

MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

September 24, 2023

Pastor James Enderle

17th Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [Genesis 50:15-21](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 103 CW

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Ephesians 4:29-5:2](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 18:21-35](#)

The Church Forgives as God Forgives Walk in the Way of Love

1. Don't march with the _____
2. Run from _____
3. Dwell in Christ's _____ and _____
4. Stand out in your _____ and _____

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

Maybe you can think of a time when you were younger, in grade school, or probably more likely in high school, and you ended up doing something not so smart, and your parents asked you "Why would you do that?" You answer, "Well, my friends were all doing it. I couldn't do something different than they were doing. It was just the thing that everyone was doing. I couldn't stand out." That's something we'd always say. Then as this picture shows, probably the next thing they might say is "If all your friends walked off a cliff, would you do the same thing?" You've heard that one before, right?



We tend to follow the crowd, especially when we are younger, so we fit in with our friends. We don't want to stand out. But that really isn't something we grow out of. We tend to want to fit in with the crowd and not really stand out.

As God talks to us today, He wants us to **walk in the way of love**. I think what we are going to see is that means we are going to stand out in different ways. It's not easy. We especially want to see how this relates when we've been wronged—when someone hurts us and we want to get back at them. It's so easy to follow along with what everyone else does.

In Ephesians, Paul is writing to a church and in these chapters he is explaining a lot of what it's like to be a Christian—Christian living. He talks about families and marriage and children and parents. Here he is talking about how we are to be with one another. He says this: ***Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*** When you read “unwholesome talk” and you look at our world today in TV and movies, what I would say is “unwholesome talk” is part of being in the crowd. Most TV shows you throw on YouTube; there are not a lot of clean shows anymore. It's the words that come out. So here God is encouraging us, *don't march with the crowd*. Just like we say don't march off the cliff just because everyone else is doing it. Don't do what everyone else is doing. Don't be filled with unwholesome talk, but seek to build each other up. Don't tear others down, but seek what is beneficial for others.

As we go on with what we read, I think especially we see where this is important. He says: ***Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*** That unwholesome talk, bitterness, anger and rage, where do those come from? It comes when we're angry because someone has hurt us. When we want to see them get justice and see their name come down and have others know what they did to us. Or for others who think that person is a good person, “Well, they did this to me!” Or if they didn't do it to me, “They did this horrible thing to someone else.” So we have this unwholesome talk, this bitterness, anger and rage when we feel wronged.

So what is God telling us? He tells us to flee from it, to *run from retaliation*, to run from the idea that “I have to be the one to get back at someone.” But that's just what we do. It's what the crowd does, what everyone says, “If you just let them get away with it, that's not right! You should get back at them!” But we know that's not what God wants us to do. That's not what it means to live as a Christian and to live as what it says here, to live in God's love and forgiveness.

God wants us to *dwell in Christ's love and forgiveness*. He says this: ***Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*** God wants us to know of that kindness and love that God has given to you so we can live in that and know that “I don't deserve anything from God. God sent Jesus to die for me because I have fallen short. Jesus needed to come and live on this earth to be our perfect substitute and even though that person has hurt me, I'm no better than they are.” We all fall short. But Christ came to be perfect for you. He was mocked. He was beaten. People hated them. They made fun of His teachings even though He was showing love and compassion. Then finally, when

He was crucified, what did He do on the cross? He looked down on those who were nailing Him to the cross and mocking Him and hurling insults, saying "You can save others, if you're the Christ, save yourself!" They mocked Him. What does He do? He says, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." ([Luke 23:26-43](#)) Christ loved them and loves you so much. It says: **While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** ([Romans 5:8](#)) We were separated from God because of our sins, but He came and died for you. He had you in mind as He was there, dying for you.

If you think about being betrayed, friends turning their back on you, God had that happen. Jesus had that happen to Him as His friends betrayed Him. Judas gave Him over to the authorities to be arrested and killed. Yet Christ forgives and shows that love. How important it is for us to see and to live and dwell in that love and forgiveness.

So what does that do for us when we are in that love and forgiveness? I think it causes us to look a little bit different. In the First Lesson with Joseph, the brothers were not expecting him to do what he did. The natural thing was for him to still hold a grudge. They sold him into slavery! But he did something radically different. Jesus was radically different. He did miracles. He showed that love of Christ, and He said He wants us to live different as well.

I have a little clip about two minutes long. You might recognize this. It's one of the more famous sketches from history. As we talk about walking as a Christian, I want to show this sketch to show you a little bit of what it might look like for us to walk as a Christian in this world. (You can see the video here: [Ministry of Silly Walks - YouTube](#). If you can't watch the video, the picture here portrays some of the silly walks.)



The sketch is a little silly but, when God asks us to walk as a Christian, what is it going to look like to the rest of the world? When He says to be kind and compassionate, forgiving each other as Christ has forgiven us; I think He is saying you are going to *stand out in your love and forgiveness.*

The man with the silly walk, he stood out. The sign there said "The Ministry of Silly Walks," like there were other people that had silly walks like him. The truth is that as Christians, some of the things that we do should look silly to the rest of the world.

For Joseph, his forgiveness to his brothers, they couldn't understand it. They had to make up a lie to say "Your father gave us these instructions to say we know you forgave us, but make sure you forgive us again." He weeps and says "Of course I'll forgive you." God had a good plan. Then he even says this, this crazy thing, "I'll take care of you and your children." So we are to forgive because God has forgiven all of our sins.

If God has forgiven my debt, who am I to withhold that forgiveness from someone else? The truth is, when a Christian forgives, it's not that we forgive and forget. It's not saying "I don't remember at all what you did," because in Christian forgiveness, I can forgive someone but if someone has hurt me, I don't have to have the same relationship with them that I had before. If they have shown themselves to not be trustworthy, I don't have to trust them in the same way that I did before. And if someone has really, really hurt me, I can forgive them but I don't have to have much of a relationship with them anymore. But I can forgive them and not hold that anger, that malice in my heart. I can say "God forgives you and I forgive you." But if they are not repentant, what is their relationship with God? I don't know but that's not up to me.

In the clip, did you see the second guy who was in the room? He started trying to do a silly walk and it wasn't very silly. I think that's what it's like for Christians when we refuse to forgive others. When we hold grudges against others, we're not standing out from the rest of the world. It's like we are trying to walk like a Christian, but we begin to blend in with the rest of the world. The rest of the world says "Hold on to that anger. They don't deserve that love and forgiveness! They haven't shown that they are sorry. They haven't even asked for forgiveness!" But for Christians, Christ has forgiven us all our sins. Even if someone has not come and said "I'm sorry for what I did," we, as Christians, can say in our hearts "I forgive you." We can pray for an opportunity that we can have reconciliation that maybe they do see their sin and I can speak those words of forgiveness. Even if someone doesn't say they are sorry, I can still say "I forgive you; not because of how good I am but because of what Christ has done for me. Just like the king and the servant, He forgave my debt that I could never repay."

As Peter talks about forgiving seven times and Jesus says seventy-seven or seven times seventy, that's how many times we sin against God every day and yet God forgives us. So we get this opportunity to stand out, to do things that to the rest of the world, honestly, looks pretty silly. But in knowing Christ and His love for us, we know it's the right thing and the good thing and knowing Christ has forgiven us, the thing that we GET to do. Forgiveness is not a must or a have to, it's a joy. Because Christ has forgiven me, I can share that joy with others. We can pray that they, too, can know that they can live in that forgiveness day in and day out no matter what they have done, that God loves them, that Christ came for them and has forgiven them. So we forgive just as Christ forgave so that all may see that Christ gave himself up for them. What a joy it is to walk in the way of love and to share that forgiveness. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.