

## HOW TO GET ALONG

"Wisdom is the reward  
you get for a lifetime of  
listening when you would  
rather have talked."

MARK TWAIN

*Scripture:*

**Romans 13:8-14**

<sup>8</sup>Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup>The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup>Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

<sup>11</sup>Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; <sup>12</sup>the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; <sup>13</sup>let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. <sup>14</sup>Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

**Matthew 18:15-20**

<sup>15</sup>"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 <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



Today the lectionary scripture choices were perfect for welcoming new members. God cares that people join together in community for mutual benefit and to promote the development of the church for the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

God knows that when people gather and work together, humans need help remembering how to get along with one another. Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love. God knows us better than we know ourselves. Even though God

made us, and we reflect God's image to the world, we are still human and thus fallible. We sin against one another sometimes intentionally, most of the time accidentally.

God created us for community. God knows we can't make it on this roller coaster journey of life all alone. We *need* each other. We *need* to be in a supportive church environment that reminds us who we are and whose we are. There are many places in the Bible on how to get along with each other peaceably so that the church will continue to grow

and prosper for the future. Many a church has died or divided due to conflicts in the church. Very sad.

## TEN COMMANDMENTS

Before this passage today from Jesus, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments when it was clear humans needed help understanding how to get along. So he engraved them in stone. Those commands helped for awhile. But then Jesus came along and summarized them down to two: Love God and Love your neighbor. He could see people just couldn't remember ten.

## PROVERBS

There are also many Proverbs about how to get along. Proverbs 18 devotes twenty-four verses to teach positive community living. Here are a few verses using the Good News translation to interpret Proverbs 18 in everyday language.

***"No one is respected unless he is humble; arrogant people are on their way to ruin."  
"What you say can preserve life or destroy it; so you must accept the consequences of your words."  
And my favorite: "Listening to gossip is like eating cheap candy; do you really want junk like that in your belly?"***

These verses in Proverbs 18 emphasize the main ingredients in a recipe for creating peaceful community relationships. The recipe requires a huge cup of honest humility, and a large amount of awareness that there are consequences for the way we speak. And the Proverb wisely warns that gossip makes a community sick.

## DEAL HONESTLY, QUIETLY AND DIRECTLY

If you look again at today's passage, it confirms these basic ingredients: First, Matthew 18:15 instructs how to deal honestly with a person who offends us quietly and directly, not out in public where they may get embarrassed. It is good to assume that the offense was not intentional. So be humble in the confrontation. But clearly confront the offense. Don't just pretend it didn't happen or things will worsen over time.

Jesus is promoting here that to get along we must confront problems or offenses and not ignore

them. That is the healthy thing to do and the key to getting along with others. Because when you let offenses build up inside they can fester. Deal with the small offenses like putting out little firecrackers. Don't let the firecrackers keep sparking and condense into one huge bomb.

During the Restorative Justice hearings to heal the wounds from Apartheid in South Africa, Bishop Desmond Tutu said, *"When we reach out and connect with one another—when we tell the story, name the hurt, grant forgiveness, and renew or release the relationship—our suffering begins to transform."*

## LISTENING

The next basic communication skill mentioned in Matthew 18 is "listening." If the one who offended you listens to your feelings, then your relationship can be restored. But if they don't listen, the passage suggests trying a third method for getting along, witnesses.

When the offender can see others agree that a sin or offense was committed then the one who committed the offense is more likely to listen and hopefully repent and be forgiven. For this to be fair, everyone listens openly and speaks positively and truthfully. No hate speech, no lies, no forgetting that we are all brothers and sisters in one big global family living together on a fragile little blue ball. Advocating for the victim of the offense is what we are called to do. Stand up for those who are unfairly treated.

## BOOK OF ORDER ON DISCIPLINE

The Presbyterian Church USA reflects on this scripture passage as guidance for the Book of Order's section on Discipline. When someone who works in a PCUSA church is accused of offending someone, then there is an ordered procedure that reflects our Matthew 18 lesson for dealing with an offense. The goals for the disciplinary proceedings are to actively listen, prescribe fair consequences, heal and hopefully reconcile with those involved in the church community.

I am proud to be a part of a church that has such a fair church government disciplinary process for dealing promptly and thoroughly with offenses that happen within the church community. The Presbyterian Church does not want people to suffer in silence. The PCUSA is known for standing up for

the oppressed and speaking out loudly against injustice no matter how painful it might be.

There is a time to be silent and listen and learn as Mark Twain's quote on page one reminds us. And there is a time to speak out, especially when you are speaking out for those being discriminated against, the neglected, the vulnerable and the oppressed.

**Bishop Desmond Tutu said,  
"If you are neutral in situations  
of injustice you have chosen  
the side of the oppressor."**

### **THE SARASOTA STATEMENT**

This past January at a conference in Sarasota, Florida (which is getting hit hard by Hurricane Irma today) two groups of Presbyterians came together to develop a new statement they call The Sarasota Statement. It was created to be a confessional statement in response to the current state of the church and the world. One group is called NEXT church, which is made up of younger pastors looking towards what is next for the PCUSA as we evolve. The second group that helped develop the statement was from the Presbyterian Foundation, which is our branch of the General Assembly that oversees our church mission funds and assets. This was an interesting combination of groups that came up with this confessional statement!

Their words encourage speaking out honestly about offenses against one another in the church and in our global family for healing and reconciliation. This part addresses how white privileged silence in the face of racism empowers it to grow stronger:

"We grieve the ways our silence indulges cowardice, justifies irresponsibility, and promotes fear in the face of injustice. Such silence leaves room for falsehood and complacency to choke out truth and compassion. As those being made new, we partner with Christ in bringing the kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. We insist on the truth and we strive against systemic injustice.

"We follow Jesus who stands with and for those who are unjustly marginalized and oppressed and calls us to do the same without hesitation.

"We decry any attempt to co-opt the gospel for purposes of excluding those whom Jesus sought, welcomed, and made his own."

### **MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**

And so, in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

In Richard Foster's book of *Spiritual Classics* he quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr. writings where he teaches how love and nonviolence is the overarching way to "get along" with those who oppose you.

He said, "Violence is not only impractical, it is immoral; for it is my firm conviction that to seek to retaliate with violence does nothing but intensify the existence of evil and hate in the universe."

And King added, "Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate and evil. The greatest way to do that is through love. Love is a transforming power that can lift a whole community to new horizons of fair play, good will and justice."

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s commitment to non-violence was tested to the extreme when his house was bombed with his wife and baby in it. MLK was at a meeting and by the time he rushed home, thousands of people were there trying to help his family and rev'ing up for revenge.

They were all so angry about the bombing they were ready to burn Atlanta. But he said to them, "He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword." (Jesus says this to Peter as he heals the Roman soldier's ear that Peter sliced off in an effort to protect Jesus.) But Martin Luther King, Jr. urged the crowd to confront the people who had done the bombing with love, and to carry on with the struggle for justice with the same dignity and self-discipline that they had when they started the civil rights movement.

Martin Luther King, Jr. knew how to get along with others by using love as his main instrument for creating peace and justice. Do you remember his other main instrument for getting along peacefully while promoting the civil rights movement? It was prayer. He asked for prayer and engaged in prayer everywhere.

He said, "We will never retaliate with hate, but will stand with love in our hearts and stand resisting injustice. We will ask people to pray that God will guide us, pray that justice will be done, and that

righteousness will stand. And through these prayers we will be strengthened, and we will feel the unity of the nation and the presence of Almighty God. This is a spiritual movement.”

The last section in Matthew 18 about getting along in community deals with what to do when the offending person is not willing to cooperate and reconcile the situation. Jesus says, “When two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them.”

### **LET IT GO**

This is directly connected to the previous verses that describe the worst case scenario, the offending person as refusing to listen again and again. We are told to trust that Jesus is there. Basically, we are to let Jesus deal with this situation. To let it go. And Jesus will treat the person like a Gentile and the tax collector.

Basically, Jesus is saying in this passage, do all you can do to reconcile with someone who offends you. Listen to one another. But if they are not willing to reconcile, then pray, give it to God and the Holy Spirit.

In difficulties getting along with others, you can call upon Jesus to lean on. Pray like Martin Luther King, Jr. who taught that every step towards others for the purpose of justice and reconciliation and love is a spiritual movement.

**Getting along with others is not always easy, even in the church.**

**It helps to remember:**

**“In our own ways, we are all broken. Out of that brokenness, we hurt others.**

**Forgiveness is the journey we take toward healing the broken parts.**

**It is how we become whole again.”**

**(Desmond Tutu: *The Book of Forgiving*)**

Amen

### **Benediction:**

**Christ’s love binds up our broken hearts and heals our broken ways.**

**His love forgives and frees us to reconnect with one another, even if we fail again and again.**

**God is constantly in our midst nudging us to reconcile and bond together for our own good, for the good of the church and for the good of the world.**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen**



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