



Lectionary 23, Year A

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15th Sunday after Pentecost: Gospel Text - Matthew 18:15-20

Matthew 18:15-20

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁵ "If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If you are listened to, you have regained that one. ¹⁶ But 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. ¹⁷ If that person 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. ¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again, 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. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

SERMON TEXT:

Grace, mercy, and peace to you on this the Lord's day, a day which is a gift to you and to me!

You know, it was not often that Jesus gave *directives* in his time here on earth. Throughout the four gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - the New Testament books that tell the story of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection - in those books, rarely did he explicitly command, instruct, or make decrees to people. His ministry was mostly about being with people; imparting wisdom - understanding - compassion and companionship; sharing stories of God's promises and healing in new and different ways than they had ever heard or seen before; preaching and teaching in parables; and generally being with the masses sharing and showing them God's love, and revealing the reality of our wholeness in God alone; and ALWAYS revealing God's intention for all of God's creation to be made whole in the newness of life that could and would only be most fully known through the Messiah - the Savior of the World. That IS the good news, friends: God loves us so much that God comes to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus which answers the call and fulfills the ultimate sacrifice which makes us right with God in the amazing circle of grace that encompasses us because of him. That's not a directive, that's a *gift*.

Yet in today's Gospel lesson, we DO get a directive from Jesus. In many ways, it is actually a step-by-step instruction on how to handle difficult situations between people.

But before we dig into this, there are a few other times that Jesus does give a "directive" in his ministry, can you think of a story?

How about the Wedding in Canaan? This story is known as Jesus' first miracle. Jesus and family are invited to a wedding. At the reception they run out of wine, so his mother, Mary, asks him to help. And he *does*! He sees some large water jars sitting around. And, in John chapter 2 verse 7 & 8 this is what we learn: *Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."* You know what it was? The Best wine of the night being served! That directive led to a miracle.

How about the story of Lazarus? In chapter 11 of the book John, we read about the death of one of Jesus' good friends, the brother of Martha and Mary. They are all saddened, Jesus is crushed, he even wept at this loss. And yet towards the end of the story, we get one of the best directives ever. After praying out loud to His Father, verses 43 and 44, tell us that: *Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"* ⁴⁴ *The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."* Those are definitive directives by Jesus that lead to the amazing miracle of new life, a resurrected life.

And then there's the calming of the storm. Jesus is in the boat with the disciples, he falls asleep, a strong storm arises and the disciples are frightened beyond comprehension. In Matthew chapter 4, it's kind of funny how Jesus goes back and forth dialoguing with them trying to calm them down and help them

believe everything will be ok, but they won't or just can't calm down...but then in verse 39 we read: *He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.* That is quite the miracle, isn't it? The people don't calm down, but the wind and waves hear and respond immediately to Jesus' directive, and a miracle of peace ensues.

And finally, in Luke's account of the Last Supper we get Jesus' directive on how best to remember him: Chapter 22 verse 19 says, *And he took the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, "this is my body, which is given for you. **Do this in remembrance of me.**"* This of course, is THE directive that leads to the greatest miracle of all...recurring new relationship and life in God through the body and blood of Jesus.

So, what's the message here? It's fairly simple: When Jesus gives a directive it is **ALWAYS** followed by an amazing miracle!

Yep, today's gospel reading is a step-by-step directive on how to handle difficult situations between people. If we're honest, sometimes we do ask God what to do in hard situations...and guess what? Here's one of the answers, yet it is oh-so-hard when we're in disagreement with someone or feel we're not being heard or understood, right? Even if and when we're attempting to be most reflective, self-aware and trying to understand what's

going on, it is often easier and maybe even seems justified to blame the other or look at their issues, decisions, or priorities as less than or wrong compared to our own.

Unfortunately, this is fairly easy to see in our world today. We are living in a culture where we walk away from each other over views and issues before we try to resolve and mend relationships. Yet Jesus gives us a pretty clear directive in our gospel lesson today. He gives us the steps to resolve conflict: go talk to the person, have the hard conversation. If that doesn't work, bring a friend or witness to assist in the process; if that doesn't work go to the wider body and have the discussion on a bigger level. But...*Have* the discussion. Don't just walk away disgusted because you can't agree with someone else, even if the issue seems like really big. Now of course, we're not talking about situations where harm or safety is an issue. It is always of highest importance that we keep ourselves and each other safe, especially children; so sometimes that kind disconnect and walking away makes sense for health and safety. But what Jesus is talking about today is more appropriate for the climate of dissatisfaction, division and deep divide that is keeping people and communities polarized today. Especially in these scenarios, it is really important to remember that Jesus died on the cross for everyone; Jesus died and rose again for all creation, and to keep us together in him. He didn't die for the right views or decisions, he died for us, each and every one of us, even our opponent.

And look at how he lived his life. Jesus was always more interested in love, compassion and forgiveness, than broken relationships, rules, and agreeing with people, even religious leaders who thought they knew what was right. And the beautiful thing is, with this directive, like all other directives of Jesus, a miracle *will* follow when we take the steps, follow his directive, and respond as he leads us to do. That's the promise. **When Jesus gives the directive, a miracle will follow.** Hear it from our gospel lesson again, *"Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."* This directive doesn't mean you have to give in or agree on whatever is separating you, but what it DOES mean is that you agree to stay in relationship because of Jesus, and seek God's will for you both in this hard situation. The promise is that Jesus comes and is present to mend, to love and to forgive. THAT is the miracle of our faith in this one who gave his life for each and EVERY one of us. Even in our differences, God can be and IS present. And very often, when we do take the extra steps he gives us here; we learn important things about the other person...maybe we learn why they think so differently, what their life experiences were that brought them to the decisions they are making. It may make a difference, or it may not, but often it is in these moments that we begin to see each other as human beings struggling to do our best, and we can remember that God's relationship with US calls for us to be in relationship with others working towards the well-being of all.

So, friends, take the time when you are in a disagreement with someone, or you find yourself in a difficult, conflictual situation, to follow Jesus' directive, and trust that the miracle will follow. Because it is in these Jesus-directed moments of our lives that we and our relationships with others can be and ARE transformed through God's miracles and everlasting love. May it be so, Amen.

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