

Sermon for September 6, 2014
Matthew 18:15-20

What I'm going to talk about today may come as a surprise for some of you, but I think that for most of us we realize that there is conflict in the church. As we can see from this passage; there's been conflict in the church as long as there's been a church. One of the reasons there's conflict is the fact that the church is made up of sinful human beings and on this side of eternity we aren't always going to get it right.

Just a couple of weeks ago Jesus told Peter that he was the rock on which he was going to build the church. Let's take a look at this rock that Jesus built the church upon. Peter, he walks on water and then loses his faith and begins to sink like a rock. He shouts out that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of the living God and then a few verses later Jesus is calling him Satan! He's too proud to have Jesus wash his feet. He claims he would die before he would deny knowing Jesus and a few hours later Peter denies knowing Jesus three times! This is the rock on which Jesus started the church. And we're just like Peter—both saint and sinner all rolled into one!

Another reason there's conflict in the church is the very fact that God has created us differently—each of us with our own strengths and weaknesses; with our own likes and dislikes; with our own personalities; with different sets of priorities. We aren't all going to react the same way to every problem or situation. What upsets you might not upset me; what concerns some of you might not concern the others. It's no wonder there's conflict in the church. I'm amazed there isn't more of it!

I came across this story while I was reading for my sermon prep and it caught my attention because the people involved were from Sleepy Eye, Minnesota and they were part of a mime ministry. The gentleman telling the story was the driver of their van and as he tells it they were a group of six people who had different senses of time and urgency.

One day he felt a strong sense of urgency because he thought they were cutting it too close and he didn't like rushing to somewhere that he didn't know well. Two women in their group had been sitting talking and seemed to ignore everyone else rushing around them and loading the van. He was angry and snapped at them telling them that the group needed to go and he wished they would be more responsible. The women asked for a couple extra minutes and he said that the group needed to go right that instant. They all got into the van feeling tense and frustrated.

The next day one of the women came to him and asked to talk with him. She very quietly told him that she had been going through a major problem the day before and was in the middle of getting a listening ear from another team member. She said she felt crushed by his harsh tone and abruptness, but later realized the pressure of being the driver. Not wanting her anger to fester, she told him about her feelings and expressed her hope that they could work it out and communicate better in the future. This was done with such great care that it was easy for him to apologize without losing face. That day he learned that others could have legitimate perspectives different from his for the same situation. But

the bigger revelation from that day was that someone could be angry with him and not hurt back!¹

Yes there is conflict in the church, but it isn't conflict that kills the church—it's how we deal with that conflict that determines the type of community we want to be. Do we talk with one another about our problems or do we talk to everyone else but the person we have the disagreement with? And when we talk with that person do we go trying to prove we are right or do we go to truly listen to our brother or sister? Do we go with our hearts full of forgiveness because it's more important to reconcile than to be right?

We all want community, but authentic Christian community doesn't come easy—it's hard work but when it happens it's like having a piece of heaven here on earth! Take a few moments right now and think of someone that you've had a conflict with—a family member, a friend, a coworker, a member of this congregation. I want you to picture that person and then say a prayer for them and for your relationship; asking God to give you ears to listen and words to forgive.

¹ Story from bloomingcactus: Matthew 18:15-20 "How to Get Along" for Sunday, September 4