

Sermon Notes Sept 17, 2017

All Sunday readings: http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp19_RCL.html

Sermon Focus: Matthew 18:21-35, How often do you have to forgive?

Conflict

There is a podcast I like to listen to called *Every Little Thing*. One episode appropriate for our Gospel today is called "The Senate Whisperer" <https://gimletmedia.com/episode/the-senate-whisperer/>. At minute fourteen, the episode veers to the experience of parliamentarians. Parliamentarians are those people who help put structure into meetings. Leonard Young, one parliamentarian shares how dog breeder groups and home owners' associations are incredibly hard to manage with parliamentary procedure. They are so passionate about the subject that they get derailed easily.

Do you know who is the worst? Churches. Jim Jones, another parliamentarian (not the Guyana tragedy guy), tells a story about church meetings. One church needed armed security / police to prevent physical violence at their monthly meetings!

Conflict is in the Bible and they had to constantly relearn how to forgive

Conflict and stress is baked into the cake. The disciples were often at each other's throats, criticizing, jockeying for position, and tearing each other apart. I am sure some new horror committed by a disciple was fresh on Peter's mind when he asked Jesus how often he should forgive. Right before this parable/teaching in Matthew 18, the talk was about how to kick people out of the community. Peter said (thinking he was generous), "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"

This is a setup for Jesus and Peter probably knows it. W.C. Fields was a famous comedian who died in 1946. He was infamously critical of Christianity. One day he was found leafing through the Bible and his shocked friend asked, "what are you doing?". Without missing a beat W.C. says "looking for loopholes."

If Peter can forgive seven times and then right off a person, then he found a loophole. Jesus is not a loophole kind of guy. He says that forgiveness is to be practiced not seven but seventy-seven times. Hint – that's not a number pulled out of thin air, check out Genesis 4. Jesus' teaching is an expectation that we don't give up on loving each other. ***It's not practical - relationships break all the time, but the parable is God's vision for who are to become, not who we are.***

Annoyance is usually cumulative - a review

I mentioned in my sermon two weeks ago, relationship with people in the pew is hard. Pastor Susan, last week, preached on prickly people. There are all kinds of 'things' that just seem to build up overtime with your fellow church members. Remember the prayer I offered for that terrible person in your life? *"I don't know their story.... God clean my heart"*. This week, I offer a follow up prayer, ***"God, open my eyes to see (insert person's name) the way you see them."*** Either prayer is great, if you use it! You can experiment with approaches that help you really appreciate challenging people. Just tolerating them is not enough.

Name calling and labeling

The tendency to label and cut off ourselves from each other is a by-product of an unforgiving approach. This is important enough for Jesus to address it with some incredibly strong words. He says that if you call somebody a fool then you're libel to the 'hell of fire'. John even says, "how can you love God if you don't love your brother and sister?" it's super important to keep the struggling to love those that are hard to love, it is good for them and it is medicine for *your* soul.

Loving kindness meditation – medicine for your heart and soul

Love for others starts with ourselves and radiates outward. This is a brief meditation practice you can do anywhere:

Yourself: May I know love, safety and peace

Your closest family and community: May she/he/they know love, safety and peace

Coworkers and acquaintances you don't know well: May she/he/they know love, safety and peace

Those you hate or really really don't like : May she/he/they know love, safety and peace.

Apologies to Mr. Fields - there are no loopholes for love.