

**Date: September 6, 2020**

**Scripture: Matthew 18:15-20**

**Title: FORGIVE AS CHRIST FORGIVES**

A veteran American League baseball umpire Bill Guthrie was working behind the plate one afternoon, and the catcher, for the visiting team, was repeatedly protesting his calls. Guthrie endured this for a number of innings, and then called a halt and said softly to the catcher, "Son, you've been a big help to me in calling balls and strikes today, and I appreciate it. But I think I've got the hang of it now, so I'm going to ask you to go to the clubhouse, and show whoever's there, how to take a shower."

All of us have encountered someone with whom it's difficult to get along.

The famous dramatist George Bernard Shaw, and the legendary Sir Winston Churchill, had several disagreements. There's a famous episode where Shaw once sent two tickets to Churchill, to the opening night of one of his plays, with instructions for Churchill, to "bring a friend, if you have one."

Churchill sent the tickets back, because he was busy opening night. He said he would come on "the second night," and I quote, "if there is one."

**Anywhere there are human beings, there are disagreements, conflict, arguments, maybe all out wars.** It's been true in every generation since Cain and Abel.

Years ago, a large statue of Christ was erected high in the Andes on the border between Argentina and Chile. Many of you are familiar with that statue. Called "Christ of the Andes," the statue symbolizes a pledge between the two countries that as long as the statue stands, there will be peace between Chile and Argentina. Ironically, shortly after the statue was erected, the Chileans began to protest that they had been slighted by the placement of the statue. The issue was, the statue has its back turned to Chile.

Fortunately, just when tempers were at their highest in Chile, a Chilean newspaperman saved the day. In an editorial, that not only satisfied the people, but made them laugh, he simply said, "The people of Argentina need more watching over than the Chileans." Somehow, that humorous comment, calmed the populace.

Strife has always been with us. Would you believe that it even happens in churches? Some would say, it especially happens in church.

**Today's lesson from Matthew's Gospel, deals with disagreeable people in church.** Jesus said, "If your brother or sister sins against you, Go and tell them their fault, between you and them alone . . ."

Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "If you are offering your gift at the altar and remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift . . ."

In other words, regardless of who's at fault, when a relationship within the body of Christ is broken, get it mended as quickly as possible!

Jesus puts the matter even more strongly in today's lesson. He says, "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they

listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” In other words, they would probably be cast out of the church.

Today, we don’t cast folks out of church very often. For one thing, where would we draw the line? Murder? Adultery? Using crude language? Smoking? Criticizing the pastor? Well, maybe that last one . . .

Just kidding! According to Scripture, we are all sinners. If we start casting out people because of their sins, we’re going to have a very small church.

No, the answer is not exclusion. The answer is, to build a church, that’s so loving, so committed, that people grow in their commitment to Christ, and to one another. We want a church where people are built up, not cast out.

But, the question I want to ask is, why was Jesus so committed to unity in the church? Evangelist Kenneth Copeland, on his website, lists 20 scriptures urging unity in the church. It was one of Christ’s most important themes. But why did it occupy so much of Christ’s teachings?

**I believe, it’s because the church meets a need in society, that no other organization meets.** When the church really is the church, it touches people’s lives, in a way, no other institution can.

Author Max Lucado, in a new book of devotions titled, *God Is with You Every Day*, tells about a gentleman in Africa named Bzuneh Tulema.

Just two years ago Tulema was the town drunk in his hometown of Adama, South Africa. He and his wife both were so consumed with alcohol that they farmed out their kids to neighbors.

But then, they came to the attention of some local church people. Members of an area church, began bringing them food and clothing. They invited them to worship with them. Tulema wasn’t interested but his wife, Bililie, was.

Slowly she became aware of her less than desirable situation and she recognized her need for Christ. It took much longer for Tulema to recognize his need. One night after a heavy bout of drinking, Tulema stumbled and fell so hard that he made a terrible gash to his head. He was found lying helpless in a gully. Fortunately, friends from the church surrounded him with the love of Jesus. Lucado says, Tulema hasn’t touched a drop since. When the church really is the church, it meets needs, that no other group in society meets.

**That’s because the church at its best, deals not with people’s symptoms, but with the causes of their problems.** Other organizations, other institutions, deal primarily with the symptoms. The police, they deal with symptoms, even prisons, unfortunately, deal with symptoms. Welfare organizations deal with symptoms. To a certain extent, even hospitals deal with symptoms. But the church, is called to get at the heart of the matter.

When a person is depressed, we don’t go to that person to just cheer him up, we want to get to the heart, of what’s causing that depression? When we see the alcoholic,

we don't simply try to argue with him/her, or convince him/her, that drinking is bad for him/her, we try to find out what he or she is running from.

When we discover a promiscuous teenager, who has sacrificed his or her self-respect, on the altar of peer acceptance, our task is not to condemn, but to counsel, in a loving way. The body of Jesus Christ is not only to deal with symptoms, but with causes of those symptoms. We see humanity's basic problem, as being that of sin, that of a broken relationship with God. We recognize, that humanity doesn't so much have a problem, as humanity is the problem.

Let me tell you a true story, of a young lady, who needed people to see her, real need. At fifteen years of age, she came home one evening, to find that her father had hung himself, in a tree, in their front yard. It seems that her mother, approximately 35 years old, had become involved with a 21-year-old man. The girl's father found out about it, and in despair, he ended his life.

A short time later the mother married the young man, so now the fifteen-year-old girl had a 21-year-old stepfather. One night in the subsequent months, her new stepfather broke into her room and sexually assaulted this young girl, whereby she became pregnant and bore a young son. But, to top it all off, her mother blamed her for the assault.

The emotional impact, of the accumulation of these events, drove this young woman nearly insane. She ended up running away from home, carrying with her, a tremendous amount of resentment, towards her mother, her stepfather, and all men in general. Here's this now sixteen-year-old girl, with a baby boy, who feels like the world is against her, who feels like no one can be trusted, and who sees no reason to go on living. Would it surprise you to know, that she became involved with alcohol and drugs, and lived a life of a prodigal?

Then one day, after five years of this kind of living, when she was about 21, she met a group of young people, who had the love of Jesus Christ in their hearts. They surrounded her with Christ's love, and for the first time, helped her realize, that there's a higher meaning to life, that there are people whom she can trust. She realized, that not everyone was out to manipulate, or exploit her. So, she gave her life to Jesus Christ, and became a joyful, radiant witness.

The change in her life was dramatic. She gained full custody of her son. And she even went to court, and gained full custody of her younger brother, who was five by this time, just one year younger than her own son, he was her brother, by her stepfather and her mother. His parents were living somewhere in a truck, and had pretty much abandoned the boy. So now, she was raising two boys, without much income, and studying to be a nurse, because she believed, that's what God wanted her to do. Even though life was a constant struggle, and a heavy burden for her, she wore a smile on her face, and a radiant look. She had learned, that life can be victorious, by the grace of Jesus Christ.

This is what happens, when people are exposed to authentic Christian living. **Now, let me ask you a question: where will such faith be found, without the church of Jesus Christ?** We're not perfect, but we serve a God, who is Perfect Love. And God

calls us, to go out into the community, and find people, who are hurting, and to show them God's love.

Not everyone we meet, will be easy to love. Some of us, are not easy to love, but this is our mission, to show the love of Jesus to everyone we meet, at work, at play, within our family, within our community, even within our church. We are responsible for one another. Even more importantly, we are the body of Christ, in service to the world. We are called to love one another, and to forgive one another, even as Christ has loved and forgiven us. So let us love by Trusting, Believing, and having an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.