

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.

Matthew 18:15-20

"Real churches have - or should have - real conflicts. The only real harm that will come to a church community is to refuse to deal with conflicts. Conflicts do not kill churches. Refusing to deal with conflict kills churches."

Listed on The Text This Week, www.textweek.com: Contemporary Commentary, Studies, and Exegesis for the Gospel reading.

Year A

Pentecost 12

September 4, 2011

Sunday Between September 4 and September 10 Inclusive

Proper 18, Ordinary Time 23

Read the passage at the bottom of this post: [Matthew 18:15-20, The Message](#) or [Matthew 18:15-20, The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click here, [Matthew 18:15-20](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Sermon by the [Rev. Dr. George Hermanson](#), "."

This passage provides the ground rules for resolving conflicts among church members.

Say again!!!

Church members have conflicts!!!

Don't tell me Christians can't get along with each other!!!

Hypocrites!!!

Just goes to show they are not actual, true, followers of Jesus!!!

For some reason, people - even people in the church - think that following Jesus is easy.

Easily understood by one and all; easily agreed on by one and all; and all the consequences and specific actions are easily followed by one and all.

Or, I guess they think that God will over-ride the usual human differences of opinion, belief, understanding, and follow-through, and make all Christians into cookie cutter clones.

Not so.

Real churches have - or should have - real conflicts.

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Partly these will arise from individual human faults and failings that need to be confronted for the sake of the well-being of the community.

And partly these will arise from good people simply disagreeing about exactly what following Jesus requires of them in their particular context.

The only real harm that will come to a church community is to refuse to deal with conflicts.

Conflicts do not kill churches. Refusing to deal with conflict kills churches.

And, in fact, Jesus knows this, and gives specific instructions for dealing with conflict and offensive behaviour - including telling members to leave as a last resort.

Verse 15. When there is a real power imbalance - a child and a teacher for example; or where physical, emotional, or sexual abuse has occurred, then this step should be skipped. In these circumstances, **NEVER** confront the other alone.

Verses 18-20. And just to be clear about the force of this teaching, Jesus states that two or three acting together in his name, they are indeed acting for him.

Unfortunately, "gathered in my name," is not so easy. It is not simply a matter of muttering, "We are gathered in Jesus' name."

Jesus' "name" is his reputation; his worth; his honour.

And so "gathered in his name," means gathered and acting in a way that exemplifies Jesus; is worthy of Jesus; embodies Jesus.

But whether we feel up to it or not, Jesus does call us to gather in his name to ensure that our faith communities are protected from the sins in our midst.

David Ewart,
www.holytextures.com

Historical background information in this post is drawn primarily from Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, see link below, pages 94-95.

* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.

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Matthew 18:15-20 (NRSV)

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."

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Matthew 18:15-20 (The Message)

¹⁵ "If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've made a friend. ¹⁶ If he won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. ¹⁷ If he still won't listen, tell the church. If he won't listen to the church, you'll have to start over from scratch, confront him with the need for repentance, and offer again God's forgiving love.

¹⁸ "Take this most seriously: A yes on earth is yes in heaven; a no on earth is no in heaven. What you say to one another is eternal. I mean this. ¹⁹ When two of you get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it, my Father in heaven goes into action. ²⁰ And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I'll be there."

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