

Homily
September 10, 2023
15th Sunday After Pentecost
Proper 18

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

We just heard an interesting Gospel, didn't we? Jesus quite literally gives step-by-step instructions for what to do if a member of the church sins against another. This scripture has always made me uncomfortable. It is a difficult passage to digest; and, here I am preaching on this Sunday! Towards the end of my three-year Episcopal School for Ministry theological program, the Dean told of using this process with a family in his church. Wisely, Rev. Handschy was in contact with Bishop Smith who was supportive of the process described in Matthew being implemented.

This Matthew scripture is referring to a time when Jesus is still alive; so, this time period is during the very early life of the church. And, Jesus knows there is bound to be conflict among his followers, even in the church, which could be detrimental to the community. So, this passage

gives some guidance on how to handle conflict in a Christian manner before conflict infects the entire community. I was amazed when Rev. Handschy explained that he met one on one with the family creating problems. Then, he and two parishioners met with the family. Unfortunately, the result was that the family had to leave the church. Prior to hearing this during my theological program, I had not been aware of a rector actually implementing this prescribed procedure.

How we address and resolve disagreements should be indicative of our Christian faith. We are to talk with people, not about them. Jesus is calling his followers to the high task of reconciliation. The Son of Man tells us that first, in private, we should honor the person by speaking the truth. We are to be honest, forthright, and clear, while being gentle at the same time. By speaking directly to people, as hard as that is, we express our love for them by not shielding them from the truth. I think what scares me the most about this passage is that by speaking directly to a person, we open ourselves to hearing how we also have sinned.

Reconciliation involves love and love is the focus of Paul's writing to the Romans which Greg/Susan read this morning. Paul's writings are

many times challenging, well actually down right hard, for me to understand. However, the first portion of today's passage from Romans is easy to understand; but, maybe tough to enact consistently in our lives. Romans says that the only thing we should owe people is our love for one another. Paul states that the commandments are summed up in 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

Recorded in the Gospel of Luke is a lawyer asking Jesus who his "neighbor" is. Then, Jesus commences to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan to make the point that everyone is our neighbor. In the parable, the man who had been robbed, beaten, and left to die along the road was someone who deserved and needed love. The two religious leaders who first passed by, according to the parable, moved to the other side of the road and did nothing for the severely injured man. We don't know where the priest and Levite were going; but, those two men thought their plans were more important than the injured man. Are we ever inflexible when someone needs us? How is it we show our love?

People involved with Josie's Free Pantry in front of our church show their love for the unhoused in our community. Some parishioners took

hold of this ministry before I did. I have been a tour guide at 6 of the annual Project Homeless Connects; and, the unhoused come into Common Ground frequently. But, there was just something about taking food from the pantry bins at the top of our parish hall stairs and going through the red doors with people who I didn't know sitting on our bench or standing near it which made me uncomfortable. Since I had had a fob and key to the church office, it was my practice to park near the High Street door and use that entrance into the church. I continued that habit after Josie and Steve Hall installed our free pantry. By coming in and out the High Street door, I could completely forget about tending to our free pantry. Who does that sound like? The Levite in the Good Samaritan parable?

After it became apparent that the area in front of our church needs to be monitored, I changed my practice. I now park near the Adams Street door. And, I look forward to seeing what needs to be added to the pantry, doing such, tidying up the area, if needed, and having a short conversation with whoever may be in our alcove. My next step is to learn names.

We have the date of the Grace Church/Salvation Army Barbeque quickly approaching. As a matter of fact, it is next Sunday! That is a fine opportunity for us to show our love for those who attend by what we do. It is a fun event with good food and with Terry Allen and his band playing toe tapping music. Years ago, when we started our annual BBQs at the Salvation Army for the residents of the shelter and the surrounding community, Grace parishioners would sit together and the people, who looked and dressed differently than us and may have smelled unpleasant, sat apart from parishioners. Then, we made great progress with us mingling and eating with the people and families we didn't know. Even though it has been four years since we've been able to have the BBQ because of that ugly Covid virus, hopefully, we will remember to gather together and not segregate.

So, we show our love by what we do. The Good Samaritan showed his love by disinfecting and bandaging the victim's wounds, transporting him to an inn where he took care of the injured man. Because the Good Samaritan had to leave the next day, he left money for the manager of the inn to care for the victim. Upon returning, the Samaritan promised to

repay the manager for any additional expenditures needed to aid in the healing of the person who had been ignored by the priest and Levite.

George, my deceased husband, grew up in a family which didn't express their love, like I was accustomed to in my family. George and his seven siblings didn't hear their parents say, "I love you;" but, yet the kids knew they were loved. How did they know that? They knew by what their parents did. Clayton and Mamie Hartsfield worked hard and long hours to scrap out a living on a few acres of land in the Bootheel of MO.

Now that leads to a rather humorous outcome which materialized in our marriage. Some of you may have already heard me share this. When George and I were getting married over 41 years ago, he informed me that we could only tell each other "I love you" once a day. He thought that if you said those words more than once a day, the words would lose their meaning. Well, fortunately, George grew to learn that wouldn't be the case. He found out that love could be verbally expressed more than once a day and still be just as meaningful each time. Later in our marriage, he would be kind of embarrassed when I would tell this story on him. And, when I was in a playful mood, I would jokingly say, "Oh, I can't say what I

want to because I have already hit the limit!” He would respond with something like, “Cut that out. I am smarter now!”

Of course, there are multiple ways that we show our love by what we do. The person who takes all the food we collect each month to the Samaritan Center or the Salvation Army shows her love for the people who use those food pantries. When a parishioner provides transportation for another parishioner love is show through that act. I could go on and on providing examples. God is pleased with us when we show our love for our family and friends, as well as the people who we do not know well.

When I was preparing this homily, God put a specific hymn in my head. That hymn is one that was recently sung at our Jefferson City First United Methodist Church during a televised worship service. The hymn is “They will know we are Christians by our love.” Some of the lyrics include

“they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love

Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love”

“We will walk with each other

We will walk hand in hand

We will walk with each other

We will walk hand in hand” “And they'll know we are Christians by our
love, by our love

Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love

Yes, they will (love, love, love, love)

Oh-oh, yes, they will know” “Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our
love, by our love

Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love”

The question is “Will they? Will they know we are Christians by our
love?” How do we show or enact our love? Please think about these
questions today and this week. “Will they” know I’m a Christian by my
love? How will our neighbors know that we are Christians? By our love?