



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Have any of you ever built a house? As a realtor, I said I never wanted to build my own home as there were too many decisions to make that Rodney and I could never ever agree on. But when we bought our home on Druid Lake Road in the Town of Erin, we found the blueprints for the house in the closet of the master bedroom. There were different renderings from the front of house to the inside, the basement and a big one for the floor to ceiling fireplace. The plans were very detailed and seemed quite complicated to me. There were words and language that we don't use in everyday life. But yet, we could see that it was our house, the house that the original owners envisioned and put down on paper in order to build that house that became our home.

As we were going through the file cabinets last spring Patti and I found some old blueprints of our church building. Again, it was someone's dream or vision that became the reality of our building here today.

I have another blueprint in my hand, right here. It is a blueprint for building a congregation, our community as brothers and sisters in Christ. The Bible is God's blueprint for how we should live our lives. Since God is not here in person, He has given us his word as His vision for how we could build His church on earth. In Scripture, we have everything we need to know on how to live our lives, build a church and live as a Christian community. But

there is one problem. The Bible is very long and was written so long ago that some language and words in it do not always speak to us today, as they did to the people of its' day. How often today do you use the words absolution, sanctification and justification in everyday conversation. Often times such words can turn people off from reading Scripture. And that is too bad as in this great book, God has offered to the world's children detail, designs and direction of how to build a meaningful life.

In short, the Bible is God's blueprint for living. We should be students for a lifetime of this great book so we too can learn the principles for an abundant and meaningful life. For most of us, this learning about the Bible began in our childhood when we attended Sunday school classes while our parents went to church. But that was a few generations ago.

Do any of you remember your Sunday school experiences? Probably like mine there were with flannel boards (do you remember those?), of maybe blackboards and lots of pictures to color and take home sheets to show your parents what you learned. Today our children are way more sophisticated. We show them or teach with YouTube videos and I have even done confirmation on Face time. But one thing has not changed. We learn best how to follow Jesus, one person to another.

And I hope for you, that your learning will never end. Not only do we forget over time, but we also look and understand Jesus' teaching more with the wisdom of our years. So, to stop learning to me would be like being dead. I cannot tell you how much I have learned in the past 6 months about not only technology but about the will of God's people. Your pastor is very much alive!

Our Gospel lesson for today is a tough one. It is about solving conflict, probably not a passage that we learned in Sunday school, but nonetheless a very important one. And just maybe it is one that our world needs to hear today, more than ever.

Our world tells us that the most natural response to conflict is to wage war with the other party or person. That is not how Jesus would have us resolve issues. He has a different blueprint, if you will, for us that He relates in

Matthew's Gospel. Jesus' ways are different than the world, where we see gossip run rampant, rumors spread and vicious words about someone are spoken behind their back. So fortunately, Jesus has an answer to conflict.

It first starts with talking to the person you are disagreeing with or has sinned against you. Sounds simple doesn't it. It is suggested that we can talk honestly and openly about what has happened. It is not screaming or shouting all our frustrations at someone. The outcome sought is that there would be direct communication resulting in some sort of reconciliation. The outcome should not be that one party is right and one is wrong, but rather that they have a good conversation and put their differences behind them. And if that does not happen, Jesus has another suggestion, that the one offended try again with a few witnesses present. Not ganging up on the offender, but rather bringing support into the mix. All involved should be there to render an ear in listening to the conversation. If the offender still does not repent, then the matter should be brought to the church.

Well, folks I am here to tell you that I believe most conflicts need not go that far. God has given us the steps to solve these issues, but we need not go so far if we just remember that we are all children of God. Jesus went to the cross and died a horrible death to absolve (big word) us from our sins. He rose again to wipe our slate clean. What a gift that was. And so, we should follow his example and forgive as we have been forgiven.

Yes, this reading, in the Bible gives step-by-step instructions on how to expel people from their worship communities, but that should not be our first goal. Our first goal should be to remember to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. And forgiveness is a part of that. Even when discipline is needed it should be done out of love.

And discipline, well that is a whole other subject. It is not a popular concept these days. We live in a world that has an attitude of live and let live at least until something goes haywire. Parents fell that they should be encouragers and friends rather than rebukers. (another word) Teachers cannot discipline children in school. Spare the rod and spoil the child was not the way most of us grew up. But discipline performed rightly is

necessary. Children will grow up to reach their potential within boundaries of safety and love better than if they were let loose with no restraints.

Today our society is in an uproar about discipline in our usually pretty civil society. Things have happened this year that have pitted white against black. Our streets are filled with violence. On the news last night, we heard that there were three shootings in Duluth in the last week. (We get our local news from Duluth!) That is quite unusual as you almost never hear about anyone raising a weapon against another. People are frustrated and I personally think everyone is tired of COVID 19, as well as racial inequality. Many people are to their wits end with no jobs, no food and no recreational activities. Life is just not the normal, we have come to enjoy. We are frustrated and act out, taking it out on each other.

But what does God say about all this angst. God does not see black and white. He does not see Democrats and Republicans. He does not label good and bad. God sees His children, His beloved children struggling. But He has left us this blueprint, His word to fall back on to solve conflict. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is just as relevant today in our litigious, politically correct and hypersensitive communities. We need folks, to get back to reading Scripture and learning what Jesus taught about living together as God's children. It is all right in this manual.

If ever there was a time for us to look to Scripture as a blueprint for our living, it is this time. With our nation under siege of violence, a pandemic and a contentious election on the horizon, now is the time to find direction for our lives and I can think of no better roadmap than the Word of God. And God has promised to walk with us during all times in our lives, even the challenging ones. Thanks be to God for that. **AMEN**