

Scripture:

Psalm 149

Matthew 18:15-20

“Talk it out.”

God is with us.

God is for us.

And God forgives us.

No matter what we do --- no matter who we are.

No matter what we neglect to do --- forget to do --- are too weak to do --- shy away from.

No matter what --- God is with us --- God is for us ----- and God forgives us.

He loves us unconditionally and always will ---- that is the very nature of God --- and nothing can ever change this.

The Bible wasn't simply given to us in order to try to help us be better --- nor was it given to us for us to simply learn from others who tried to be better.

The Bible isn't chiefly about us and what we should be doing.

And the Bible isn't mainly about Paul and what he did ----- or mainly about Abraham --- or Moses --- or Jeremiah --- and what Abraham or Moses or Jeremiah did.

The Bible is about God and what He has done --- and continues to do.

The Bible shows us the great Acts of God --- it is all about the greatness of God.

Even a passage like ours for today from Matthew's gospel --- which at first appears to be a set of directions for certain circumstances --- even this passage turns out to be all about God --- and His glory.

First and foremost ----Matthew 18 is not a prescribed to do list.

First and foremost Matthew 18 is --- God loves you --- God forgives you ---- and God is forever with you.

Too often unfortunately we take this passage and think of it as a checklist describing exactly what we ought to do should there be disagreements amongst us.

In the NIV the headline for Matthew 18:15-20 is ---- “Dealing with sin in the church”.

“Dealing with sin in the church” ---- maybe --- but there’s a whole lot more going on here than just human sin and how to deal with it.

But for now sin --- and how to deal with it according to Matthew 18:15-20.

Step one ----- point out the fault to the person when they are all alone --- go to them when no one else is around ---- when it is just the two of you and point out their mistake --- their sin.

That’s step one.

And if that works well then all is well --- and there is no need to proceed to step number two.

But if that doesn’t work --- step two is to take one or two others along and try again to speak with the offender.

Go to the person --- with one or two other trusted friends --- and try for a second time to point out their mistake ----- and hopefully this time it will work out and you can work things through and get back into a healthy and trusting relationship once again.

That’s step two ----- see verse 16.

And of course if step two works then there is no need to go any further --- disregard step three.

But ---- if after coming together with a small group of trusted friends there are still unresolved issues ---- It has to be taken to another level.

Step three ----- which is ---- as verse 27 says ---- tell it to the church.

“.”Tell it to the church --- what does that really mean? --- tell it to the church.

Does it mean tell it to the elders?

Does it mean tell it to the whole church --- as in stand up in front of everyone and talk out whatever it is that has caused a riff between two ---- or perhaps even more people by now.

Step two may have caused some people to take sides and there could be a riff between more than just the first 2 people involved.

The whole message --- if you read this passage as a set of guidelines and instruction in the event of conflict ----- the whole message --- can be summed up as ----- “Talk it out.”

“Talk it out.”

Talk it out with the person one on one.

If this works --- and you are heard --- and there is forgiveness then the problem is resolved.

But if this doesn't work --- if there is still tension --- unresolved issues.

Then it's on to step two --- which is ---- Talk it out again.

Only this time have a few more people in on the conversation --- trusted friends --- other believers.

And if step 2 fails --- the solution --- the guidance ----- is --- “Talk it out.”

Talk it out --- for a third time.

Only this time it isn't just you --- the offender --- and a few trusted friends -- - this time it's all of you plus --- “the church”.

In other words ----- talk it out again --- with even more people present --- and no doubt even more words spoken.

From a strictly instructional level ----- the instructions are ----- “talk it out” - -- “talk it out” --- “talk it out”.

Talk it out until it is worked out.

Which of course is helpful --- very helpful ----- and exactly what we should do when we come into conflict with one another.

“Talk it out” ----- is what this passage says --- and talk it out is exactly what we should do.

But this passage isn’t just about what we should do.

In fact this passage isn’t primarily about what we should do.

Like all passages in the Bible --- this one is primarily all about God --- and His glory --- and His majesty ---- and His love --- and beauty and wonder and awe.

And the prime attributes of God that are held up before us today in Matthew 18 are forgiveness and presence.

First forgiveness --- one of the great Christian biggies ---- forgiveness.

A biggie and also a hardy --- difficult to do --- very difficult to do sometimes.

Verse 19 ---- after all this talk of conflict and sin --- and what to do if there is hurt and conflict and sin in verses 15-18 --- we have these words.

“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.”

“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.” --- that’s verse 19.

And it has to do with forgiveness.

It isn't just if 2 people agree on something and then ask God for it ---- it will happen.

It's not wish hard enough together and it will happen --- that's not the point here.

We know this because every year since 1967 at least 2 leaf fans have asked and wished hard --- very hard ---- for the Leafs to win the Stanley Cup and it still hasn't happened yet. ---- soon perhaps but not yet.

The line doesn't mean if two people want something badly enough and ask together then they will get it.

This line means if 2 people who are hurt or have disagreement about something if they truly want to find a way to move forward and they truly seek forgiveness and ask God for help ---- it will come.

If they try to work it out one on one and that doesn't work ----- if they try to work it out with a couple of trusted friends hearing them out and that doesn't work ---- if they go to other members of the church for more help trying to work it out and that still doesn't work --- as long as they genuinely both want the same thing --- forgiveness --- forgiveness and not just ---- "I was right and they were wrong!" ---- as long as they go to God seeking forgiveness together --- they will get it.

Forgiveness ---- that's the first glorious thing about God that this passage drives home.

And the second is His continued presence.

His continued presence.

"For where two or three are gathered in my name --- there I am with them."

God is with us whenever we come together in His name.

Forgiveness comes not by human effort ---- it comes by God being present -- - God standing among us as we genuinely seek reconciliation together.

Talk it out ----- because when we do God is there with us and God will work it out through us ---- and forgiveness and peace --- shalom ---- will come.

Matthew 18 ----- isn't just about human beings following a handful of steps in order to achieve a goal.

It's really about God --- and how He is with us and how He forgives us --- and how this enables us to live together in community in harmony ---- even when disagreements arise.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God ----- as we just sang together a few minutes ago -----

Seek ye first the kingdom of God --- and His righteousness ---- and all these things shall be added unto you.

In other words seek His presence --- seek His forgiveness ---- seek new life in Christ --- and all the rest will fall into place.

We are so often so ---- "us centered" --- that there is very little room for God to work His way in.

Paul reminds us in Philippians 2 verse 7 that Jesus emptied Himself --- so that He could be filled with God's goodness.

And Paul goes on to say that we are to imitate and emulate Christ --- emptying ourselves of us --- our wants ---- our desires ---- our needs as we define them ---- so that we can be filled by God ---- by Christ --- by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible isn't about us and what we should be doing.

The Bible isn't about Abraham and what he did.

The Bible isn't about Moses and Jeremiah and Deborah --- and what they did.

The Bible is about God.

And the Bible is about what God did with and through Abraham ----- and Moses and Deborah and Jeremiah and so on.

This passage from Matthew 18 isn't primarily about the steps that we are to do when faced with conflict --- step one ---- go just one on one --- and then if that doesn't work step two ---- you and the other and a few trusted friends ---- and then if that doesn't work tell the church ---- that's not really the heart of this passage.

The heart of this passage is --- the very last 2 verses ----- “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.” ----- and ----- “Where two or three are gathered in my name --- there I am also.”

Forgiveness through and because of God.

Gifts of God --- reconciliation ---- forgiveness --- when we come together in His name seeking unity --- that's what this passage is all about.

Our dispositions matter at least as much as our efforts --- misguided effort rarely leads to success.

Forgiveness isn't about following a set pattern of behaviour ---- follow steps one --- two --- and three – and you'll get where you want to get ----- that's not what's being held up here ---- that's all about human effort.

Life is not ---- “Do the right things and you will be rewarded accordingly.”

Sometimes we do the right thing and get wrecked in the process.

The Christian life is all about --- “God is good and gracious and merciful --- beyond measure --- follow Him and things will work out --- follow Him and you will get rewards beyond what this world can ever offer.”

God's grace and love and mercy are overflowing --- beyond just any 3 step - ----- 8 step --- 12 step --- or any step approach.

The key here is that it is only after we have truly discovered God's forgiveness for ourselves that we can ever extend it to another.

It is only after we have truly discovered God's forgiveness for ourselves that we can ever extend it to another.

Put another way ---- withholding forgiveness --- not extending forgiveness to a fellow human being always raises questions as to whether one has ever really discovered God's forgiveness for themselves in the first place.

Step one ---- two ---- and three ----- go and talk --- and go and talk again --- and then go and talk again ----- mean very very little unless we have first experienced and accepted God's forgiveness for ourselves.

Talk it ---- and talk it out again and again if necessary.

But all the talking in the world won't get us anywhere unless we first have experienced and accepted and are acting out of the great forgiveness of God.

Jesus never once intended that His words here in Matthew 18 would be seen as a legalistic template --- simply a set of rules designed for a certain situation.

Instead it's mercy and grace and forgiveness --- God's mercy and grace and forgiveness that permeate and influence and rule the day --- not do this and then do that in order to achieve this or that --- that's cheques and balances.

And God works in grace not cheques and balances --- forgiveness works with grace not cheques and balances.

We are called to be gracious and forgiving and loving just as God is.

We are called to empty ourselves so that God can enter in and save the situation from disaster.

We are called to seek God's will and not our own.

Then and only then can we ever approximate all that God has in store for us.

The minute we're able to stop looking just for what we need and what we want --- in worship --- in scripture ----- in relationships ---- in life ---- we

experience that God provides us with everything we could ever want or need --- and then some.

Matthew 18 isn't about getting where we want to go by our own efforts.

Matthew 18 is about how God enables even difficult situations to be opportunity for glory.

“Truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.” ---- means that if we truly want to work things out and we truly want to forgive each other of wrongs --- and get along ----- thanks to God and His forgiveness --- we can.

Once we've experienced and accepted God's love and forgiveness and are no longer just concerned with ---“I'm right and they're wrong” --- anything can be worked through.

And so we gather today not first and foremost simply looking for what we are supposed to do and not do --- be and not be --- because all of that means very little without first a profound experience and appreciation of the goodness and majesty and wonder of God.

Follow this step and then that step and then that step and you'll get where you want to get ----- not so much really.

Stand in awe of the wonder and majesty of God --- and then you will know what to do as He leads you ---- Yes ---- Yes ---- and Yes.

We're generally pretty good with the “Tell me what I need to do” --- part of faith.

But --- the ask me to be dependant --- dependant on God --- ask me to do less and be more dependant ---- that is often a whole lot more difficult.

The ----- ask me to empty myself approach --- the ask me to give up my set of priorities ---- the ask me to rip up my agenda ----- and replace it with God's before I even see His ---- is more of a challenge than just tell me what to do and I'll do it approach.

The scriptures are not exercises in what should we be doing.

Instead ----- the scriptures are invitations into what God is doing.

And so we thank God for all that He reveals to us about Himself in His Holy Word --- The Scriptures ----- and we thank God for all He reveals to us in His Living Word ----- Jesus Christ.

And today in Matthew 18 we are reminded that God always forgives ----- and that God also finds a way to help us extend forgiveness.

God is for us.

God loves us.

God forgives us --- and He demands that we love and forgive others.

“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.” --- and ----
“Where two or three are gathered in my name --- there I am also.”

God is for us ---- and God is with us.

And all will be well.

Amen.