

Proper 18A 2020 Sermon

Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus said, "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. 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. If 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. 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. 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. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Every 4 years, when presidential election season rolls around, we experience, all around us – in the atmosphere in which we live, in the very air we breathe – an increased negativity, and a higher energy of polarization, demonizing, and attacks. We don't hear much of a candidate's positive plans for the future of our nation; we hear, instead, about how bad or dangerous the other candidate or political party is. And my friends, this fierce atmospheric negativity takes a toll on our souls, on our spirits – whether we are aware of it or not.

So ubiquitous is this negativity and divisiveness that we can't escape it *entirely*, can't avoid *completely* the toll it takes on our souls. But we **can** decide not to feed it; not to repeat the negative thoughts over and over again in our minds, or listen to the same negative commentaries, over and over again.

In our Adult Forum a few weeks ago, we listened to a short video clip with Richard Rohr, who was talking about this very human tendency to be drawn to the negative. Let's hear what Fr. Rohr says:

(play video clip [here](#))

When we are in resentment, we are not in Christ. The two cannot coexist .

"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

That is the first petition in the prayer which Jesus taught us – the first thing Jesus would have us ask for: that God's kingdom and God's will be *lived out* on earth, just as it is in heaven. That **God's** kingdom and **God's** will be *lived out* on earth, just as it is in heaven.

And yet, so often I live in such a manner that I might as well be saying, **"My kingdom come, my will be done"** – or, my **tribe's** kingdom come, my **tribe's** will be done, whether that tribe be the ethnic, religious, socio-economic, racial, national, political, or other group with which I identify. And, as we all know, identifying strongly with **one** tribe almost assuredly means that we are strongly *opposed* to some **other** tribe: a *different* ethnic, religious, socio-economic, racial, national, political, or whatever other group. And this opposition between *my* tribe and that *other*

tribe leads me to arguing and maneuvering and manipulating so that **my** tribe wins: **my** tribe's kingdom come, and **my** tribe's will be done on earth.

And **God's** kingdom and **God's** will are forgotten. It doesn't matter how loudly or proudly we announce our Christian identity as justification for our point of view; the reality is that when I fight so single-mindedly for my tribe's kingdom to come, my tribe's will to be done, God's kingdom and God's will are no longer even on my radar screen.

My friends, we all know that we are a deeply divided nation; and we have to know how antithetical that divisiveness is to Jesus. In today's Gospel, we see how *relentless* Jesus is in his desire that within his community of followers there be loving relationship, one with the other. And when those loving relationships are strained or broken, Jesus spells out in exceptional detail, the steps through which reconciliation might take place, so that there be restoration of community, a community bonded together in love.

Any of you who have been through Confirmation classes, or have just studied the Catechism in our Prayer Book, will remember what the mission of the Church is: "The mission of the Church is to restore all people to **unity** with God and each other in Christ." To restore all people to **unity** with God and each other in Christ. This should come as no surprise, since Jesus, on the night before he was crucified, lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed that we – you and I – be one, as he and the Father are one. (John 17:21) And he prayed for that unity more than once.

And here's the thing: If the Son of God is so passionate about reconciliation between those who are divided, then God the Father, also, must be passionate about our reconciling with one another. And we who are created in the image and likeness of a Trinitarian God have deep within our DNA that same divine passion for reconciliation and union. All we have to do is dig deep within our soul and *connect* with, and draw energy from, that God-implanted passion for reconciliation, unity, and community.

As Richard Rohr said, the tendency we humans have to wrap ourselves around any negativity is, indeed, diabolical. Choosing to continue to rethink and relive that negativity, over and over again, is choosing Hell. But it is within us, my friends, to choose otherwise: for we are created in the image and likeness of God the Holy Trinity – three different and unique persons who are so intimately bound by mutual love, that they are one. We can wrap ourselves around negativity; or we can join the divine flow of love within the Holy Trinity.

The choice is ours.

AMEN