

September 10, 2023: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**~

“To forgive and agree together.”

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com

Scripture Reading: Matthew 18 v 15 - 20

1. Introduction:

One of the most difficult things in life, for many of us, is to say I am sorry. To apologize for what had been said or done that hurt another person means one has to think about one's actions, face them and take on the courage to go to the person and make things right. It is so awkward to do, and I have seen that in my own mediation work, and my own interactions with people, and I am sure for many it is true as well. It is easier to let things go and hope one will not need to face that person again and go on with life. It is true though, that an unresolved issue is not always beneficial for one's health and wellbeing, and not good for everyone involved.

2. Christ, the Mediator:

In our passage Jesus describes for His disciples a process they must follow within their community of faith to deal with issues and sins that are hurting the community. First, He says, go in private to the one who sinned against you and sort things out. If the person listens to you, you have won over that person. To win over the person meant winning them from their sinful behaviors, which should not be tolerated in the community of faith. If the person does not listen, take one or two others with you, He says. In this case two or three witnesses were crucial in establishing and clarifying the matter, making sure that it is understood by everyone as something that needs to be addressed. If the person still does not listen to them, he or she needs to be brought to the church and a public statement would then be made about the issue, and the church would then discuss and decide what needed to happen to that person. If the person refused to listen to the church, they should be treated like a pagan or tax collector, which during Jesus' time, were those who were rejected by the communities. Jesus was indeed a good mediator, because for Him a process

of listening and understanding, and clarifying the issues that caused problems, was important. He also emphasized that a private conversation first was necessary, and that not too many people be brought in at that point, because it could have a negative impact on the conversation. There is clearly power in bringing two or three witnesses to help with the situation. What is interesting is that He then counseled them about bringing the person to the whole church if nothing else worked in the private conversations. The final option was to inform the person that he or she was not welcome in the church setting, because of their sinful behavior which must not be tolerated. This is a serious last option, presented to the disciples by Jesus Himself. It is clear that for Him the nature of the Christian gathering was a place of peace and love and mutual understanding, not a place to perpetuate sinful behaviors, because it is not acceptable in His eyes.

3. Be in agreement with one another:

Jesus then declares in verse 18 that, “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” It is about tying and untying things. This expression was used in Rabbinical literature, declaring to everyone what is and what is not permitted. It is about the things and issues which needed to be untied, not the people as such, says R.T. France in his commentary on Matthew. The issues and things that caused the problems needed to be addressed, but they needed to have mercy on the people who did those things, until it became clear that those individuals were unwilling to make things right, and needed to be removed from the church gathering. Sinful behaviors must not go on without being dealt with in the church of Christ, He says, because it is the church of Christ.

Jesus then expands this notion of being unified to the practice of prayer. When two or three people are praying together, they must come together in agreement on something to bring to God in prayer. Two or three people were enough in Jesus’ mind to bring the concerns to a place of agreement, and in that agreement they could in good faith bring their concerns to God. But more, they would come into the presence of Christ, and call on the Name of Christ, making their unity a unity in Christ, which gave their prayer the authority it needed to access the heart of God.

4. Conclusion

Jesus needed His followers to be unified, and that those in His circle free themselves from sinful behaviors, issues, and things that hurt the faith community. His message and life's purpose were to bring love and forgiveness and healing to those He encountered, and that must be the purpose of the church of Christ. To come to God in prayer, means that we must come in a unified manner, with nothing that stands in between us as we come to the throne of God. That means we need to make right with the person or persons whom we have issues with, or whom we feel had hurt us. This is the simple message of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Body of Christ. Go and make right, forgive one another, be free from those things that bind you from being the person I want you to be. This is the will of God. It is not easy to do what Christ is asking from us. But in the realm of Christian community, we have no other choice. We must follow Christ in all He asks from us. That is love and peace and joy... May God help us in this call from Christ this morning. Amen.