

Confrontation and Communication
Matthew 18:15-20
Sunday, September 6, 2020
Beargrass Christian Church

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Derby Day on Labor Day weekend? Are you kidding me?
 - 1. But the win, place, and show must go on.
 - 2. Did you hold your horses—or actually celebrate Derby 2020?
- B. And despite the “pew pressure,” I struggled with the decision.
 - 1. Should I Honor the tradition? Tiz the Law? Is it Enforceable?
 - 2. The annual “Running of the Puns” is on the first Sunday in May.
 - 3. Surely, I should not save them until September?
- C. As you Grace Fans know, I go to great lengths not to horse around with any Derby dialogue during the message.
 - 1. Heaven nose, that might stirrup the urge to trot out a paddock-full of pony puns—which could have its ups and downs.
 - 2. Some neigh-sayers would nag me about it later.
 - 3. There might be a parade of painful posts on social media?
- D. So it would be-hoove me not to make horses the mane emphasis.
 - 1. That could end up being a tail of whoa—a real stretch.
 - 2. You might scratch your heads or tap your shoes a bit.
 - 3. You might even run from your rowses and leave the place.
- E. Some of you would not have a Winning Impression.
 - 1. You might think I am un-stable and never show up again.
 - 2. So, I will not saddle you with a Thousand Words when some of you are Major Fed up with it already.
 - 3. The odds are that you could not take it...furlong.
 - 4. You would have to rein me in so I don’t gallop off on the wrong track or head out of the wrong gate.
 - 5. It would be a night-mare and a gamble to filly you up with an over-dosage of foal-ish figures of speech.
- F. So, I promise to buck the urge to whip out any puns or jockey any Derby words into the message on the spur of the moment.
 - 1. You might put on blinders and miss the twin-spiring sermon.
 - 2. You could get colt feelings, mount up some resistance, rail against me, tell your mudder, or slap me on the backside.
 - 3. You might start a turf war, turn away, or leave the Church-ill.
 - 4. That is exacta what I do not want!
- G. And the message does not refer to horses, so it would be a longshot and not Authentic to try to make any connections—so I won’t.

II. TODAY’S PASSAGE IS PERPLEXING...AND PROMISING.

- A. Jesus expresses concern for the health of the church.
 - 1. Today’s text deals with issues of sinfulness, confrontation, repentance, and judgment within the faith community.
 - 2. Jesus could be speaking in personal or in corporate terms.

3. It could be “you” individually—or it could be the TRSV—the Texan Revised Standard Version—“y’all.”
 4. Either way, he says if you have a concern talk to each other.
 5. If that doesn’t work, bring in some non-biased witnesses to help.
 6. If that doesn’t work, get a larger group to address the matter.
- B. It is interesting that Jesus does not get specific.
1. Other biblical authors like Paul love long lists of lousy behavior.
 2. But Jesus seems to leave the matters of misbehavior more open.
 3. He infers that anything that is unhealthy is subject to scrutiny.
 4. There does not seem to be a distinction between “personal and church business”—people are to live with integrity.
 5. Unaddressed unhealthy behavior compromises the church.
- C. A current example is the unfolding story of in-Falwell-delity.
1. Is this what we expect from the leader of a university?
 2. Has their behavior tarnished the image of the institution?
 3. What about the \$10 million punishment package?
 4. Are people saying: “If this is Christianity, you can keep it?”
 5. We all fall short—there are times to be confronted and confront.
 6. Most of us won’t make the headlines—but our behavior matters.
- D. Let’s proceed to verse 17 and become more puzzled and perplexed!
1. Jesus says that if the confronted don’t shape up—just let them go—treat them like the unclean Gentiles and tax collectors!
 2. Some of us are OK with that, but is that what he really means?
- E. Again, the context is important as we consider Jesus’ words.
1. What are the two parables that serve as bookends and prop up Jesus’ proposals about how to work things out in the church?
 2. On the front end is the parable of the lost sheep and the message that it is worth risking the flock to go out and save the lost one.
 3. On the backside is the story about the unforgiving servant and the consequences of withholding forgiveness.
- F. So, we return to our question from a couple of weeks ago.
1. What would Jesus do—how did he treat Gentiles and tax collectors and other outsiders and people with problems?
 2. He welcomed them and ate with them and loved them.
- G. Then the last few verses, 18-20, offer some important promises.
1. Sometimes these words are used selfishly.
 2. I have heard people say: “It says right here that if two of us agree about anything—then God will do it for us!”
 3. But we are talking about confrontations and communications.
 4. So, this is a promise of power for the health of the church.
 5. The language used is similar to the legalese of 1st century out-of-court disputes—there is freedom in the proceedings.
 6. And there is a promise of a Presence.
 7. God’s approval is grounded in Jesus’ declaration: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”
 8. When Jesus is present then there should be a greater opportunity for a healthy and productive outcome.

III. THIS READING REMAINS REMARKABLY RELEVANT.

- A. Do you recall a time when you experienced something like this?
1. Have you ever had a conflict, conversation, and resolution?
 2. Have you ever gone to the “second step” to get other opinions?
 3. Although Jesus’ words refer to church life, they get lived out every day in a variety of settings and circumstances.
- B. For instance, it happens among children—especially siblings.
1. Ellen and I delight in watching our triplet grandboys interact.
 2. Generally, the “Three Wee Kings” are three wee angels and get along.
 3. But now and then we will see an occasional squabble.
 4. Aiden is usually independent and does his own thing.
 5. But Theo and Bryson get into it once in a while.
 6. Theo likes to grab things from Bryson—and Bryson melts down.
 7. So, an intervention or distraction is needed from time to time.
- C. Confrontations happen between spouses.
1. I run from conflict like it is the plague—a lot of that has to do with growing up with parents who fought way too often.
 - a. They could go days without speaking—and my sister and I never knew if it was “safe” to come out or even come home.
 - b. And they often put us in the middle as “mediators.”
 2. But then I married Ellen almost 40 years ago.
 - a. You have heard the advice, “Don’t go to bed if you’re angry.”
 - b. Ellen won’t even let me leave the room if I’m upset!
 - c. When it comes to conflict, she makes us work on it right away—which I hate—but which I really love about her.
- D. Did you see the story about the couple in Ecuador?
1. Their families disapproved of their marriage nearly 80 years ago, but now they are a world record-breaking couple.
 2. Julio and Waldramina Tapia have lived a combined 215 years.
 3. I wonder if they have ever had an argument?
 4. When asked about their formula for staying together they said that it was the result of love plus maturity plus mutual respect.
- E. Believe it or not, conflicts even pop up at Beargrass at times.
1. For the most part, things have been pretty peaceful.
 2. But we are a diverse bunch—theologically and politically.
 3. So, we have different points of view and perspectives—and we give thanks for that and love and respect each other...usually.
 4. During these quaran-times, I confess that I miss the hugs, hellos and sermon evaluations that happen at the door after worship.
 5. One day someone said, “That was a prophetic message today.”
 6. I said, “Oh...I didn’t think it was all that prophetic.”
 7. He said, “I didn’t say prophetic...I said pathetic.”
 8. And our conversation continued...
- F. But that is one of the things I miss about not being “in person.”
1. My colleagues and I have noted how much “church” happens when we are together—even in groups of two or a few.
 2. In the Gathering Space and hallways and parking lot—church happens.

3. A lot of our healing, productive meetings occur in the small meetings before or after the scheduled meetings.
 4. Zoom has been a super tool, but we can't read the body language of the sea of faces on the screen or follow up as easily.
 5. We are missing the power of two or three gathered together.
- G. The church was intended to be bureaucratically streamlined.
1. Jesus says that valid decisions can be made when a few folks with faithful hearts and minds have honest discussions.
 2. We don't always need a consensus or quorum.
 3. We don't always need a standing committee or task force.
 4. We don't always need more hoops and hurdles.
 5. We can transform the energy of conflict into the joy of ministry!
- H. A pastor encapsulated the can-do and can-do-it-now attitude that the Spirit can inject into a genuine faith community.
1. She said: "If you receive a call to act on an issue concerning faith, God can lay it on your heart in the morning..."
 2. "You can find a partner or team to help you do it by the afternoon—and you can tell us about it the next day."
- I. A powerful example of this at Beargrass is "Pedal Power."
1. There is an awesome article in the latest St. Matthews Magazine.
 2. The first sentence says: "It is amazing to think how one conversation between two individuals can lead to positive change in a community that helps thousands of people."
 3. The team recently repaired and presented its 5000th bicycle!
 4. God works with us to transform our messes into mission!
- J. And maybe Matthew 18 is not about church discipline at all?
1. Could it be that it is an affirmation of God's amazing grace?
 2. God continues to offer us an undeserved place at the table.
 3. God relentlessly call us to return and be fully restored.
 4. Perhaps these words remind us to deal with each other the way God deals with us—with a gracious pursuit to make things right.
- K. I do not have to tell you that we have some daunting challenges and conflicts to face in our lives, community, country and world.
1. There continues to be a lot of very "heavy stuff" in the news.
 2. But I am encouraged that people are coming to the table.
 3. Let us continue to lift up prayers of lament and hope.
 4. Let us continue to pray for peace and the resolution of conflict.
 5. I believe Jesus' words and presence and power can help us now.
- L. A young girl was asked if she was optimistic about the future.
1. She smiled and said, "Absolutely!"
 2. Then she stated matter-of-factly: "I shall see to it personally."
- M. The church can be the place where "see-to-it-personally-people" can come around the Table to "see-to-it-together."
1. And you never know...you never know what might happen...
 2. When two or three are gathered...