

Trinity it is so good to be with you this morning. My name is Mother Kelsey, and I am the new Curate here at Trinity. I'll be here for the next year and half and I'll be sitting at the feet of Fr. Dan and at all of y'all's feet as I continue my formation as a newly ordained priest! I have had a wonderful first week getting to know the clergy, staff, and meeting folks around the building. And if **you** see me wandering around the building looking confused there's a good a chance that I am confused, so be gracious to me and point me in the right direction as I get a lay of the land. Likewise, my husband, Isaac and I have three kids. A 6-year-old named Phoebe, a 4-year-old named Milo, and Goldie is our 9-month-old. If you see any of them wandering around looking confused, or if the 4- and 6-year-old are looking mischievous, please point them in the right direction as well.

It's a blessing to be here and I look forward to getting the chance to get to know you all, to be with the beloved community of Trinity. Thank you for welcoming me and my family so well.

When my husband, Isaac, and I first started dating, we took a class our church was offering on conflict in marriage. Mind you, I think it had just been a few weeks of dating but being the earnest Christian college students that we were, we wanted to be prepared for when we encountered a disagreement.

Preaching on our gospel text this morning feels a little bit like that marriage class because I am talking about conflict and confrontation before I have even had a proper conversation with most of you.

Even so, conflict, disagreements, misunderstandings, these are part and parcel of being in relationship. So, it's never too early to think about how to respond when moments of friction come up, and what God has to say about it.

Jesus had a lot to say about love. What loving in thought, and word, and deed should look like. And I have such gratitude that *while* Jesus communicated love and how to love God, Neighbor, and self. That he also said something about how to handle things when the people we love hurt us. When the relationship between the members of the family of God breaks down.

Because as earnest as we are about fostering a welcoming, loving, faithful community, the people of God are also a family.

And if your family of origin is like mine, you know that families know just what buttons to push, we know all the tender spots, and we can do a pretty good job of hurting one another.

Within the family *of God*, we each bring our own individual stories, communication styles, things that trigger us, and energize us. *And ultimately*, when two or more are

gathered, *conflict is coming*. But the Good news is, God is with us even there, even in the messy and tender places.

When we jump into this week's gospel, Jesus had just told his disciples that he would have to die, and they launch into the question, "Who is the greatest?" Who will lead us, who will replace you once you are gone? And Jesus responds that those who are the greatest in His redemptive movement are those who have the humility of children and those who have a heart of service.

He reminds them that the decisions that they make impact other people. How they act towards one another has consequences. And thus, they are to care for one another in a way that prevents their family members from stumbling. He uses the parable of the lost sheep, that when they see someone stumble for whatever reason, they are to pursue them in humility and service, as if they are a shepherd going after a lamb.

And it's in this vein that he talks about what to do when someone has been wronged. Jesus knows how hard it is going to be for the early church to stick together in community especially once he is gone. And he goes straight at things. Right up front.

First, he says, try to work it out between the two of you. Remember the goal: find the lost sheep, bring the sinner back into the fold, keep the community together. And if that doesn't work, if they don't listen, take a couple people with you. Expand that circle slowly. And still if they won't listen, it is then the responsibility of the community to go and address them in person.

In this way Jesus encourages the church to be a community that nurtures honest dialogue. To be a community that refuses to keep silent in the face of behavior that harms others.

The process outlined involves hearing or listening at every step. Four times in the first three verses, Jesus refers to listening or refusing to listen. The repetition suggests that the call to hear one another, to listen closely to the truth of the other, is a vital component of a community grounded in the ways of Jesus.

When we listen to these instructions you might be uncomfortable with them, I'm with you. Because Jesus is giving instructions for the benefit of the sinner, the person whose actions are pulling them outside of the community. It's the wronged person, the person who has been hurt who is to humble themselves, and go to the person who's hurt them, carrying the bulk of the burden of restoration.

That's counter intuitive. That the wronged party bears the responsibility to speak up until they are listened to and to pursue someone who has hurt them.

It drives home the point that this whole following Jesus thing is a humbling business,

This is a teaching about reconciliation, on love, forgiveness. And It's not easy. To care about the sinner and about the community, more than our own sense of justice, is counter cultural.

And yet when we attend to one another in this way, we build relationships of understanding and peace.

We are to be a peacemaking people. But as this gospel attests, *peacemaking* does not mean **keeping the peace** at all costs. The church at large has had to grapple with the fruit of **peace keeping** and not *peace making*. Peace keeping is pushing things under the rug, closing mouths and ears, and pretending all is well for the sake of appearances.

Now, as the mother of three children ages 6 and under, I am not above choosing my battles and keeping the peace to maintain my sanity. There are moments when I do not engage.

In a literal sense, do not look under any rugs in my house, you will find goldfish and lord knows what else.

But we all must grow in discernment to know when we do need to engage. When we do need to speak up, and to speak up persistently until we are listened to.

It might be over something that already feels weighty, that immediately triggers something in you that this must be dealt with and promptly. Or it could be a little thing that someone said in passing, or in a meeting, that if tucked away or pushed under the rug, will later trip you up and turn into a stumbling block to your relationship with that person, or even with God.

To speak up in those moments takes humility, it requires us to be vulnerable. To go to someone and say, "hey when you said that this is how I received, it..." and then making room to listen and receive what the other has to say. That kind of listening is a skill that can feel uncomfortable but one that must be nurtured to foster a community and bears with one another.

In C.S. Lewis' book *The Great Divorce* he describes Hell as a vast abandoned city, a kind of sprawl. The people had stubborn conflicts with each other and simply moved further away from the center so that they could be on their own.

Lewis says that Hell keeps growing larger and larger because everyone consistently chooses distance over confrontation.

And before my fellow conflict- avoidant introverts here think "you know what...that doesn't sound so bad". Just because we require and enjoy our alone time to recharge and reconnect with ourselves, we are also made for relationship. It is not good for us to be truly alone, because we are made in the image of God.

God the Father, God the son, God the holy spirit, a god who is inherently relational. We too are meant to be in relationship. We are meant to be *with*.

Thus, when things are hard, when someone has wronged you. When tempers are heightened, egos bruised, and the bridges between you while not burned are starting to smell a bit of smoke. Remember that in an answer to the question of who is the greatest, Jesus said the humble. The servants. Those who value restoration over being right. Those who go out of their way to be with. To bear, to speak, to listen, to hear. These things do not come naturally, they are difficult. They reveal the tender parts of ourselves. But before we give up and choose distance over confrontation, remember that Jesus, who humbled himself all the way to Hell itself, is with you, he is actively in our midst every moment-- but especially in the tender ones. He is holding us together, restoring us, re-membering us, reminding us that we were made for relationship, and calling us to a life of peace, if we only have ears to listen.

Amen.