



**First Federate Church**  
**Rev. Zachary Lysdahl**  
**February 12th, 2017**  
**“A People On The Move”**

In the Berenstain Bear's book, *Moving Day*, Brother Bear is told by his father that they are leaving the Mt. Cave, with its leaky pipes, cracks, and crumbling foundation to live in a treehouse in the valley. So he asks Momma and Papa bear if moving will be hard; if he can take his book and toys with him, if he'll like their new home, if his friends can come with him, if he will make new friends, if his new home in the valley will be comfortable like the cave. At the heart of all brother bears questions is a single concern, Brother Bear's comfort level. He was used to the leaky pipes, he had grown accustomed to the crumbling foundation. For Brother Bear, it did not matter that their new home would be better, he was worried about changing homes, having to adjust to a new way of living.

As you may well know, moving from one home to another can be a lengthy and difficult process. Rarely is it settling and often it is uncomfortable. If you have ever moved to a new place you know just how trying it can be to adjust to all the new things. New rhythms, new habits, new surrounding, new weather, new traffic patterns, new language, new friends, and a new community all make change hard. But we still forge ahead, anyways, with the expectation that these new things will soon become normal and comfortable. We know in time we will see the new place with a fuller, richer and deeper perspective.

From the earliest chapters of the of the Bible the people of God have been a people set apart, distinct from the culture surrounding them. In the book of Genesis, Abraham was instructed by God to leave home, his neighborhood, his land and move to someplace new. To a foreign land. One he had not seen before. Sometime later in the book of Exodus, Moses was called to lead God's people out into the vast desert of the Sinai peninsula! A place filled with dangers of all sorts. Through these stories we begin to see how God has acted in history to set the people of Israel apart from others physically. God set them apart not so that they would be withdrawn from the world, but to mark them as God's own and to teach them the ways of righteousness. God's people were to be a distinct people; living in according to God's commands. Setting the Israelites apart, God gave the Israelites a new way of living, helping them to see the world with a richer and deeper perspective. We, as Christian have historically been on the move to new places for God.

As we have heard over the past few weeks in Matthew, we are at a place in the story where Jesus had retreated into the mountains and the disciples were with him. Last week we also heard what some of our responsibilities are as followers of Jesus Christ. We have are to be the salt and light in the world. This morning we pick up with Jesus and the disciples still on the side of the mountain. There Jesus speaks with the disciples and moves them into a fuller understanding of the Christian faith. An

understanding that is not comfortable, because it calls the disciples to a higher standard. In particular, Jesus speaks about Christian community and how Christians ought see one another and interact with one another. Jesus calls his disciples away from sinful thoughts and relations, to a new place, a place of reconciliation.

In verse 21 Jesus tells the disciples “you have heard it said to people long ago, ‘Do not murder.’” Surely the disciples would have already known this this, after all they had been given the 10 Commandments and murder was expressly forbidden by the sixth commandment. In fact, it had been written in stone. Jesus does not stop there. He sharpens that commandment and clarifies it. Murder is wrong and so too were unjustified angry thoughts directed at another person. Here, Jesus points out that people can be mortally wounded by thoughts. Intentionally harmful thoughts are just as destructive and damaging as the act of murder itself. In short, Jesus told them that if they purposefully thought disparaging things about another person they have committed murder with their heart. In this we see God moving his people to a new place, not physically, but in terms of how they should live and treat one another. As Christians we are called to be on the move to new places in our relationships.

Jesus goes on to sharpen the commandment about adultery in the same way. He told the disciples, anyone who purposefully thinks lustful thoughts about another person has committed adultery with their heart. Lustful thoughts are thoughts that use another person for our own personal gratification, considering them as objects instead of fellow children of God. Despite the fact that it is a thought, it is still a transgression as offensive and sinful as acting on those thoughts. Jesus continued on, saying the same thing about swearing “If you speak words of destruction, aimed at another person, or worse at God, in your heart that is the same as shouting them out loud at the top of your lungs.” What Jesus has done in this passage was to point out that both actions and thoughts can violate any of God’s commands. Both are equally sinful and will receive judgment.

This new understanding the of the law given by Jesus would have certainly been uncomfortable to those hearing it for the very first time. As Jesus explained and expanded the law, the disciples were being moved to a new place. A place of richer understanding, a fuller way of seeing the world, which would unite them into a new and more complete community. One that recognized both actions and thoughts can break God’s commands.

That we can break God’s commands with our thoughts and actions is an alarming truth, which means each and everyone of us are a broken. This reality is self evident because if we were perfect nothing would ever go wrong. No one would be cut down with words. No one would ever be treated as subhuman or objectified. No one would be profaned. If we weren’t broken and inclined to sin there would be no reason for Jesus to have come to earth and take the sins of the world upon himself so that we might be reconciled to God our Father. But Jesus has come to this world because our thoughts and actions do break God’s commands and we are a broken people.

In our brokenness we treat others regretfully. At times, instead of honoring one another we get angry over simple and often trivial matters and go on to fan those cinders of displeasure and hostility into a blazing fire. At times, we think inappropriate thoughts about other people and the things we might do with them. We are broken and our thoughts and actions reflect that truth. This is what we are called to move away from.

In the gospel lesson this morning Jesus points out more than our broken thoughts and actions. In verse 24 he shares with the disciples and with us the necessity to be reconciled with one another. For if the heartbeat of a community is inappropriate anger, unmanaged lustful thoughts, and hateful words it is not a community at all. It is only a collection of people with their own interests in mind. When Jesus said to the disciples “be reconciled” he was pointing out that reconciliation is one of the linchpins to Christian community. Reconciliation holds the Christian community together in deep and rich ways. It is what sets Christians apart as God’s people. Not only are we called to move away from those thoughts and behaviors but we are called to move towards reconciliation. In community, when a person’s actions and thoughts violate another and the will of God, the disciple of Christ are to reconcile themselves with the victim of their wrong doings. Reconciliation isn’t comfortable because it is hard. We have to move from a place we are comfortable in, to a place we are uncomfortable in: a place of change.

What does Jesus mean when he tells the disciples to “be reconciled.” Jesus desires for us is to come together through meaningful change. To end needless hostility. To change enmity for friendship. To move from malevolence to friendship. That is what reconciliation means, and that is what we as Christians are on the move toward.

Being reconciled with one another is not always easy to navigate or comfortable. It can be like adjusting to steps and corners of a new home we’ve recently moved into. The crumbling foundation is gone, but we were used to that. The new home is solid, but we aren’t used to it. So reconciliation takes intention, like the careful placement of a foot on the last step before the floor. It takes perception, like feeling the walls of the hallway down to the bathroom at night, which is now on the left instead of the right. It takes time, like learning how to operate the new appliances. No matter how hard it is Jesus has called us to a new place, a new community, where reconciliation is part of the way of life. A reconciling community is a deeper and richer place for all of Christ’s disciples, a place Jesus calls us to move into.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.