

Sermon September 6th, 2020

God Restores Us

The words we hear in our gospel today speak to the core meaning of Christ's message to us. God has sent Jesus to restore humanity. To restore our relationship with God and with one another. Jesus does this through the cross and resurrection narrative. Jesus does this through his acts of healing. Jesus does this through his teachings.

In this morning's gospel Jesus has walked with us long enough to see how well we don't get along with each other. Jesus has seen enough conflict in his ministry, whether it is the disciples fighting over who the greatest is, or the Pharisees arguing with Jesus over everything he says and does, or all the marital strife he sees that encourages him to say a few words on divorce, or the financial court battles between brothers on the farm, or the constant debate over who is in and who is out. Everyday Jesus came across conflict as he walked with us in this world.

Unfortunately, the world hasn't changed much since Jesus came into this world. We face a lot of conflict in our lives. Whether it is with our spouse or partner. Or with a co-worker or boss. Or with our children. Or with our parents. Or with a friend. Or with an opposing fan at a sporting event. Or with a driver during rush hour. Or with the cashier at the supermarket. Or with a member at the place of worship you go to.

If you were to look back on your life, how many broken relationships have you experienced? For most of us, probably too many to count.

Conflict is so present in our lives that Jesus feels the need to share some advice on the matter. In fact, Matthew who writes about Jesus' story feels compelled to highlight this story in his gospel, because he continues to see so much conflict in the early church. Conflict is so present in our lives.

And the presence of conflict isn't the only thing that motivates Jesus to speak to us. Jesus sees how we handle conflict. For most of us, we do whatever we can to avoid conflict. We are afraid to confront people, because it may turn into a big blow out. Or we are terrified that they might just walk away. So, we bury the pain inside until we either explode causing an even bigger mess, or share with others not involved in the conflict,

leading to triangulation, rumors, and social shame. Or we become resentful. Slowly pushing our loved one away.

So, Jesus stands before us today to give us a model of how to deal with one another when we don't get along. A model that when followed restores our relationships most of the time.

In this model, the first thing Jesus says to us when someone has wronged us, is that we need to confront the person to see if there is hope of reconciliation. This really challenges our natural inclination to avoid the conflict. Instead of assuming how that person may respond, we are encouraged to share our feelings with grace, hoping that the person will recognize their fault and genuinely try to do better. More often than not, when we confront someone with love, or check in, we find out that most conflicts are resolved with better communication.

Now, sometimes this text can be abused. Some, leaders, will use this text to encourage a person to go back into an unsafe situation. If you are in an abusive relationship your first step is to distance yourself from the person and seek professionals who can keep you safe, and mediate for you. Jesus didn't set these guidelines in place for people to put themselves in harms way.

But, for most of our relationships where the power dynamic is on a level playing field, our first step is to try and reconcile directly with the person.

Sometimes, a person may not think they did anything wrong, or deny hurting you. If this is the case then you find a mediator who can help you communicate better with each other. If that doesn't work then the community as a whole, needs to act as the arbitrator.

Now in our individualistic society we sometimes struggle to see the damage a conflict can have on a whole community, but even today, I have seen a conflict between two people explode into the community they are a part of, causing lasting wounds in the community.

In fact, we see this too often in our church communities. Conflict that is left to fester causing wrinkles in the body of Christ.

This is why Jesus' words today are so important for us to follow. They help us better communicate with one another, so that, we can resolve conflicts before they become toxic to ourselves, and to our community.

And so, Jesus stands with us today, showing us a way to experience God's promise of restoration and healing from the conflicts in our lives. Jesus stands with us today, to give us a foretaste of what is to come in fullness on the last day. A day where our world will be transformed into a place where there will no longer be conflict between us. A world where we stand in God's healing and restoring presence always. Feeling renewed. Feeling at peace with one another.

Let us pray, gracious God, give us the courage to confront those in our lives in a safe way who have hurt us. Give us the mercy to forgive when they are sorry. Give us strength to forgive and let go of our need for revenge or judgment when they are unable to say sorry. Walking away from the unhealthy situation with hope that you will turn their hearts. Humble us when we are confronted to repent for the things we say and do or don't do that hurt our neighbor. And may we continue to experience your healing and restoration in our lives. **Amen.**

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