

Materials for Virtual Worship

Sunday 6 September Trinity 13

Collects for 13th Sunday After Trinity

Almighty God,
who called your Church to bear witness
that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself:
help us to proclaim the good news of your love,
that all who hear it may be drawn to you;
through him who was lifted up on the cross,
and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

or

Almighty God,
you search us and know us:
may we rely on you in strength
and rest on you in weakness,
now and in all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Readings

Letter to the Romans 13:8-end

8 Owe 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.

11 Besides 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 armour of light; 13let us live honourably as in the day, not in

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revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. 14Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Matthew's Gospel 18:15-20

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.'

Reflection

Our gospel this morning, about how to resolve conflict, on first reading, had me a little perplexed, where was the humility? where was take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see more clearly to remove the speck from your brothers eye? (Matthew 7:5) and then it seemed we got into bullying by taking some others along to reiterate the point. But like so many texts in the bible they should not be taken in isolation, and this morning's Gospel reading gives us some real, concrete, step-by-step instructions from Jesus on how we should handle conflict. If we start at the beginning of Matthew 18 in

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verse 1 the disciple asked 'who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven and Jesus calls a child and answers 'whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in heaven'. He was saying that was the wrong question, as leaders of the church they should be asking, 'who's missing and how can we restore them? it's all about the little ones, be and welcome the little ones.

Then, directly after our passage, Peter asks, 'How often should I forgive my brother?'

And Jesus says, 'always forgive.'

Our passage about conflict is smothered in the principle that we should always seek reconciliation and community.

Within any relationship or communities there will be conflict it is unavoidable; we all make mistakes and have different view- points, it is how these are dealt with that is important. If you want to have a close relationship with your spouse, your family, your friends – more importantly, if we want to have a vibrant, connected community as a church – then we need to learn how to resolve conflict, and Matthew gives us our rules. The first thing to do is to seek reconciliation, not to revile and to do this just between the two of you, in private not in public, Jesus lays out how these things are to be handled by a Christian community. And quite simply, his prescription is to talk about things openly, honestly, and directly, person-to-person. Jesus wanted people who had been hurt to talk directly to the one who hurt them and to lay things out in an honest fashion, in hopes of having the issues worked out. Jesus doesn't say, 'Ambush them' and neither does he say, 'Meet at high noon, in the middle of Linton High Street and shoot it out. Let the best man win.' Instead, he says that we should speak honestly and directly with each other, not in anger, but also not hiding the hurt that has been done. Now note that he does not suggest that one person should be the winner and one the loser. No ... what he wants from this direct communication is

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reconciliation. Both parties getting back, as much as is possible, to a place of shared care and concern, of forgiveness and understanding.

And at this stage whilst it is difficult do not gossip with others about the problem.....There is an old story about a man in a small village who was known as a gossip. The people were really upset about it and they asked the wise sage of the village to deal with it. So, the wise sage took the man aside and gave him a bag of feathers. He told him to go spread those feathers all over the village and then come back the next morning. The man did as he was told, he spread the feathers all over the place and then came back the next morning. The sage told him to go and gather up all the feathers that he had dropped the day before. 'But sir' the man said, 'that's impossible. The wind has spread my feathers everywhere, I couldn't possibly get them all back.' 'exactly,' the wise man said, 'and so it is when you gossip and spread rumours about others. You can never take it back' The greatest enemy can be gossip. I know we should not gossip, but I know we all do, and the damage can be great.

Matthew then tells us if the first stage leads nowhere one or two people can be drawn in primarily to listen, possibly also to advise, and to bring some balance and perspective. The reference to 'two or three witnesses' comes from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 19;15) where a person could not be judged on the word of one witness alone. However, if the member will not listen Matthew says then tell the church. When we are dealing with conflict in the family of God, this is a family matter and we keep it in the family, we do not put it on Facebook. It is important to note here that you do not bring other people to gang up on the offender. You bring others in to ensure that the words you are saying are proper and seek to restore the offender to community, but if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

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Sometimes there is a danger when we emphasize love and community, it may seem we are supposed to just gloss over blatant sin and call it love. That is dangerous.

Anyone who has been involved with a loved one who struggles with drug addiction knows the phrases 'intervention' and 'tough love.'

Sometimes you can do everything in your power to help someone see that what they are doing is hurting themselves and hurting you, but it does not change them. You cannot lower the standards and allow the person to keep hurting you or the church and pretend nothing is wrong. You grieve that loss, they are like Gentiles, tax collectors, and strangers. But how does Jesus treat the Gentile and the tax collector? He loves them, pursues them, and gives his life for them. I can remember when I was a stroppy teenager my Mum saying 'I don't always like you, but I will always love you.'

Our last part of the reading says, '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. 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. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them', I think Jesus is reminding his disciples of one simple truth. Remember, you represent me in the world. Never ask who is the greatest among you. Always go after the little ones and the lost sheep. That is what we are all about.

I think the mark of a great church is not, the size of its building or even if we have a building, we have had many lovely services on Zoom, or the number of people sitting in the pews, the mark of a great church is one that knows how to handle conflict the Jesus Way. Let us face it, when people try to live together in community it gets messy and conflict happens.

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If there is someone who you know holds a grudge against you for something you did, or were perceived to have done, either recently or ages ago, apologize and sincerely ask forgiveness. Likewise, if there is someone who comes to you and asks forgiveness for something that has caused you to hold a grudge against them, grant them forgiveness. To ask forgiveness is not weakness. And to grant forgiveness is not to condone what someone has done. They are merely steps toward reconciliation – the thing that Jesus did when he reconciled the whole world to God by hanging on a cross. If he can do that for us, surely, we can do this for each other, and for him. My prayer is that we are a church that seeks to be like the little ones and work through our conflicts by speaking the truth in love.

AMEN

Lindi Kent

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Hymn (Gradual)

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
Light for the world to see.

Chorus

Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone.

Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come.

Bernadette Farrell

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Hymn (at Offertory)

King of kings majesty
God of heaven living in me
Gentle Saviour closest friend
Strong deliv'rer beginning and end
All within me falls at Your throne

Your majesty I can but bow
I lay my all before You now
In royal robes I don't deserve
I live to serve Your majesty

Earth and heav'n worship You
Love eternal faithful and true
Who bought the nations ransomed souls
Brought this sinner near to Your throne
All within me cries out in praise

Your majesty I can but bow
I lay my all before You now
In royal robes I don't deserve
I live to serve Your majesty

Jarrold Cooper

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Post Communion Prayer

God our creator,
you feed your children with the true manna,
the living bread from heaven:
let this holy food sustain us through our earthly pilgrimage
until we come to that place
where hunger and thirst are no more;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen