

I Am With You

September 6, 2026

Matthew 18:15-20

This morning we are digging into the Gospel of Matthew- chapter 18 where Jesus is teaching the disciples about how to get along with each other- and how to live as followers of Christ. It begins with the question, who is greatest in the kingdom of God- Jesus' answer is both surprising and telling- the little child- then he goes on to describe the lost sheep- and in this section, Jesus is talking very plainly about conflict and reconciliation- and how to love one another with accountability- I asked Savannah to read it for you in the Message translation, and I'm going to read it one more time in our familiar NRSV. Let us listen and hear God's word.

¹⁵ “If your brother or sister sins against you,^[a] 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.”

This is the word of God for the people of God:

Thanks be to God.

Illustration

I never had a sister- so I did not know.

Our children seemed to be born best friends- very different people- who seem to fit together like three legs of a stool. Fritz- the oldest- loves coming up with ideas- Bessie more reserved and thoughtful refines and perfects- Catherine Grace just enough more outgoing that she can put a plan into action.

When they were little, they would play together for hours- sledding down the stairs in cardboard boxes- creating forts in the bushes or just swinging on the hammock.

But then, it happened-

Sometime in early middle school-

The girls started fighting-

Not just the occasional - hey- that's mine-

Or that's not fair-

Or she got the bigger piece-

But long- drawn out- quiet feuds-

Unkindness was seeping in-

What happened? I thought?
What is going on?

So I did what any smart person does- I looked around for someone who seemed to have it all together-
My friend Betsy had two of the most polite, kind, lovely high school girls I have ever met- so reached out and asked-

My girls are fighting. What do I do?

Betsy laughed- out loud-
They are sisters she said- Sisters fight!

The closer they are- they said- the more likely they are to disagree-

In our conversation she did offer me- the golden rules of sisterhood- good boundaries that make good friends:

You do not play with your sister's toys/stuff when she is not there

And

You give your sister space when a friend is over, or someone is on the phone, or when she asks for it

And the most important rule:

You do not borrow clothes, or shoes... without asking first-
Ever.

Betsy told me that her girls have turned this into a bit of a game- if someone slipped up- they had to take off the sweater- or the jacket, or the hair clip- and hand it over- immediately.

The What of the passage

What is going on in the passage?

At the beginning of this chapter, The disciples ask Jesus who is the greatest in the Kingdom of God.

What is the Kingdom of heaven like?

He says it's like child then a lost sheep then the Kingdom of heaven is like

If your sister Or your brother sins against you- you go to them- in love.

Jesus is showing the disciples- and us- that in this Christian life of ours that we are living in a paradox- we love and follow Jesus- heirs to the kingdom- finding perfect peace and communion-

But our lives are imperfect- broken- messy-

We live in both the right now of the Kingdom of heaven, and in the not yet-

The Why of the passage

In Matthew 18 Jesus is acting as a teacher to the disciples- engaging in a back and forth- a dialogue

Jesus is instructing the disciples in how to love one another- how to live together,

The Why Now

It turns out that Betsy was right! - According to experts, the more sisters love each other, the more they are going to have conflict.

According to Moshe Ratson, who researches conflict, conflict is about learning how to face tension without losing yourself, your values, or your connection to the other person. Conflict does not indicate a failure in the relationship, healthy conflict can become one of the most powerful opportunities for growth in relationships and in communities.

So in his teaching on the Kingdom of heaven- Jesus teaches about conflict because he knows that conflict can be a good thing-

when churches are listening to God and growing and working, and when they really love each other, and care deeply- that there will be tension-

Conflict is part of growth-

In Matthew 18 Jesus teaches us that conflict is part of being the kingdom of heaven-

The profound hope of this passage is that when tension creeps in- that God is also with us-

What is the kingdom of heaven like? Maybe it's knowing that even when we struggle- that God is with us, and that God gives us a path forward.

In our passage, Jesus loves us so much that he is willing to give us a road map for handling conflict-

Because in any community where people care about for and with one another, there will be conflict. Even right here- where we can feel God's presence- catching a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven.

And Jesus loves us so much that he tells us what to do-
He says- stop- pray- remember that I am with you in the room-
Breathe- prayer and go
directly to the person.

He tells us to go to the person who has hurt us in love. Not to withdraw, not to hold onto our pain, not to talk behind their back. Jesus says to go to the person who has offended us- in love- and that when we do we regain a friend- and further- as Savannah read so eloquently, Jesus promises to be with us in the middle of it. He says a yes on earth is a yes in heaven- that when we can get together on anything at all on earth that God goes with us into action.

That is quite a promise-

Jesus tells us that in the messiness of disagreeing and then listening and then finally discerning together God's will is so incredibly powerful that God is with us in it. Moving into action.

Friends this passage is telling us that when a conflict makes us stop and listen to each other, when we can lean in instead of drawing back that God's power goes into action with us.

And when God is with us nothing is against us.

Each week, we begin worship with the passing of the peace. God tells us that before we can make an offering of praise, That we need to make peace with one another speaking to one another and loved listening to one another and love.

Each week and worship we embrace the promise the grace the power of this passage relying on God presence As we go to one another in love.

Illustration

In our house, if I put on my daughter's shoes to run to the mailbox- and she sees me- I have to take them off- no questions asked.

We laugh about it-

I'm not sure if it was the boundaries, or just learning how to ask for what they needed, but it's true what the research says- sisters do fight- but There is nobody who has your back quite like your sister does.

My daughters have a great relationship- they are still very different people with different styles and ideas, but they are very good friends.

Maybe we all have to go through the store of middle school in order to get set the peace and grace of a sister who really loves us no matter what.

In God's perfect grace, perhaps it is a blessing to know that even when there is conflict, that it is still part of the kingdom of heaven, and that God is with us in it.

May it be so. Alleluia, Amen.