



God Is Among Us

September 7, 2014

Matthew 18:15–20

“If your brother or sister sins go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

“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 that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Thought For The Week

Scriptures: Ezekiel 33: 7-9 • Romans 13: 8-10 • Matthew 18: 15-20

Having now lived as a member of the Community of Christ since the year 1952, when I was baptized at the age of eight, I would like to claim some personal experience of what this (Christian) way of life involves. First of all, it is a life in common with a number of others. Secondly, this common life obviously has its “ups” and “downs.” You are destined to live & work with some individuals who are amicable, good-natured, harmonious, friendly, affable, pleasant, courteous and delightful.

On the other hand, there will invariably be some who are disagreeable, displeasing, offensive, unpleasant and unlikable. That is simply the nature of life in common. When one enters this way of life (as a Christian) he/she does not have the option of choosing only those with whom they will easily and harmoniously survive. This is especially true if you have ever spent some time within any of our military organizations.

The role of anyone acting as your superior, of course, is to make it possible for all to live or work together in harmony and peace. One approach toward this end is for the superior to gather the group for common self-evaluation.” Each individual is invited to publicly identify some common offense that may have, or already has affected the group’s efforts. You might be surprised how many people react positively to these types of discussions. Sometimes, in an extreme case, the superior might ask an individual to speak with him/her privately about some offense to the common good. This does not mean that these discussions must result in dismissal or severe reprimands each time. It can be used as a “growing tool” that will enable the person to improve themselves and others. The value of either of such approaches is that it avoids the onerous option of having to ask one individual to personally correct another, whether in public or private.

Correction is always a treacherous matter; of course, because the offense we may find in another may very well be obvious in ourselves as well, hence, our reluctance to correct another person.

Still and all, demanding as correction may be, it is a healthy option for life in common. The scriptures spend considerable space suggesting that it is a valuable asset to the spiritual life as well. The first lesson comes from the pen of Ezekiel the prophet. God warns him that his task as a prophet is to correct the people of Israel. This is the role of a prophet, namely to bring before the people their individual and common failures and insist that they modify their behavior. Obviously, it is not something any prophet, ancient or modern, would voluntarily choose to do. Nonetheless, that is a prophet’s responsibility: not simply to predict the future, but to judge the present moment in history.

In the captioned gospel lesson, Jesus also insists that life will tend to be more peaceful if individuals or even communities can come together and settle their differences in a humane, compassionate and civilized way. Jesus suggests a process of stages: if you or your brother cannot find an amicable solution to your differences, bring in one or two outside witnesses to make a judgment; if that fails, bring the issue to the whole community, the church. If even that fails, consider the offender an outsider, someone without the hope for a resolution.

All this sounds rather simple, of course, and in the real world it probably does not work out, as you would like.

Nonetheless, it seems to me that the thousands of battles, small and large, that occur in the world each day could easily be resolved if the two sides had the resolve to come together and speak respectfully with one another. As I write this, I think of the terrors that are happening in Iraq and Syria, the Ukraine and in some parts of Africa at this time. Can it be true that two sides in any issue need to resort to killing and torture to find a solution to their differences? Has humankind not yet reached a point where it can settle its differences amicably?

Now, as I think back on it, the model of correction we practiced in our youthful days in the community was not such a bad solution. At least we did not end up killing each other.

Happy Birthday Ally (9/8)

Prayer for Peace

We thank you, God, for the blessings of life. We thank you for friends, family, and those who give particular meaning to our lives.

We confess our shortcomings. In your compassion you forgive our sins, known and unknown, things done and left undone. We pray for the special concerns and needs of those gathered here this day.

We pray for the nations of the world, and in particular on this day the country and people of Brazil. May they use their resources for the good of all. May we all learn to be wise stewards of the riches you have bestowed upon us.

Hear our prayer, O God. Today we offer ourselves as instruments of your peace. Amen.

Stewardship Thought For The Week

We leave footprints everywhere we go. The footprints we leave are added to the footprints of those who have gone before, and they make room to walk for those who will come after. During these difficult times, let us take a moment to reflect upon where our footsteps have taken us on our faith journey.

Our footprints can be washed away unless we continue to move. Difficult times provide us with an opportunity to focus on what is significant and important. We need your support to continue to grow in the Spirit and to seek newness of life as we build and serve our community. Help us maintain our Community of Christ in the Plymouth Area as a quiet place to come and rest and be with Jesus.

Our job, as people of faith, is to leave footprints that are deep enough to offer protection, peace, promise and hope to those who walk our way in the days to come.