

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 6, 2020

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one. Sing or read the final hymn aloud.)

Prepare for worship: Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

Call to Worship:

Kum Ba Yah (UMH 494)

Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah.

Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah.

Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah.

Oh Lord, kum ba yah!

Come by here, my Lord, come by here.

Come by here, my Lord, come by here.

Come by here, my Lord, come by here.

Oh Lord, come by here!

Centering Words: Where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be in their midst. (*BOW, 202*)

Affirmation of Faith: Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayer of the Day:

Merciful God, help us to become the people you have created us to be. We yearn to build communities of love, but it is easier to tear down than to build up. We long for the healing of the nations, but it is easier to harm than to heal. We want to bear our grief with dignity, but it is satisfying to parade our wounds for all to see. Bind up our spirits, Gracious One, that we might reconcile with those who have caused us pain. Help us to cast aside the things that chain our spirits, that we might be free to care for one another and fulfill your law of love. We pray in the name of the one who is with us whenever two or three are gathered in his name, Jesus, who taught us to pray: (*Abingdon Worship Annual, 2020, 195*)

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

Psalm 149

Epistle Reading Romans 13: 8-14

Old Testament Reading Exodus 12:1-14

Special Music

Gospel Reading Matthew 18:15-20

Sermon How to be Reconciled

Hymn: *Blest be the Tie that Binds (UMH 557)*

1. Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love;
the fellowship of kindred minds
is like to that above.

2. Before our Father's throne
we pour our ardent prayers;
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
our comforts and our cares.

3. We share each other's woes,
our mutual burdens bear;
and often for each other flows
the sympathizing tear.

4. When we asunder part,
it gives us inward pain;
but we shall still be joined in heart,
and hope to meet again.

Benediction:

God wants us to be reconciled to each other as we are reconciled to God. Let us go forth, listening to understand each other both within and without our church so all may become reconciled to God. Amen.

Response:

God Be with You till We Meet Again (UMH 673)
God be with you till we meet again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you,
with his sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.

Matthew 18: 15-20

I find it interesting and maybe even prophetic that the last time this passage came up in the Lectionary Cycle, we were in the midst of the “Me Too” movement, a time when women were coming forward recounting times that they had been sexually abused and exploited by men. It was a time of women coming forward and saying that they had been sinned against.

Today we are in the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement, a time when people of color are saying they have been sinned against by excessive use of police force, racial profiling, and other acts of discrimination. Then and now people were coming forward saying, “we have been sinned against.” Both are times when people want to be heard. They want something done about it.

In this passage Jesus seems to be giving a paradigm to deal with times when we feel that someone has sinned against us. This seems to be a paradigm for dealing with internal conflicts within the church, and it is a very good one at that.

First, go confront the person who sinned against you, but do it in private. Tell them you were offended. Let them know that you were hurt by them. They may be unaware that their behavior was offensive or harmful.

If they blow you off, then enlist one or two others to go with you. They are to serve as witnesses to confirm the evidence between the two of you.

If they still blow you off, then take them before the whole church. Let all of the people hear the complaint and if the person remains unrepentant, then they are to be turned out of the community. This is the paradigm that Jesus seems to be giving as a means of dealing with troublemakers within the church. If after being confronted with their sin by the offended, some witnesses, and then finally the whole church, just kick them out and get rid of them. Good riddance. Let’s move on.

But wait. The issue here in this paradigm is not to “deal” with troublemakers. The issue is not about determining who is right or wrong. It is not about getting justice and punishment for the sinner. That is not what Jesus is wanting in putting forth this paradigm.

But that is often the lens through which we view this passage. It is an orderly means of determining who is right and who is wrong. Plus determining the punishment, with being excommunicated the final punishment.

But this passage is not about crime and punishment. The goal of this paradigm of dealing with sin and conflict in the church, or any community, is not about determining right or wrong. It is about seeking reconciliation. It is not about confrontation in a judicial sense but in a therapeutic sense, to work toward healing.

The key word throughout this passage is *akouo*, listen to. *Akouo* goes beyond simply listening with the ears, but to understand. So, we listen to understand.

The first step is listening. Listen to hear the complaint of the other person or group of people. That may seem easy enough but too often we just listen to the words. We hear the words and then make our interpretation of the words rather than hearing what they mean in the words they say. In the case of Black Lives Matter our interpretation is “Only Black Lives Matter”, when they are saying “Black Lives Matter Too”, particularly in incidences where it seems like Black lives did not matter. There is a big difference in interpretation.

As we interpret, we often listen to defend. We may hear what the other is saying but we are preparing to defend our position as we are listening. That means we are not really listening. We may be listening to reply, to give some wonderful words of wisdom or comfort, which usually are not wise or comforting. We are not really listening for we are focusing not on what the other person is saying but on what we want to say in reply.

The type of listening Jesus is talking about here is listening to understand, to understand the thoughts and feelings of the other party. Listen to understand what had all those women up in arms. Why that friendly hug that is held a little too long makes them uncomfortable. Listen to understand why people are protesting the police, to what is fueling this anger that leads to protests and riots. Listen to understand the position of the police, to what leads them to use excessive force or firing more rounds than is really necessary.

When we listen to understand, we listen so that we may be reconciled to each other. So we may live in community with each other. When we listen to understand we may grow closer in relationship to each other and to God.

When we listen to understand we may see our sin. We may see how our sometimes unintentional and seemingly innocuous acts, sexual innuendos, disparaging remarks, “jokes” may be harmful to others. When someone tells you that you did or said something that offended them, listen to understand how what you said or did may have offended them. Because it is not just their problem, it is a problem for both parties as it causes a breach in the relationship and/or discord in the community.

The sin is not just what has been done or said when confronted by another. The real sin is the consequence, that what has been done or said has caused a breach in the relationship with another. It has caused a riff in relationships within the community.

The Good News in this passage is that God want us to be reconciled to each other and to God. The truth of sin is that sin keeps us from being reconciled to God and to each other. The sin is not just in sinful acts, but in the ways in which our acts lead to broken relationships with others and therefore with God. Therefore, we work for reconciliation by listening to understand the issues that divide us and keep us from understanding each other and being reconciled to God.

Let us listen to understand. To understand how relationships become broken so we may be reconciled to others and to God.