already in Matthew 7, Jesus has said, "Judge not that you not be judged." The judgment you pronounce is the judgment you get. Well, we all pronounce judgment. In fact, on one level we're commanded to... it's called discernment.

Yet in Matthew 13 Jesus taught us that we're not to separate the wheat from the tares. We are to judge actions, but we have a very hard time judging hearts. And even if we could, He says, "Let" which equals "Let be until the harvest." "Aphiami," suffer, forgive until the harvest.

We can't really know. Yet it's been a temptation of the church for a long time to know everything, so we can control everyone and not have to trust anyone to save us.

We use our psychologies and theologies to cut each other down to size, our knowledge of good and evil, and we call that church discipline, but church discipline is more than just law.

Satan will try to use this for his purposes, but Jesus redeems all things for *His* purposes, and He chooses to use us for His purposes. So right now, we're going to pray for Christ's Body Ministries, and for us, and for Becky, and for Bruce. So would you join with me and do that?

Lord, God, in the name of Jesus we rebuke the evil one, and we command him to get his hands off of Christ's Body Ministries, and off of us, and off of your people. Lord, God, we know that You have called us to go to battle against him, and we go to battle, Lord, with the Gospel, with the Truth, with Jesus, the Christ, the Word of Truth, spoken in love from the Father. And now, Lord, God, we pray for Christ's Body Ministries, that You would guide them and direct them. Show Yourself as a pastor, because that's what You are, Lord Jesus. You are the Good Shepherd, to all of those who have been pastored by Bruce in the past. May they look past this moment of failure in Bruce because, Lord, God, it was a sin (I think You're pretty clear about that). But may they look past that to You, Lord Jesus, and may You minister to them in their places of fear, and doubt, and shame.

*And Lord, speaking of their fear, and doubt, and shame, we pray for all of those that were close to Bruce, that You would comfort them and You would guide them through this time of mourning and remind them that **You** are the one that numbered Bruce's days, and You recorded everyone of them in Your book.*

Lord, we pray for Becky as she struggles with Bruce's death and feeling abandoned and betrayed by Bruce and yet missing Bruce and so grateful for Bruce and the incredible gift that he was to all of us. Lord, would You show Yourself as the great Bridegroom to her? And, Lord, for Bruce's children, his two grown children, would You show Yourself as the Father that you are?

And so, Lord, we pray for Christ's Body Ministries, and we pray for us, for we are all Christ's body, that You would help us, Lord Jesus, to do what You desire for this ministry in downtown Denver and for the homeless in our city and all over the world. Lord, would You guide us as a church to know if we are to give more, change structure? Lord, help us to do Your will for Christ's Body and downtown Denver. Amen.

Sermon

If you are still reeling from the announcement of Bruce's suicide, forgive this illustration, but I think it will be helpful.

[Movie clip from Monte Python's Holy Grail:

Two women are looking at pictures. One picture is of the Spanish Inquisition. The older woman explains, "And this is the Spanish Inquisition hiding behind the coal shed." The younger woman responds, "Oh, I didn't expect the Spanish Inquisition."

Three men dressed as Spanish Inquisitors burst into the room and exclaim, "Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition." The three inquisitors take the older woman into their custody, chain her to the wall and demand that she confess to heresy. She exclaims that she does not understand what she is accused of. They respond by saying that if that's the way she wants it, they will make her understand.

They proceed to "torture" her by poking her with the soft cushions while shouting, "Confess, confess, confess.]"

So the Inquisitors command, "Confess, confess," but she doesn't know what to confess. So they torture her with the soft cushions, and then she must sit in the comfy chair until noon — kind of like church on Sunday. Of course in the Middle Ages, they tortured with far more than soft cushions. Their swords were cold, hard steel.

The Inquisition was formally established by the church in the 13th century. It was a special court that was supposed to have the peculiar power to judge intentions as well as actions.

In Spain, thousands were burned at the stake; hundreds of thousands were tortured and exiled. If you were to ask the Inquisitors what they were doing, I imagine they would tell you they were cutting off the unholy member and practicing church discipline as described in Matthew 18.

You know suicide is murder, and murder is a heinous sin. May none of you ever commit it. We need church discipline that none of you will. Church discipline.

In the skit, they keep bursting into peoples private lives and yelling, "No one expects the Spanish Inquisition." Of course in reality, we all do. That's why we hide so much, act religious so much, and speak in platitudes so much.

Deep down inside we all know that we've sinned and that there is judgment, and justice demands satisfaction. Some people will even seek that satisfaction themselves and before their time.

Well, the Inquisitors got this much right, for unrepented heresy and sin, someone had to die.

Matthew chapter 18:

See that you do not despise one of these little ones;

Remember, the disciples had been competing over who was the greatest in the kingdom, and Jesus picked up a "Mikros"—a little one, a least one.

See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.

Jesus is saying there are high level, warring angels assigned to the "least of these." They watch the face of the Father as He gazes upon His "little ones" in absolute love. So you'd be an absolute fool to despise them.

Next verse:

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray...

A farmer once explained that cows don't intend to get lost or go astray, they just nibble their way to lostness.

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.

Several years ago on a summer night in 1992, I stood chatting with friends at a backyard dinner party in California. At one point I turned around and saw something in the bottom of the pool. My heart seemed to stop in my chest, for all at once I knew what it was. It was my two year old daughter, Elizabeth, flailing her arms helplessly on the bottom of the deep end.

No one had seen her.
No one could hear her.
She was at the party
but totally cut off, alone, and dying.

She had done what we told her not to do — go near the pool. She didn't mean to drown, but she nibbled her way to lostness.

Needless to say, in an instant I was at the bottom of the pool, fully clothed, seeking my lost little one. Then I was out of the pool, holding her in my arms, thanking God for every breath she drew. And yet Elizabeth was disciplined... disciplined by the pain on my face even as I rejoiced over her in my arms.

Had you seen the pain and joy on my face, you would know to never despise her. I think you'd dive in after her, too.

In 1928 in Massachusetts, a man fell from a boat dock into the bay. A sunbather, who was also an excellent swimmer, just watched him drown. When the family of the drowned man sued the sunbather for not diving in, the court had to reluctantly rule that the man on the shore had no legal responsibility whatsoever. Maybe so, but he obviously hadn't seen the face of the Father.

The Shepherd rejoices over the one lost sheep more than all the others. Holding my daughter on the side of the pool was just about the best party I've ever been to.

Rich Van Pelt told me about his friend, Bill Crawford. Bill was at a backyard dinner party when a little girl tapped him on the leg and said, "Mister, will you hold me?" He kept talking. She asked a few times, and Bill said, "Just a minute, honey, and I'll hold you." She wondered off. Bill watched her out of the corner of his eye as she asked others. Then he forgot about her... until he heard screaming. Someone had found her, dead. She'd fallen in the pool.

No one even knew who she was. The next day, Bill went back and put together the pieces. The little girl was the daughter of a divorcee in the neighborhood. The divorcee was recently engaged to a man who said he'd only marry her if there were no "little ones," no

children. So two weeks earlier the mother had taken the little girl around the neighborhood asking people to take her daughter.

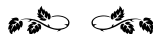
At one house the little girl wandered around back and fell in the pool. The adults came and rescued her. They held her and rejoiced over her. Bill doesn't know, but he believes she fell in the pool at the party he attended just to get hugs. Lost, just to be found.

Well, I don't want anyone here to feel condemned by that story. She had gotten some hugs, but they didn't satisfy. Bill's hug wouldn't have satisfied. She wanted her mother's hug and her father's hug. Yet in the end, not even that would satisfy and fill her to full. We all want more, and we put people through great pain trying to get it.

So what the little girl did was wrong,
but don't despise her.

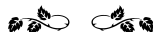
What the little girl did was wrong,
like sin is wrong.

Maybe sin is
like trying to get hugs in the wrong way,
like looking for love in the wrong places.



If you can't believe your Father's love,
or perhaps *won't* believe your Father's love...

Well, you might just fall into the pool
no matter how many people hugged you.



You know, Bruce had a whole lot of people that hugged him, a lot of people that loved him really well (I'm convinced of that). But maybe, for just a few moments last week, he doubted his Father's love.

Maybe anytime we sin, we doubt our Father's love. That is, we don't believe the gospel; we turn from His face. "We have seen the glory of God shining in the face of Christ." Such pain and joy over us... "sorrow and love flow mingled down."

Verse 10:

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones..."

even if, maybe especially if, you, yourself, are the little one for "what you do unto the least of these you do unto Christ."

Verse 14:

So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

Paul writes in Ephesians that “God accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will.” And Jesus says,

So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

Do you understand? We always divide the passages, I think, at just the wrong place, just at where they don’t, at first, make sense to us. I think Jesus is saying that church discipline is finding the “lost little ones.” And when we begin to see that, it changes everything.

I’m convinced we don’t practice Biblical church discipline because we don’t see the face of our Father in heaven.

And if you say, “No one can see the face of God and live,” let me put it this way, we don’t see Jesus. We don’t see “the glory of God shining through the face of Christ.”

So we don’t take sin very seriously.
And we don’t take sinners very seriously.

As the church, we’re tempted:

To speak truth without love,
which isn’t really truth,
Or we’re tempted to love without truth, which isn’t really love.

Truth and love are one substance,
and we’ve been commanded to drink it.

As the church, we’re tempted:

To the inquisition where,
“in the name of truth,” we slay the very people we were sent to save,
Or we’re tempted to do nothing where,
“in the name of love,” we watch people drown and don’t confront them.

We just make them sit on comfy cushions until noon but don't tell them what to confess for fear we may offend.

Either way, church discipline is a joke, a tragic joke. For either way — inquisition or soft pillows — the little ones stay lost. They remain at the bottom of the pool drowning in sin.

We are to take sin seriously because we take sinners seriously. We are to hate sin because of the Father's love for the sinners.

To sin is to believe a lie at the depth of your being. The lie is that God is not Truth. And God is not Love. So God is not good. Therefore, He can't be fully trusted, so you'd better trust yourself.

If we fully trusted God, we'd fully obey God, but instead, we've believed lies.

In Revelation 12 the dragon tries to drown the church in a river from his mouth. The river is lies. Lies like he spoke in the garden so long ago. He's the Father of Lies, the Prince of Darkness.

God is light, and Jesus is the light of the world. Scripture tells us, "God is Love," and "Jesus is the Truth." Jesus is God come to us. That means the Truth is Love come to us.

Jesus is the Word of God.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Love connects things in truth making life.

Apart from truth, we lose "the Way" and get lost.

Apart from truth we are alone,
even surrounded by the party,
we remain isolated,
drowning in lies — lost.

So Jesus says, "Go... go to them with the truth." "The truth shall make you free," even though, at first, the truth is unwelcomed and perceived as another lie. Sadly, much of what we call "the truth" is a lie. The truth is Love come to us. So if you don't love, you can't speak the truth, and, in reality, you are being used by the Father of Lies, just like the Pharisees, the legalists.

You know, if you live by the law, you don't take sin very seriously. In fact, you see it as a way to compete.

Remember, the disciples had just been competing over greatness in the kingdom. In competing, good deeds are a way to score points, and bad deeds (sins) are a way to lose points. When you compete, you have a vested interest in other people's failure. You secretly hate the sinner because you love it when they sin; you think it's to your advantage. But you're just digging your own grave, for "the measure you give is the measure you get," and the "judgment you pronounce is the judgment you receive." The judgment we are to pronounce is Jesus.

If you believe you are saved and sanctified by grace in Christ and grafted into His body, then you have no vested interest in another's sin, but only in their health.

Our translation records Jesus saying, "If your brother sins against you." The oldest manuscripts just record Jesus saying, "If your brother sins."

Both are the same, for all sin is “against you” for there is only one body and in Christ, you are part of that body. So a brother who sins is a member of your body. Their sin is a disease that afflicts the whole body.

There is only one sword that can cut out the sin and save the sinner. The sword is Love, come to us as Truth. God, come to us as Jesus — the Word. We need to live close enough to each other to believe that we’re one body. So we believe truth, spoken in love.

Jesus said, “If your ‘brother’ sins...” He’s talking about groups of two or three. Most churches in that day were house churches.

I think the best church discipline happens in small groups in homes, small groups of honest community where we don’t act religious, and don’t speak in platitudes, and don’t hide our sin, and don’t live a lie. But we do share our crap because we’ve come to believe we are each “little ones” that are “lost,” and we’ve come to believe we’re a body so what hurts one, hurts all.

So when someone comes with truth that hurts us, we see it also hurts them, and so we believe it’s not a lie. It’s truth spoken in love. It’s truth hanging on a cross... truth bleeding for us... truth broken for us. So we begin to believe truth because it’s love, and we begin to believe love because it’s true. It’s Jesus, and we are to speak Jesus.

He’s the judgment we are to give.

He’s the Word we are to speak.

He’s the sword we are to swing.

But what if the brother still won’t listen to you or to the group? Next verse:

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

In I Corinthians and II Thessalonians, Paul talks about shunning those that persist in sin, but that assumes they’re still part of the church. This is a step beyond that. To the Jew, Gentiles and tax collectors were outside the Ecclesia (the covenant community).

Jesus says, “Let them be to you as pagans and tax collectors.” We assume that means despising them.

How was Jesus towards pagans and tax collectors?

Who’s writing this? Matthew, the tax collector. Remember the last pagan Jesus encountered in Matthew? The Canaanite, Syro-Phoenician woman whose daughter had a demon.

Jesus said He was only sent to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Yet He went to her and did just what she asked, and He revealed that she was a lost sheep of the House of Israel.

Luke 19: He came “to seek and to save the lost.”

How does Jesus treat pagans and tax collectors?

Does He despise them? No! Does He go and speak truth to them? Yes! Jesus speaks the sharpest truth, the most rigorous ethic in all religions. He speaks truth, “Be perfect.” He speaks truth to them, and then He dies for them. That’s how He treats them.

The Inquisitors were right: Unrepentant sin and heresy merits death. And so “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” That is love, and so that fulfills the whole law, and that is our judgment as well as our salvation — Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

So then, this cross and this table are the depths of church discipline. They reveal the truth about us in love. And we're not only called to speak it, we're called to be it — the body of Christ, broken in love.

In other words, when sinners won't listen to the truth:

We are to go in the name of Jesus to seek and save the lost.

We are to go to sinners and let them crucify us.

In other words, we are to forgive.

And when we as a church forgive, we are connected to powers beyond our wildest imagination.

Next verse:

"Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven."

That's like perfectly times completely.

In the middle ages, the Roman Catholic Church claimed that Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom solely to Peter, and, therefore, to the Pope. They used that as a weapon of power in the Inquisition.

But right here (just after Jesus gave them to Peter in chapter 16, using the same language of binding and loosing), Jesus gives them to any two or three gathered in His name. Jesus gives them to the church, and He gives them to your small group.

Loosing is at least forgiving. And "loosing on earth" is connected to loosing in heaven, which at least means that when someone confesses sin in Jesus' name, we have the incredible privilege of pronouncing in the name of Jesus, "Your sins are forgiven you."

Holding my two year old daughter on the edge of the pool, having pulled her from the deep, was just about the greatest party I've ever been to. Holding a friend in my arms as she wept for joy, because I had just pronounced, "In the name of Jesus and under the authority of the blood, you are forgiven," and watching demons flee from her in terror... Well, that's a pretty great party, too.

That's church discipline.

"Loosing" at least means forgiving, and we can speak on behalf of heaven when people confess their sins and call on Christ. It means at least that and maybe more. I don't exactly know.

But if "loosing" is forgiving and "binding" is not forgiving, we do know what to do with persons who've sinned if there's any chance they might be just lost at present in sin (like a pagan witch or crooked tax collector). Well, at least on our part, we better forgive, forgive, forgive. Because they have a Father in heaven who desires that none of them should perish, and so we'd

better not despise them. Don't be a fool, for warring angels look on His face as He gazes upon them with absolute love.

When we forgive,
we "loose" others, and we "loose" ourselves.

Leviticus 19 tells us to rebuke a brother frankly so that we don't share in His guilt. If he's drowning, you must dive in or share in his guilt. If he's sinning and lost in lies, you must speak truth. When you forgive a person, you confront them with the truth about sin. You pronounce judgment, but the judgment is Christ — the Word of God, Truth spoken by Love, the Fire and the Sword. And you loose them as you loose yourself.

There is no greater church discipline.

Yet what if they still choose bondage? I mean, what if they still won't believe and keep on sinning? Or what if they're dead, like Bruce?

Well, we forgive and entrust their soul to a faithful Creator. And the very last thing we ever do is despise one of the Father's little ones.

Tuesday night I went to Bruce's house. The coroner had just taken Bruce's body. Becky, Bruce's wife, was being comforted by friends. (I think Becky is a real saint and so did Bruce.). Well, at one point, Sam Kimbriel took me around the corner into the front hall and showed me the stairwell and the railing. He said, "This is where Bruce must've hung himself earlier today."

Thursday night I was thumbing through Bruce's autobiography that some of you have read, The Road to Nowhere Is a Two-Way Street. I was glancing at parts I had marked or underlined in the past.

For some reason, on p. 127 I had marked these two sentences. When I read them my heart seemed to stop in my chest. These are Bruce's words, "As I rounded the corner, my heart seemed to stop in my chest. Duncan was hanging from a rope next to the stairwell... by his neck." Duncan is Bruce's son, his little one. He was seven at the time. He'd been playing with a rope he'd tied to the railing and in the process, accidentally hung himself.

Bruce described how he'd found Duncan, saved Duncan, and held Duncan as he prayed for the first time in two years, "Oh, God, please!" and Duncan began to breathe.

I don't know what Bruce was thinking when he hung himself from the stairwell last Tuesday. Maybe subconsciously he was remembering joy at hugging Duncan and longing to be held by His Father in heaven.

Well, if so, he went about things the wrong way. And no matter what he prayed as he hung there, dying, what he did was horribly wrong!!! It was a heinous sin.

I don't know what he was thinking, but I do know this, his Father in heaven did not despise him. God is at least as good a father to Bruce as Bruce was to Duncan for I believe Bruce was one of God's little ones.

It's not for me to separate the wheat from the tares, but I heard Bruce confess Christ. I watched him tear up over the gospel. I witnessed Bruce love the last and the least of these with such tender compassion I thought, "I want to be like this man." "Love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God." (1 John 4:7) I believe Bruce is God's little one. So when Bruce got lost, God came for him.

God came for him 2000 years ago and hung for him on a cross outside Jerusalem. And so God hung with him last Tuesday on the stairwell in Denver — God with Bruce, Jesus in Bruce, God the Son in Bruce dying with Bruce. And God the Father raised His little one, Jesus, and with Him, Bruce.

Well, that's what I believe, hope, strongly support. For love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things, and my God is love.

But now if you've been tempted like Bruce, and I know some of you have, you might think, "Shall I sin that grace may abound? Shall I get lost just so I can be found? Why not kill myself?" Listen closely, please, please, please, don't! Because it hurts. It hurts me, it hurts everybody in this room, it hurts the church, it hurts the body of Christ. So more than the fear of punishment, let the love of Christ constrain you, let the love of Christ be your discipline.

For don't you see, when Bruce hung himself, he hung Jesus. Jesus said He would never leave us or forsake us. I saw Bruce come to this table. I believe I saw Bruce ingest Christ at this table, and so He was in Bruce. Whatever you do to the least of these, His brethren, you do to Jesus, even if the least of these is yourself.

So when Bruce hung himself, he hung Jesus. And now, let's just be terribly honest, anytime we sin, we hang him, too. The penalty for sin is death, and He chooses to bear it for you. Seeing that is the best church discipline I know, Jesus Christ and Him crucified. No sword cuts deeper.

And so right now, let's swing the sword in prayer:

Lord, God, in the name of Jesus, under the authority of His blood, we forgive Bruce McBogg. And in the name of Jesus, and under the authority of His blood, Lord, God, we forgive each other. Lord, there are people that feel shame over Bruce's death. Lord, we have no way of knowing, but you know. We swing the sword anyway. And we say, "In the name of the Jesus, you're forgiven, we release you." Now get up, Church, and walk, and run, and grab the sword, and enter back into the fight. Because the lies of the evil one, those are the things that you battle against and those are the things that keep you out of the battle. And so Lord, in the name of Jesus, we forgive.

And Lord, we thank you for the incredible gift that was Bruce because, Lord, the true Bruce, the real Bruce, is You in Bruce, You living out your life in Bruce, ministering to people behind dumpsters, and living in alleys, and feeding them food, and preaching them the Word, the true Word. And so we thank You for Bruce, and we call upon You to guard Your Word spoken through Bruce.

Guard over the hearts, Lord, of those that called Bruce their pastor. Guard over Christ's Body Ministries, and guard over us, Lord Jesus, that we might walk in You, live in You, speak in You, for we are Your body.

And so on the night that Jesus was betrayed, He took bread and broke it, saying, "This is my body, given to you. Do this in remembrance of me." And in the same way after supper, having given thanks, He took the cup, and He said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins, drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me."

And so, if you want Him, we invite you to come forward, tear off a piece of the bread — the Way, the Truth, and the Life, broken for the love of you — and dip it in the cup. The black

cups are wine, the purple cups are juice, but they're both Truth in Love. They're both fire. And ingest them. And when you do that, you are making a public profession,

Jesus, You are my Lord. I want you to be my Lord. I want you to live Your life in me. And I'm calling upon You to save me, because, oh, Jesus, I need a savior! Because I, on my own, do not love like You.

And so come to the table, and believe the gospel in Jesus' name. Amen.

[The congregation then sings...]

Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy

Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, love, and power.

Refrain:

*I will arise and go to Jesus,
He will embrace me in His arms;
In the arms of my dear Savior,
O, there are ten thousand charms.*

Come, ye thirsty, come, and welcome,
God's free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings you nigh.

Refrain:

*I will arise and go to Jesus,
He will embrace me in His arms;
In the arms of my dear Savior,
O, there are ten thousand charms.*

Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Lost and ruined by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
You may never come at all.

Refrain:

*I will arise and go to Jesus,
He will embrace me in His arms;
In the arms of my dear Savior,
O, there are ten thousand charms.*

Text: Joseph Hart; Refrain: unknown
Music: Traditional American Melody,
Walker's Southern Harmony, 1835.

His Banner Over Me

He brought me to His banqueting table (echo)
 He brought me to His banqueting table (echo)
 And His banner over me is love.

I am my beloved's and He is mine (echo)
 Yes, I am my beloved's and He is mine (echo)
 And His banner over me is love.
 Yes, His banner over me is love.

Chorus:
We can feel the love
Of God in this place.
We believe Your goodness
We receive Your grace
We delight ourselves
At Your table, oh God,
You do all things well,
Just look at our lives.

Words and Music by Kevin Prosch
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We don't see our lives very well right now. But one day, I believe that we will be with the Father, and He will unwrap our lives for us. And we'll say,

Oh, my God, you were with me every step of the way. You wept every tear I wept, you felt every wound that I bore. You laughed at every joke I laughed at (maybe not all, but most). You were with me in all those things.

And I think, maybe, Bruce will turn to you and say,

Oh yeah, just look at my life. I thought I came to Him, but He came to me. And He was with me when I failed. And He was with me in prison. And He was with me on the streets of Denver. And He did not leave me when I left Him and did my own thing. And He was with me at Christ's Body Ministries. And, oh, look at that, He was with me as I hung on the stairwell! He does all things so well.

And He throws a great party.

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if He finds it, truly I say to you, He rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.

In Luke, Jesus tells that story, and, by the way, I think we've all gone astray, so you don't need to go astray. But in Luke He tells that story in parallel with the story of the woman who finds the coin and then calls everybody together, and they have a party.

And then, He tells the story of the Father who lost His son. And His son comes back to Him with a dirty heart. He's still dirty out on the road. And the Father runs to him, and He gives Him the ring, and the robe, and the shoes. And He calls to His servant, and He says, "Kill the fatted calf, for this, my son that was lost, is found!" And He throws a party.

And, you see, I think this is the thing that is so hard for us to believe, but our Father in heaven, our God, it's not like He does anything halfway. And so He spares no expense for the love of you. May you *believe* that because if you believe that, you will live like that. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A lot of people are tempted to suicide. And if you've listened to voices, and the voices have said things like this, "You need to kill yourself," and especially, if you've spoken out loud, "I hate myself, I want to die," right now, you need to confess it, and surrender it to God. And you can use one of the prayer team ministry people to confess it to, you can confess it to someone else in here, but right now let's pray over it.

In the name of Jesus, under the authority of His blood, if that was you, just speak that to God right now, in the silence of your heart (you need to tell somebody else somewhere along the line, too). And now in the name of Jesus, under the authority of His blood, you are forgiven.

And Satan, every dark force of evil, you leave these people alone for they are covered with the blood of Jesus, and He delights in them. Amen.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.

Matthew 18:10-13

One morning I came across an old story told by a farmer which explains how cows end up on the road lost: A cow is nibbling on a tuft of grass in the middle of a field, moving from one tuft to the next, and before you know it he ends up at some grass next to the fence. Noticing a nice clump of green on the other side of the fence, the cow stumbles through an old tear in the fence and finds himself outside on the road. "Cows don't intend to get lost," the farmer explained, "they just nibble their way to lostness!"

Michael Yaconelli

So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

Matthew 18:14-16

Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

Leviticus 19:17-18

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:1-2

If any one refuses to obey what we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15

For a detailed study on church discipline, spend some time chewing on 1 Corinthians 5:1-6:11, and don't forget 2 *Corinthians 2:5-11*.

For a valuable resource on reconciliation between Christians outside of the secular judicial system, visit: www.HisPeace.org

In the world it is called Tolerance, but in hell it is called Despair . . . the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die.

Dorothy Sayers

Truth is a constant delight to them that love her; such beauty holds no power to offend.

Steven Lawhead

I am the way, and the truth, and the life...

John 14:6

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:5-9

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Matthew 18:17

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. And as he sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples.

Matthew 9:9-10

Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."

Matthew 21:31b

And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel..." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Matthew 15:21-24,28

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it?"

Luke 15:1-4

For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

Luke 19:10

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about

anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Matthew 18:18-20

And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

John 20:22-23

Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.”

Matthew 18:21-22

In this question of truthfulness, what matters first and last is that a man's whole condition should be exposed, his whole evil laid bare in the sight of God. But sinful men do not like this sort of truthfulness, and they resist it with all their might. That is why they persecute it and crucify it. It is only because we follow Jesus that we can be genuinely truthful, for then He reveals to us our sin upon the cross. The cross is God's truth about us, and therefore it is the only power which can make us truthful. When we know the cross we are no longer afraid of the truth. We need no more oaths to confirm the truth of our utterances, for we live in the absolute truth of God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship