

† **READING FROM THE GOSPEL: Matthew 18:15–20**

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**Sunday, September 4, 2011**

In our Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus is speaking to his disciples . . . he is speaking to you . . . he is speaking to all of us. This time, let us listen deeply, let us absorb his words into the secret places in our hearts and be willing to reveal the truth . . . the truth that changes us. Join me in our reading this morning from the Gospel of Matthew chapter 18, verses 15-20.

**WOMEN:** "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.

**MEN:** 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.

**WOMEN:** 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.

**MEN:** 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.

**WOMEN:** 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.

**ALL:** For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

This is the word of our Lord.

**Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

This is my body . . . broken for you. Shouldn't that be enough? This cup is the new covenant . . . shed by my blood for the forgiveness of sin. Shouldn't that be enough? And yet . . . it seems it never is . . .

There is so much brokenness in this world . . . so much pain . . . so much suffering . . . so many people yelling at each other . . . so much hate . . . so much evil . . . so much pettiness and pride. So stop and think for a moment . . . where is there brokenness in your life . . . who is that person you no longer speak to . . . who is that person you avoid at all cost . . . who is that person you carry a grudge against... who is that person in your life you refuse to forgive . . . who is that person you talk about behind their back . . . who is that person you refuse to love . . . no matter what . . .

This is my body . . . broken for you. Shouldn't that be enough? There are some who believe Jesus never actually said these words from Matthew. They believe that the gospel writer added them because of what was happening in the early church . . . maybe some petty disagreements . . . maybe major theological rifts . . . because not all early Christians seemed to be getting along. We witness that later in the Paul's letters. And some point out . . . that Jesus would never speak in such harsh terms . . . after all . . . he was all about grace . . . not excommunication. There are also some who say that the last verse

doesn't even belong there . . . that it was tacked on in the wrong place. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Some people have a hard time connecting those words in the same breath with labeling someone a pagan and a sinner. I, however, do believe that those words belong precisely there . . . and I believe Jesus spoke them . . . because in the passage preceding our scripture reading today, a shepherd leaves his flock to go and search for the one lone sheep who has gone astray . . . and next week we will hear Jesus telling us that forgiveness is something you offer over and over and over . . . the power in these words from Matthew 18 is all about the community of Christ Jesus . . . it's all about grace and forgiveness.

This is my body . . . broken for you. Shouldn't that be enough?

So what is Jesus telling his disciples . . . what is he telling us? Jesus knows us . . . he knows the heart and soul of every child of God who walks the face of this earth. And he knew then . . . as he knows now . . . that we don't treat each other very well . . . that the Kingdom of God he began in this world, "as it is in heaven" is far from complete. But Christ has shown us the way . . . to be a part of the building of that Kingdom . . . and that includes our little community here at Kirk and Columbia.

So what is Christ telling us to do . . . as his disciples? Quite simply . . . to build up the body of Christ, the church . . . our community of faith and love . . . to be a loving community who shares . . . to be one who loves . . . to be one who reaches out . . . and most importantly . . . to be a community who forgives.

But you know . . . sometimes we are unable to do what Christ calls us to do. We might go and talk to someone who has hurt us . . . who has sinned against us . . . but that won't always work. We might even take along someone with us to confront someone . . . to help someone see that their lives are causing pain and suffering . . . but, that, too . . . won't always work. And then . . . in what seems like a last resort . . . the body . . . the church . . . can gather to attempt to confront someone with the truth in the hope of reconciliation. Unfortunately, sometimes that doesn't work either. And in cases like that, when someone has done something that merits their dismissal from the church . . . you will probably hear words like . . . "Well, we tried. We did all we could to help them see the light. They just wouldn't change . . . they wouldn't repent . . . they had too much pride." And some will even add in . . . "We're better off without them." And so we move on . . . the church bruised a bit . . . and broken again.

I think that Jesus was using this passage to point out to us that we can live within our rules and regulations to deal with people we don't want to deal with . . . but that's not good enough. Our ways will never be God's ways. You see . . . Jesus is making a point here. Because quite simply . . . even the one who is asked to leave . . . will still be sought after by Jesus Christ. Our shepherd doesn't give up on anyone . . . because Christ came into this world to save sinners. . . not to build a temple to the saints. Even though we might give up . . . Christ never will. And for the sake of my soul . . . I give thanks to God for that truth every day.

So once again . . . as we prepare our hearts to come to this table this morning . . . this table of grace and

forgiveness . . . let us spend just a moment in silent reflection . . . Where is there brokenness in your life . . . who is that person you no longer speak to . . . who is that person you avoid at all cost . . . who is that person you carry a grudge against . . . who is that person in your life you refuse to forgive . . . who is that person you talk about behind their back . . . who is that person you refuse to love . . . no matter what . . . This is my body . . . broken for you. Shouldn't that be enough?

This cup is the new covenant . . . shed by my blood for the forgiveness of sin. Shouldn't that be enough?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.