

Introduction

Conflict is a part of relationships and life in community. Jesus' words in today's gospel are often used in situations having to do with church discipline. The prophet Ezekiel tells of warning the wicked to turn from their ways, and Paul reminds us that love is the fulfilling of the law. We gather in the name of Christ, assured that he is present among us with gifts of peace and reconciliation.

Prayer of the Day

O Lord God, enliven and preserve your church with your perpetual mercy. Without your help, we mortals will fail; remove far from us everything that is harmful, and lead us toward all that gives life and salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.

Amen.

Romans 13:8-14

The obligation of Christians is to love one another and so fulfill the heart and goal of the law. Clothes make the person as we "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" and live today in light of the future God has in store for us.

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbour as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

¹¹Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹²the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³let us live honourably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus offers practical advice to his disciples on how individuals—and the church as a whole—should go about restoring relationships when one member has sinned against another.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁵"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. ¹⁶But 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. ¹⁷If 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. ¹⁸Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, 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. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Sermon

6 September 2020

Jesus Says...

Christians of every generation have quoted Jesus in contemporary circumstances

You remember the children's game.

Simon says "Tug your ear."

Simon says "Close your eyes."

Simon says "Stomp your feet."

"Touch your nose."

Players shall only do the things Simon says.

Because Simon, whoever he is,
has genuine authority.

The Christian Church might be defined
as the community
that does as Jesus says.

Jesus says "Feed the hungry."

Jesus says "Heal the sick."

Jesus says "Forgive your enemy."

"Get rid of trouble-makers."

Did I catch you,
again?

The reading from Matthew can be regarded as Exhibit A
in the argument that the Gospel
was not written during or even shortly after
the death of Jesus.

The church was not created until after Jesus' death and rising.

And it took some time,
after that,
to have spread to other cities,
where members developed a pattern for resolving disputes.

Which means that the author,
and his community,
probably created this code of conduct,
and put it on the lips of Jesus.

Not to be deceitful,
but because it was the way they saw it.

They believed that the risen Christ continued to speak, instruct, encourage his people,
even decades after his literal demise.

As far as they were concerned
the spirit of Jesus continued to preach and teach.

It's also what we aspire to
when we identify ourselves as Christians;
followers or imitators of Jesus.

Or when we ask WWJD;
what would Jesus do?

Or when I open my mouth to preach.

I hope that the real, risen Jesus,
composed as I wrote,
and now speaks through my tongue and mouth as I preach.

The passage before us today
is Matthew's way,
and the practice of his community,
to say Jesus wants the people who gather in his name
to be more concerned about fixing broken relationships
than in expelling trouble-makers.

Today we call it restorative justice,
and acknowledge its roots among the First Nations of this continent.

While the British and French systems of justice
are designed to identify and punish wrongdoing
and wrongdoers,
restorative justice seeks to acknowledge the wrongdoing
and to restore the wrongdoer.

It is not adversarial and punitive,
but reconciliatory and community-building.

Compare it to what Matthew has written for us.

Someone does something that causes real harm.

An object is stolen.

A building is vandalised.

A person is injured.

Restorative justice begins with an invitation
to the person or persons who have been hurt,
and to the person or persons who caused the harm.

If both parties agree,
they sit down together.

Not in court, through lawyers, judges and the bailiff,
but face to face.

The one who caused harm acknowledges, in detail, what they have done.

Those hurt describe the pain that such action has caused.

And then the one who did wrong offers an apology,
and asks what might be done to "make it right."

Sometimes may include incarceration,
or community service,
but it usually means something more personal.

I was part of this process in a previous parish,
where some teens and seniors spent several weeks at a local cemetery,
repairing damage stones
and planting new shrubs and flowers.

Eventually talking about those who buried in that place,
And what it means to grieve and remember.

The goal, through this whole process,
is to help the victim and perpetrator be reconciled.

Both parties communicate face to face,
one on one.

Larger groups or the courts get involved only if they can't sort it out themselves,
with the help of a facilitator.

The Jesus that Matthew and his people knew was like that.

They didn't want to accuse and punish,
and then send people from their community away,
but to find some way for the damage to be repaired
and for the wrongdoer to be restored to loving relationship with his or her neighbours.

When done well restorative justice builds neighbourhoods and communities.
Victims and perpetrators begin to see themselves as connected to the places where they live
and the people who live around them.

Both discover that they are seen and seeing,
forgiving and forgivable,
loving and lovable.

What a “Jesus thing” to say.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

Unite your church, O God. Grant us the gifts of repentance and reconciliation. Bless the cooperative work of churches in this community (*especially*). Strengthen ecumenical partnerships; guide the work of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Protect your creation, O God. Teach us ways that do not harm what you have entrusted to our care. Renew and enliven places suffering from drought, flood, storms, or pollution (*especially*). Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Turn nations and leaders from ways that lead to death. Shape new paths toward peace and cooperation, teaching us to recognize one another as neighbors. Guide legislators, civil servants, judges, and police toward laws that protect the well-being of all. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Tend to all in need of your compassion. Hear the cries of those awaiting justice and those yearning for forgiveness. Give community to the lonely and neighbours to the outcast. Shelter all who are vulnerable in body, mind, or spirit (*especially*). Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Sustain us in our work, O God, and give work to those who need it. Shape societies to ensure fair treatment for all who labour. Help us to love our neighbours in and through our work. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We remember with thanksgiving those who have died in faith. As you equipped them, equip us with your protection and power, until with them we see your salvation. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Invitation to Communion

Come to the banquet table
where Christ gives himself as food and drink.

Prayer after Communion

We give you thanks, gracious God,
that you have once again fed us with food beyond compare,
the body and blood of Christ.
Lead us from this place, nourished and forgiven,
into your beloved vineyard
to wipe away the tears of all who hunger and thirst,
guided by the example of the same Jesus Christ
and led by the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.

Blessing

Mothering God,
Father, ✝ Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Remember the poor.

Thanks be to God.