

Text: 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. **September 11, 2016.**

Forgiveness and comfort are yours through Jesus. Amen.

Comfort. Such a wonderful word. Just say it in any context and it brings wonderful images to mind. Comfort food, the warm, steaming meatloaf mom used to make. A comfortable chair with a glass of wine at the end of a long day. Got your feet up, too. Comfy clothes. But as you look at each one of these pictures, that comfort is really best after something difficult, right? The comfort food is best when it's cold, or you are really hungry. The comfy chair feels best after a long day. Wear comfy clothes before bed, that's ok. Wear sweat pants all day, not so good.

What about after sin? That smart remark you regret but can't take back. Wouldn't it be nice to have mom not just say, "It's ok," but rather to say, "I forgive you. I've left it on Jesus." That's comfort! That burst of anger that showed who you really are. When you apologize, which is more comforting, "No worries," or, "God remembers that sin no more"? The best comfort, after the worst troubles, comes from God and his forgiveness. The best part is that God loves to forgive and God loves to comfort. God loves to comfort with forgiveness. God comforts sinners with forgiveness. God comforts sinners with forgiveness.

Maybe in the situations described above, it would be relatively easy to forgive. But the situation for the Christian Church in Corinth was a little more.... Well, let me just tell you. 1 Corinthians chapter 5 lays out the situation. A man was sleeping with his father's wife. That's right. The Bible tells us exactly that! And how did the Christians in Corinth respond? They were proud! Proud of their tolerance, proud of how permissive they were, proud of how they could be Christians and still be just like everybody else. While the sin was going on, they pretended the sin was small. Everyone was doing it. They were supposed to be loving. But it's never loving to ignore sin. It's certainly never loving to be proud of sin.

So God's spokesman, a man named Paul, the one who wrote both 1 and 2 Corinthians, wrote to them. He told them, "Don't kid yourselves. Don't be proud. Be ashamed that you are allowing this to go on. Warn this man of his sin. Use God's Word to convict him. Kill his sinful nature and bring him to see that as long as he continues on, willingly, knowingly, repeatedly, in this sin, without the least bit of remorse or sorrow, he cannot claim to be a Christian. Well, he can claim, but he really isn't one."

An amazing thing happened. They confronted him. In love. They warned him. Out of concern for his soul. They pointed out his sin. As fellow sinners. And God's Word did its amazing work. God's Word convicted him of sin. Best of all, God's Word brought him forgiveness for that sin. Full and free and finished forgiveness. God's Word brought him comfort. That's what God's Word does. God comforts sinners with forgiveness.

And if only that were the end of the story and the Christians in Corinth lived happily ever after. But there's sinful people involved here. It's never that easy. Those same sinners who made the sin small while it was going on, made the sin big when it was over. We can't let this guy back into the church. Look at what he did! This guy can't kid himself and call himself a Christian ever again. That's where we pick up this account. God's Word dealt with those who wanted to make the sin small. How will God's Word deal with those who want to make the sin big? God comforts sinners with forgiveness.

Notice the calm and comforting tone. To some extent. Not to put it too severely. Don't lay any more burden on him. He has been through enough. Comfort him with forgiveness. Call him to your side. Don't let his soul be swallowed up by excessive sorrow. Don't heap on the guilt. Heap on the forgiveness. Heap on the comfort!

Which temptation is more of an issue for you? To make sin small while it's going on? Or to make sin big

after it happens? You know what I'm talking about. We have all our excuses. It's the times we live in. He started it. He treated me the same way. I'm the victim here. And we have every rationalization, minimization, excusation for our sins. The devil loves it when we do that. Or we go to the other extreme. We make sin big. God could never love me. Did you hear what I said? God could never forgive them. Don't you know what they did? Sorry to be vague. Each of us knows the burden we carry. And God wants each of us to know that Jesus already carried that burden, in our place. Jesus took your sins on his shoulders. Even the ones you thought were small. Jesus died for them. Jesus lifted the burden of sin away from you, even the sins you think are too big. Jesus threw them in the depths of the sea. He remembers them no more. He nailed them so deeply into the cross they can never be pulled out again. Jesus went to the cross, not so that you could be forgiven. Jesus carried your sins so you are forgiven! There's comfort. God comforts sinners with forgiveness. God loves to comfort sinners with forgiveness. God comforts sinners with forgiveness.

Can't you see the concern for comfort here? I know I've mentioned these phrases, but I don't think it will hurt to hear them again. Forgive and comfort him. That's what God loves to do with sinners: forgive and comfort. Don't let him be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. The punishment already inflicted on his soul is sufficient. Let me say something clearly. Guilt is not God's voice. Guilt is the devil's voice. God forgave the guilt of your sin. God forgave the guilt of your sin. Guilt is the voice of the devil, trying to get you to think, "Your sin is too big for God to forgive." Don't listen to the devil's voice of guilt. Listen to God's voice of comfort! God loves to comfort sinners with forgiveness.

Let's remember though the kind of sinner we are talking about. The man who had, in the past, been sleeping with his father's wife. But now he had been brought to repentance. He had confessed his sin. He had been stricken with godly sorrow. He was not a proud, brazen, willful sinner. He was a humble, repentant, sorrowful sinner. The goal of pointing out his sin was not to pile on the punishment or bring on the guilt. The goal was to restore him to the church, the fellowship of believers. The goal was to reconcile him with Christians who were begging for the chance to comfort him. The goal was to reinstate him to that special status: brother in Christ, member of God's Church, forgiven sinner. The goal was to reaffirm their love for him. This word for reaffirm meant something formal and public. It wasn't that they grudgingly let him come back to church, because well, you can't really keep him from coming, but man, we wish he really wouldn't ruin our good church after what he did. No way! Reaffirm. Reinstatement. Reconcile. Restore. Show love. Comfort. Call him to your side. Have him over for supper. Share the sorrow of your sins so you can share together the joy of your Savior. The purpose of confronting was ultimately to comfort the humble, repentant, sorrowful sinner. God loves to comfort sinners with forgiveness.

This balance of not making sin too small while at the same time, not making sin too big, is a difficult test. The Corinthians, after encouragement, passed the first test. They stopped ignoring the sin and stopped being proud of it. Instead they confronted him. But there was still that second test. Would they overwhelm with sorrow? Or overwhelm with forgiveness? Would they be just as diligent about comfort as they were in punishment? That can be a difficult test and tough balance.

God is putting us to the test, to see if we will be obedient on both sides. Let's say someone isn't hearing God's Word. No worship. No Bible study. No personal devotions or Bible reading. Well, it's been summer. Everyone's busy. Well, you don't have to go to church to be a Christian. Well, next excuse. Will we pass the test and be obedient and love that soul enough to confront? And then if someone comes back, will we love them enough to comfort? Will we look at them with suspicion? Have we given the impression that you can't come back, because you will be met with some strange stares? God loves to

comfort sinners with forgiveness and so do we.

Paul says in verse ten, If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. You don't need my permission to forgive. Jesus already forgave the entire world. Jesus already told his followers to announce forgiveness to every repentant sinner. And what has been forgiven (if there was anything to forgive in how you dealt with this sinner), it has been forgiven in the sight of Christ. Wow! Forgiveness isn't just between you and me. Forgiveness is between you and me and God and Christ. What more can we say?

Well, maybe one more thing. We need to keep being diligent in passing the test, in balancing not making sin too small and not making sin too big. Satan likes to take advantage of us. He wants to try to outwit us, to defraud us, to make sin look so good at first and then make us feel so terrible after. But now, we know his schemes. Now, we are in the know. Now, we are not ignorant. We know how Satan operates. And isn't that half the battle? Well, I know the battle is knowing God's Word and applying God's Word and letting God train you not to listen to the devil, but, but, isn't that a huge step, just knowing the devil's schemes. Before you sin, the devil will entice you by making sin small. Everyone's doing it. It's not a big deal. Blah, blah, blah. Now you know that's the devil's voice. Don't listen! When a fellow Christian is caught in a sin, the devil will try to convince you. Well, you're a sinner too. Who are you to say something? Well, it's not my place. It's not my business. That's the devil's scheme, that by apathy, everyone lets that Christian walk away from Christ and into the devil's arms and no one loves that person enough to tell them the truth. But now you know that. You don't have to fly off and be a jerk and call every member who wasn't in church today and read 'em the riot act. But maybe there's one person you haven't seen in a while. Maybe you've been thinking about them and praying for them and you have a godly concern to talk to them. Talking to them with concern and love is a good thing to do. Don't make the sin so small it can never be addressed. But don't make the sin so big they won't ever want to come back. Forgive them. Comfort them. Welcome them. Call a fellow sinner to your side. Eat together as fellow sinners in need of the same Savior. Worship together as fellow sinners in need of the same comfort. God loves to comfort sinners with forgiveness. And so do we. Amen.