

*Pastor David Anglada' Message Outline
Grace Lutheran Church and School
Malverne, New York
www.glcas.org*

Building an Authentic Community Matthew 18:15-20

14th Sunday after Pentecost

September 6th, 2020

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.¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."¹

Let us pray: Gracious God, we seek reconciliation with our sisters and brothers that only your peace can provide. Help us to mend the tears in the fabric of our world community-family by family, neighborhood by neighborhood, city by city, village by village, county by county, and country by country until we are, in truth, a human race. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.²

Several weeks ago, a pastor friend of mine shared with me that two congregants in his parish were bickering with each other. However, several members in his congregation are now taking sides with the two members of the congregation who are challenging each other. Presently, both members are verbally castigating each other. Pastor John informed me that the individual who posted on Facebook stated that "the President of the parish council was clueless regarding when their congregation should start worship again on Sundays." Before the day was over, the posting made its way to other members of the congregation on Facebook.

The author of the Facebook posting, and the President of the parish council are not presently speaking with each other. Furthermore, they are both pointing fingers at each other. Moreover, they are not being kind with words directed at each other.

The parish council president is demanding an apology from the member of the church who did the posting. The person who wrote the comment has responded by saying, "I spoke the truth, let the president of the parish council get over it and deal with reality."

Let me share with you that, it is always uncomfortable to tell someone they have done something hurtful to you as well as harmful to themselves. No one ever wants to hear they are wrong. It becomes difficult for people to say I am sorry; I made a mistake.

This situation is hurting the congregation at large, they have divided themselves into opposing groups. They have forgotten the hymn: "One Bread, One Body." We sing this hymn, but we truly forgot the meaning of the words that we are the body of Christ Jesus.

My good friends let me share with you that the indispensable Church of Christ is not perfect; it is challenging to be an authentic community of Christ. It is so difficult to build an authentic Christian community. Christ church is a living system; it is a living organism; the Church is a gift of God to us. However, the Church is composed of human beings that are not perfect. We will all make mistakes, and at times falter. Yes, there will be conflict in the Christian Church!

Thanks Be to God that we are immune to tension here at Grace Lutheran Church and School.

Well, not so, fast pastor David someone is saying to themselves we have also had our moments of conflict in the past.

Dear saints of God conflict are not new. It is not unique to the world at large, and it is not new to the Christian Church. What is evident to all of us is that no matter who we are or what we believe, we are not immune to conflict, mostly where two or three gathers for worship.³

Matthew's Gospel chapter 18 reminds us that conflict was just as real in the early Church as it is more so today in 2020.⁴

When Matthew the gospel writes to the early Church, he was witnessing the saints of God having conflicts with each other, disagreements, and offending each other. He saw the Church as a family system; both family and churches have their ups and downs. As we are aware family life is not much different from congregational life.

The late Psychiatrist Scott Peck stated that all types of organization or family systems go through four states: Pseudo, Emptiness, Crisis and Authentic Community.

Matthew suggested the following rubric to follow to deal with their interpersonal difficulties. Matthew is interested that there be repentance on the part of the offender.

First, the offended party is to point out the fault to the offender and try to settle the conflict between the two of them. Tell the offender how you feel and why. The goal is to seek reconciliation. The second step if it is necessary If the offender does not make a change of heart, repent, or listen.

The offended person is to bring two witnesses and point out the wrong in the presence of the witness and the offender. At times we need the help of others to help us achieve repentance and reconciliation or a win/win.

If by bring others do not achieve its purpose, then you a third step. If the offender still will not listen, then the offended person is to tell the Church. If the offender will not listen even to the Church, then they treated as an outsider.

I believe that Matthew, the Gospel writer, is informing the early Church that the offense might have begun against one member, but it may become an offense against all. Only the radical step of exclusion may shock the offender into repentance. It is extreme, but it may be the only way.

Furthermore, Matthew says, ***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.***

Why treat them as Gentile and Tax collector because Jesus also came to save the Gentile and tax collector. In other words, our blessed Lord is not giving up on any sinner. I truly believe that Jesus saw Gentiles and Tax Collectors not as outcasts of the community, but as objects of restorative action.

I do not read today's gospel text as steps or justification for cutting people off from Church, only in the case of physical, mental abuse against anyone in the body of Christ. Moreover, wherever there is molestation against anyone.

Matthew's gospel is inviting us to understand that we brothers and sisters in Christ live in brokenness that human beings are not perfect, nor is the church community. Our goal as a church is always to seek repentance, reconciliation, and restoration. We seek win/win's, we do not seek to always be correct or right. We seek relationships.

However, we strive for excellence; we strive for holiness, we strive to do the will of God as well as to seek repentance, and restoration of relationships. We seek win/win not, I win, and you lose. We seek to love each other and the neighbor.

So, where is the Good News in our Text today? Our Lord Jesus wants to bring healing amid broken relationships, whether in the church community or in our personal lives. Matthew's goal for the church is: Repentance, Restoration of Relationships within the Christian community.

My prayer for our community of faith is for our Lord to bind us together into an authentic community. In an authentic community, we will experience perfection and imperfection. We will have both saints and sinners. Yet we are the Church of Christ Jesus. We have been called to love each other. Beloved in the Lord, we need each other in the body of Christ. I would like to share this illustration I read this week.

A flock of geese functions as a system; in his book *High Flying Geese*, Browne Barr illustrates their reciprocal impact on each other: As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. Thus, by flying in a v formation, the whole flock adds at least 71 % greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own. The message is that we can get where we are going more quickly and easily if we have a common direction and give a good uplift to one another.

Whenever a goose falls out of formation, Barr remarks, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go alone. The goose will return to the formation quickly to benefit

from the lifting power of the bird immediately in front. **The message is:** we need the support of each other.

Together we can build a healthy, Authentic Community here at Grace.

Let us pray: Morning has dawned, Christ's light shines upon us, it is time to wake up to the power of love, repentance, and restoration of our souls. Amen.

Endnotes

¹ New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

² Practical prayer by Alice Camille, Exploring the Sunday Readings, September 2020

³ Raquel St. Clair Lettsome, Connections-A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship , Year A, Volume 3, Season after Pentecost (Louisville: WJK, 2020)296-297.

⁴ Ibid. 297.