

Sunday Update
6th September 2020

Matthew 18:15-20

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

18 "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

When you hear the word "church" what is the first thing you think about? Is it the building that we call "the church" that has been there for over 100 years and that stands tall as part of the community, the building that is closed for now? Or you might think about the denomination of which we are a part, the "Church of Scotland", the group of churches of which you have been a part for a long part of your life? (Other denominations are available and are equally acceptable!) "Church" might mean the minister: sometimes people speak of answering a call to ministry as "going into the church", using the word to speak of the career path that people like me have followed. We also talk about "going to church" which might refer to the building, but actually might also be about the service that we attend there.

The best answer to that question and indeed the answer that the Bible gives to the question is this: the church is people. The word that is so often translated "church" in the Bible, as in the passage at the top of the page today, is 'ekklesia' and the basic meaning of this word is a people that is called out. The church is the people. The church is the community of faith, that meets together, that shares a common life together, in some way or another. The church is a building only in the sense that this is the place where the church meets, the place where the community of faith comes together to do things, like worship, prayer and meeting together for other reasons. The church is the people, and together we make up this community of faith. We are joined together in a shared faith in Jesus and in what Dietrich Bonhoeffer described: "Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us". Jesus has done the same thing in all of us and so we share this amazing thing in common.

In today's passage, Jesus gives us some insight into what life in this community will be like and how we can bring being disciples of Jesus into the life of the church. The first insight we gain from Jesus is that the Church is made up of imperfect people. "*If your brother sins against you...*" (verse 15) suggests that there will be times when people get things wrong. There are times when our fellow Christians will do or say something that offends us or hurts us; there may be times when something that we do or say offends a brother or sister in Christ. That is the reality of the life of the church community; none of us is perfect and that very simply truth needs to be the first element in shaping our relationships with one another. Accept that fact; don't expect perfection! Be aware that we all make mistakes.

There are two ways of reading verses 15-17. We have most easily read these verses as a way of disciplining someone who has strayed! The brother who has offended needs to be brought back into line and here is the way to tell him off and make him behave properly. But there is another way to

read these words of Jesus: here is the church community caring for someone who has got things wrong and the community wants to support him and help him recover. That's quite a different spirit! Historically, in Scotland, the churches have taken the first option with people who have made mistakes; I read the Kirk Session minutes of Reay Parish Church in Caithness from the 18th century, hoping to get some insight into church life; what I found was a group of elders who spent their time doing two things, distributing money to the poor and punishing people caught in "antenuptial fornication" (their phrase!) On the side all of the church building in Reay there is an iron hook, missing its collar: those caught were tied to the wall by the collar to be publicly humiliated, a punishment for their sin!

Jesus says *"treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector"*. These are the outsiders! So we should throw out the person who refuses to listen! Or should we? I remember a conversation with someone who had found her way back to church, but she described to me a time when life was rough, going through a divorce, and she left church saying "church was not for the likes of me then." Somehow, the church had managed to communicate to her that she didn't belong because her life was a mess, or because she felt she had made mistakes. But how did Jesus treat pagans and tax collectors? Jesus came to these people with grace; He loved and cared for the; He accepted them and welcomed them into the kingdom. The church should be a community shaped by grace, welcoming and accepting everyone, caring for people who have made mistakes or for whom life is messy. It is too easy to judge and criticise; we need to have the highest standards of behaviour, but we need to remember that we are all imperfect that Jesus treats all of us with grace, love and acceptance.

There are two more qualities to discover that allows the community of faith to live well together. The first of these qualities is "listening". All the way through these verses, the person who has offended is to listen: to the individual whom he has offended, then to two or three others, then to "the church"; it is the lack of listening that intensifies the treatment; in the end it is the lack of listening that suggests he is no longer part of the community of faith and that relationships have broken down. Listening is also part of the process of caring for the brother who is wandering from God's way. We're very good at telling one another what we think and how others are wrong; but if we stopped to listen to each other more often, then our relationships would be so much stronger. When we listen, we discover why someone is shouting at us: is this a cry for help, or are they looking for some care and attention, or is it something else? Listening stops us from making wrong assumptions about one another and creates the space for us to care.

The second quality is prayer: *"if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."* (verse 19) Our disagreements, our failings, our misunderstandings should all be "bathed in prayer" (Michael Green) Pray for one another; pray for people you know who have offended you; pray for people who have got things wrong or who are struggling to live life in Jesus' ways. Pray for people who are weak and frail, who are afraid and anxious just now. Prayer is the oil in the engine of the community, that brings grace to every relationship and helps us get them right more often.

The church is people, imperfect people, but people whom God loves and to whom Jesus is full of grace. Jesus shows us how we can be a people who live together well, with relationships shaped by grace, people who care for one another, who listen to one another and who pray for one another. Let's be church like that!

Prayer: Father, we thank You that You have called us Your people and that we are challenged to live in the Lord's ways; forgive us when we make mistakes and fall short of what You expect from us. Help us to accept one another as You have accepted us; may Your Spirit inspire us to care for one another, to listen to one another, and to pray for one another, so that Your church may reflect the light of Christ into the world around us.

Day by day, dear Lord of you

Three things I pray:

To see you more clearly,

To love you more dearly,

To follow you more nearly,

Day by day.

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- Pray for our schools, the children, settling down into the routines and rhythms of being back at school; the teachers and other staff; wearing masks or no masks?
- Young people beginning college and university course; help them to find their way, with Zoom classes or lectures, and other face-to-face contact. Pray for College and University chaplains, bringing Jesus and His grace into the life of these young people and these academic institutions.
- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.
- NHS staff, care home staff, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- The opening up of lockdown, to be done carefully and not recklessly; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable. Headline stories of breaches of the protocols to be seen for the danger that they are rather than people to copy them.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some still furloughed, others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- For charities like Blythswood, usually busy in the autumn with a shoebox appeal. We won't be filling shoeboxes this year; we can't imagine a way to do it safely; pray for those who would normally receive shoeboxes, that they will be provided for in other ways.
- For the virus to go away completely; pray that science will find a vaccine.
- More places opening: let this not be the occasion for a spike in the virus, but for people to stay safe and well while enjoying new freedoms. Churches agonising over the question of re-opening their buildings, weighing up the value against the risk – Lord, guide us.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; go and have a listen.

How great Thou art

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fp7ZJwqtsPU>

All people that on earth do dwell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NC5FfEavPM4>

Jesus is King

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQWP5LYtiZA>

Such Love
I'll go in the strength of the Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRTUk5vbNY>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOknG-JGeHw>

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerigpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.igpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - New issues of “**Every Day with Jesus**” Booklet for September and October 2020 are now available. Please contact Ian Aitken who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are also available with Michael Merriman. **Let the Bible feed you.**

Church News: we are planning to produce an issue of Church News sometime in the next few weeks. Alison is keen to include people’s stories of lockdown: did you learn to play the guitar or to speak Spanish? Contact Alison on jgchurchnews@gmail.com with your lockdown stories or anything else you would like to include in Church News.

Heather’s Prayer Time: Heather is holding another prayer time for the work that she is doing, for the schools, children and young people and their families. It will take place on Wednesday at 7.30pm on Zoom; message her and she will send you the link if you want to join in.

Held together

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

Dear Lord Jesus,
we don't have to see you
to know you are with us.
You bring us all together,
as a community,
in your love.
Thank you, Jesus.
Amen.



Instructions...

Find something around your home that has instructions (Lego model, recipe, bookcase etc.). Do you need the instructions? Why are they important?



Question...



Look at the picture above, what do you think is going on in the painting?

This painting is called "Reconciliation" by an artist named Ni-nig. Reconciliation is a situation in which two people or groups become friendly again after they have argued. Does knowing this change what you think about the painting?

Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in Matthew 18:15-20. You can read them in a Bible or find them here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2018%3A15-20&version=ERV>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage.

Talk together...



Jesus is trying to explain how we should treat one another; calling out sin and helping one another to live God's way. We don't tell of the bad choices a person makes to make them feel bad or to take revenge or to hurt them, rather we tell them out of love, so we can help them change and grow into honest and sincere followers of God.

- Why do you think Jesus says we should talk to people privately first?
- Why do you think he says that the whole church should be involved if two people can't sort out a problem?
- Have you ever fallen out with a friend? What did you do about it?
- How do you react if someone tells you you've done/said something wrong?
- What might help us to decide if something is right or wrong, or just a different way of seeing/doing?
- What things can we do to help everyone get along with one another?

Make together...

Give each person a different coloured piece of paper. Think of times you/a person might have been wronged or upset by others and tear off a piece of your paper for each example.

Gather all the torn pieces together then, working together, use the pieces to create a mosaic of something beautiful, eg a flower, a heart, a butterfly, a sunset.

After you've finished, talk about how beautiful things can come from dealing with things that have upset us. Have you ever experienced something like that?

Play together...

Have a Oneness Olympics in your home! Who is the fastest team in a three-legged race? Which pair can get to standing the quickest when sitting back-to-back with arms linked? Who can complete a blindfolded obstacle course the quickest by only following their partner's voice? Which pair can throw a beanbag between them the longest without dropping it? Who can win the hug-a-balloon relay? (Two people stand face to face with a balloon pressed between them. Move sideways to the finish line without dropping or bursting the balloon!) Perhaps you can think of other ideas to try too!

Praise together...



As One (Same Boat Music):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=164&v=WlwKA05

Pray together...

Dear God,
we go back to our communities;
the places where we live,
where we learn to listen to you
and to each other
and act on what we hear.
Be with us, Lord.
Amen.