

New Kilpatrick

Sunday 6th September

Podcast

Matthew 18:15-20

Welcome

Hello... Good to be with you and thanks for the invitation to join you... We're into September already... that's almost six months of podcasts... and it has been a pleasure, and will continue to be so as we are intending to continue with the podcasts and phone line services for some time yet... The beauty of the podcast is you can hear it anywhere and as any time... We've heard folk listening while walking the dog, one a hill... last week we heard someone listening to it while sailing up the west coast of Scotland.

And these are good stories to hear... because the gospel is not for church... but for the world... and when we hear these sacred words in the world... we are able to hear them differently... If you were to read the story of the Good Samaritan at the doors of Glasgow City Mission... you hear them differently... and when you hear today's words... about living in community standing in our community... they take on different nuances...

This might even become our local version of the BBC's Travel Show... or perhaps closer to Misadventures of Romesh Ranganathan... Anyway... hearing these words... outside and beyond the institution of the church... sometimes makes more sense of them... which is where we travel today...

Gathering

Where two or three are gathered
Where neighbourhoods and parish
Where poor and hungry
And wealthy and comfortable
Where roads meet and paths cross
Where arguments happen and debate flows
Where coffee is drunk and vegetables bought
Where imagination shapes new worlds from the old
Where something good comes out of the injustices of the past
Where words are used to speak of peace and hope and truth
Where two or three are gathered
There shall grow
The kingdom of God

Prayer

When you hear the words, *Loving God, we give thanks*, we will respond with the words, ***For all you offer us***. Let us turn our hearts and minds to God in prayer. Let us pray.

Creator God,

As the church doors open for the first time in over five months, we welcome a return to what is a bit familiar. Yet for some, the familiar, is now the comforting, and welcoming sound online through the podcast and video. However we move forward, we are grateful for being able to be involved in church through different media, hearing different voices each week and find comfort in what it offers.

Loving God, we give thanks, **for all you offer us**.

As the days become shorter and the nights draw in, we are beginning to see changes in the natural world around us, the fading of the summer flowers, the hedgerow and trees slowly turning from a lush green into their autumnal colours.

Loving God, we give thanks, **for all you offer us**.

In a world where forgiveness and compassion can seem in such short supply, and it is easier to stay angry with each other rather than find the courage to talk, we need to remember your love and forgiveness extends to everyone and you set the example we must follow. Whatever we do and say, you welcome us back.

Loving God, we give thanks, **for all you offer us**.

So today, wherever we are, we come to listen, to ask your forgiveness, to give you thanks, and to share in our time together.

And now as a community in Christ, we say The Lord's Prayer as one voice:

Our Father, who art in heaven
hallowed by thy name.

Thy kingdom come

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory for ever.

Amen.

Reading Introduction

Over the last couple of weeks, we have begun exploring Matthew's Gospel. Today, we turn away from the parables, to teaching for the church members. We have to remember the gospel stories were written for the early church, many years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Today's short passage tells us how to deal with conflict with another

member of the church. In some ways it is comforting to know that there has always been conflict in the church – it has, and never will be, perfect. Disagreements and arguments have caused schisms since the church began, and will continue to do so, in one way or another. In another way, it is sad that such disagreements happen. But we are all human. So here, we are given a straightforward example of what to do in such cases. First, speak with the person who has wronged you. If they do not listen, take one or two others with you, then take it to the church, before finally ostracizing them if need be. However, it seems an odd solution given Jesus talks so much about forgiveness which this passage leads into next week. Let us hear the reading in full now from Matthew 18: 15-21.

Reading Matthew 18:15-20 (Catherine Cameron)

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.”

Reflection

Where two or three are gathered in my name... there will be conflict... Not quite the exact quote... but perhaps a more realistic experience...

Don't you just love the bible... for lots of reasons of course... but for being honest... I would join the church that is shaped round these stories of failure... I'd join the church illustrated in these passages we read... that admit to being less than their calling... communities having problems... struggling with their humanity... in this god-shaped... love-centred... chaos... of doing community...

Let's rewind a tad... and see where tis passage has come from... and then why it might be life for us today...

But, as we know... nothing in the Bible is randomly said... With most passages... there is a back story and today's back story is... Matthew's church... Matthew the gospel writer's faith community... was having problems... This was a wee church in Antioch... they were growing away from their old identity as Jews... and moving into what was becoming known as Christianity... It was quite existential moment...

Perhaps we are sensitive to that today... for we are having our own existential crisis... wondering who we are... and what we are becoming...

Matthew's community didn't find it easy... I certainly hope they didn't... because it meant something to be Jews... and it meant something to be Christian... and changing from one to the other... must have hurt... unless it meant nothing... But hardly had the church begun... when it was falling out with itself... O joy!... It's actually such a relief to say that...

I don't know if you ever watched the TV sitcom Cheers... I don't remember much being so young... except the theme tune... and the lines...

Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got... taking a break from all your worries sure would help a lot... wouldn't you like to get away... sometimes you want to go... where everyone knows your name...

Not sure a bar in a church basement would be everyone's cup of tea... though under coronavirus regulations... at the moment... we would be allowed more folk!... however it is the sentiment... the idea of being community... Matthew's church was finding it wasn't as simple as that... and they've remembered this story from Jesus' life because it spoke directly into their situation... That's why it's there...

These gospel writers aren't historians... and they aren't journalists... who are simply reporting stuff that happened... They have a purpose why what is remembered is remembered... Matthew's community was struggling...

But what we have is not some programme of restoration... but what is being encouraged... between the lines... is an honest dialogue that speaks out against behaviour and decisions that harm others...

It illustrates how we make room... and hear... and walk alongside... those who are being disempowered... who are coming worse off... who are being made vulnerable... and for the whole community to notice... and hear...

It's a lesson for way beyond the church... in the world... If we are rebuilding communities and economies and neighbourhoods... exploring what it means to be who we are, now... it is these insights and lessons we are invited to hear...

But... and here is the grace-filled beauty of this passage... "If the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" so it reads Jesus said... Not the most welcoming verse... and a dangerous verse taken out of context...

But who was it Jesus welcomed first into the kingdom... who he called down from trees... fed at tables?... Gentiles and tax collectors... One of the Bible's beautiful ironies... Don't you love the Bible because even when it tries to be divisive... it stumbles into grace and compassion and love...

So in our time... in this version of wondering who we are... and the fall out of Covid... and our divided communities... read the Bible's story... and you can't help but fall into

grace and hope and a generous and gracious model for where two or three are gathered... doing community...

Contemporary Reading

Two or three
Enough to fall out with each other
Two or three points of view
Two or three prejudices
Two or three fears
It is the making of a schism

Two or three
Ears to listen
Two or three minutes to hear
Two or three moments of respect
To consider
And debate
It is the making of community

Two or three shades of the same colour
Two or three courses to a meal
Two or three books in the bible
Two or three states of water
Two or three in the trinity of God
Diversity is a creative gift
Variety is a divine requirement
Two or three make a community
It's colour
Its strength
Its ability to learn and grow

Two or three
Enough to evolve and thrive
Enough to flourish and bloom
Enough to make space for two or three more
Enough to say
where two or three are gathered
"There I am among you"

Prayer

Let us come together once again in prayer. Let us pray.

Loving God, we are, and never will be, perfect. Fallouts and disagreements are a common place in all walks of life between family, friends, colleagues and even

strangers. However, you ask us to let go of the anger, resentment, and bitterness this can cause over time. Today, may we find a way to forgive, to move forward, and release those emotions that hold us back from following you.

As we come back into the building to worship, may we remember those who do not feel able to do so, whose health precludes them from returning, who are still anxious about being in larger gatherings, and for whom returning will be a painful experience because of loss and bereavement. May we continue to support everyone in all situations and give them the time and space to be with you just where they are.

Creator God, in this new month, may we find time to stop and see the wonder of your world in the colours and sounds and sights that surround us. May we find a place to just be, to give way to our resentments, our anxieties, our pain and find a peace within you.

And now in the silence, we bring our own prayers to you, prayers for those who need your guidance and love. In the silence, hear us.

These are our prayers for your church today. Amen.

Benediction

May we go now
Further into community
And where just two or three
Carry grace and generosity
There will be the kingdom

And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
The Love of God
And the common life of the holy spirit
Be with us all
Evermore

Thanks

For letting us be with you today - thanks. We always hope the community we are continually shaping, for it is never an end point but a continual journey, is always moving closer to being like the kingdom. We're doing that in more creative ways now: yes, church services have begun again, but our community is mainly online or phone calls and you can meet us there at nkchurch.org.uk. There you will find podcasts and YouTube services, daily prayer, projects, zoom groups, zoom day school, and a bundle of other things.

If you would like to come to church services in the sanctuary, and you feel safe in doing so, we invite you to phone the church office on 0141 942 8827 to book a pew, by the

Thursday evening of the week you wish to attend, and we will call you back on the Friday to confirm.

But our worship remains here as a podcast and on the phone and it is a delight to see you. Well I can't see you, which is always a shame. One day soon hopefully. But we hope to join you again next time whenever you are and whenever that might be. Take care and stay safe.