

## Lectionary Bible Study Our Savior Lutheran Church



### Lectionary 23 Readings

Ezekiel 33:7-11, Psalm 119:33-40  
Romans 13:8-14, Matthew 18:15-20

[Click here](#) to join Pastor Mark for a Live Zoom conversation each Wednesday at 10am.

Meeting ID: 868 8793 0554 Password: 654321

Or dial in for audio only: 1-301-715-8592

### Matthew 18:15-20 (NRSV)

[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>15</sup>“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. <sup>16</sup>But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup>If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. <sup>18</sup>Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup>Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup>For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

### Matthew 18:15-20 (The Message)

“If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you’ve made a friend. If he won’t listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. If he still won’t listen, tell the church. If he won’t listen to the church, you’ll have to start over from scratch, confront him with the need for repentance, and offer again God’s forgiving love.

<sup>18-20</sup> “Take this most seriously: A yes on earth is yes in heaven; a no on earth is no in heaven. What you say to one another is eternal. I mean this. When two of you get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it, my Father in heaven goes into action. And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I’ll be there.”

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This passage begins with addressing conflict within the Christian community. We know that conflict among humans is inevitable. However, conflict in the church seems optional. And yet... “I like Jesus but I don’t like the Church.” These words have been spoken far too many times. Or as Mahatma Gandhi said “Jesus is ideal and wonderful. But you Christians, you are not like him.”

1. *Have you encountered conflict in the Church before?*
2. *Was the conflict handled using the outline here in Matthew 18?*
3. *What do you think about the outline for handling conflict?*

Before we go too far into this outline for conflict resolution and accountability, we should go back and put the text in context. Chapter 17 begins with Jesus being transfigured before Peter James and John. Then we see Jesus and the disciples in the region of Galilee, specifically in Capernaum. Chapter 18 begins with what can only be described as Jesus' radical teaching that protects the vulnerable: Welcoming children (Matt 18:1-5), not being a stumbling block or temptation to sin (18:6-9), shepherd leaving the 99 sheep to find the 1 (18:10-14).

4. *How does that context affect the way you read today's passage?*

Verse 18 brings up the idea of binding and loosing (which was also in Matthew 16:19). Note that Matthew's gospel is written after 70 AD – the Temple has been destroyed and a group of Jewish and Gentile Christians are trying to figure out religious practices. Conflict was inevitable, and some were beginning to think all Jewish laws were “archaic” and disposable. However, in Matthew 5:18 we see Jesus claiming that the Law will remain in existence. As Matthew's gospel goes on, we see Jesus expanding some laws while contracting others. A law may be bound when it is deemed to be applicable to a situation or loosened when a law was not applicable in certain circumstances. (For example, in Matthew 12 we see Jesus picking wheat on the sabbath and healing.) Jesus, the rabbi, is giving the authority for these decisions to the Church.

5. *How does this connect to the earlier discussion of conflict?*

In reading The Message translation, we see some of the more Jewish understanding/nuance of this text. Our binding and loosing have eternal and holy connections. We can bind ourselves to God (or the opposite). In my conversation this week with Rabbi Michael Birnholz of Temple Beth Shalom, Vero Beach (see [www.OurSaviorELCA.com/biblestudy](http://www.OurSaviorELCA.com/biblestudy)), he shared about the Jewish practice of daily binding oneself to the word of God with tefillin. He shared how the practice leaves an impression on the skin.

6. *Our faith too is a tactile faith. What rituals do we have that are tactile? How do they aid in binding ourselves to God?*
7. *Does God bind God's self to us?*

Last but not least, we hear these words of great comfort: “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” (v 20). The Mishnah has a similar saying about studying Torah: “if two sit together and there are words of Torah between them, the Shekinah (presence of God) rests between them.”

8. *How are these words the same as the Jewish teaching? Is there a difference?*