

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost-September 10, 2023

Introduction to themes for the Day:

It's as if someone hit the 'fast forward' on our lectionary schedule of readings. It's not as if the stuff between last Sunday and today is filler. Jesus is transfigured, his opponents push back against the way he lives his life, his followers start squabbling over who gets to be the head boy in God's realm.

Today Jesus speaks again to the church about relationships- With Jesus it's always life for the sake of others and especially the most vulnerable among us.

Gospel Reading Matthew 18:15-20

15“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. 16But 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. 17If 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. 18Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19Again, 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. 20For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Sermon:

You've heard the one about the person rescued from a desert island after many years. The castaway had built three improvised shelters. The rescuers were curious. The first was home. The second a church. “What's that third building”, the rescuers want to know. “Oh, that's my old church.”

Conflict is inevitable even in church. The process that Jesus outlines for resolving disputes is grounded in Jesus' whole life dedicated to reconciliation and care for the vulnerable. If we follow Jesus, that's where we're headed too.

Matthew urges the church to remember what it's about. Maybe a firm grasp of our identity is more the order of the day. So let's lay parts of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount alongside today's Gospel reading and see what rubs off.

Several months ago, we explored the beatitudes where God announces blessing and relief to the most vulnerable; people on the verge of despair, people oppressed by systems that enrich the already rich, those who mourn, and those who yearn for a just and peaceable world. At the time, we said the rest of Matthew's Gospel can be seen through the lens of these Beatitudes. One preacher suggests imagining Jesus sitting in our council and staff meetings. I'd ask "and what if he brings those beatitudes along with Him?"

Remember Jesus saying to the crowds that they (as in all y'all) are salt of the earth? When salt loses its fundamental properties of saltiness, it's good for pavement and that's about it. When we try to be anything other than what we are, we lose our saltiness for the sake of the world.

Jesus also says we're light in the world—and we can't put light on the subject when it's hidden underneath the laundry basket.

How the church treats its own and the rest of the world, becomes one of the ways we're known. The sheer number of jokes about church fights over things like the colour of carpeting or the brand of coffee served at coffee hour suggests we fail quite often.

Jesus envisions and enacts—and embodies a community contrasting others that like to throw their weight around to get their way. When Jesus talks of the kingdom of God he describes communities of forgiveness and care for the vulnerable.

As we figure out how to get along, and how to love our neighbour, we're called into being salt and light. It's the thing we say when we baptize someone into the church

"Let your light so shine that others see your good works, and glorify your Father in Heaven. " Amen.