

Sermon 13 September 2020, 14th Sunday after Trinity (Proper 18)
Reverend Irene

Matthew 18: 15-20 Romans 13: 8-end

A broken friendship.

A deeply wounded marriage where every conversation hurts.

A family member with whom there is no longer a loving relationship due to a long forgotten argument.

A rift between church members who were previously colleagues or friends. These, and a myriad of other scenarios are well known to us all;

and don't get me started on the classic

"I don't go to church anymore, I fell out with the vicar"

If I had a pound for every time I've heard that – I'd be well off

Incidents like these occur throughout our lives and can result in long term damage to previously good relationships, and they can happen to any of us, especially in our church life. Our readings show us that the first Christian Communities had to be reminded how to behave; they were no different from us.

The question is, what can be done to improve human nature, and thereby our relationships with each other?

Today's gospel is an instruction on how to deal with fraught situations and strained relationships. Clearly, disagreements happen, Jesus knows there has never been such a thing as a harmonious, perfect Christian community, which is why he gives guidelines on how to deal with disputes, but having guidelines is one thing, abiding by them is another! Healing broken relationships is a priority for Jesus, he knows our frailties, he knows the biggest barrier to overcoming problems is our PRIDE!

We fail to admit our own faults, and only see faults in others.

But Jesus says three things,

- 1) If you're in the wrong, be big enough to take the initiative and say sorry.
- 2) If you are the one who has been wronged, be big enough to let it go. Talk things over with the other person and try to reconcile your differences so as not to widen the rift.
- 3) If the rift cannot be healed in the first instance, try again, show the love and care that Jesus showed to the Gentile and the Tax collector. Be honest about your own actions and ask the other person to do the same. Remember that redemption comes from both sides so provide every opportunity for returning to the fold.

What is the point feeling smug about being in the right, if you end up losing a valued friend or member of the church community? What's the point in leaving a community of friends to be left adrift alone?

Whether we like it or not, a relationship break down, regardless of who is at fault, causes everyone to suffer. We cannot always be united, it's human nature to squabble, but we can try to resist the temptation.

The Benefice of Cogenhoe and Great Houghton and Little Houghton with Brafield on the Green

Jesus puts the burden on each one of us to try to heal the wounds of hurt because he has done the same. In the service of Holy Communion, we see how far Jesus goes to repair our relationship with God even though the breaking of the relationship was our fault. He didn't wait for us to come to him, he took the first step to repairing it by sacrificing his life on the cross, to take away our sins. Through the humility and generosity of Jesus we live our lives closer to God, and through him we have the vision of what living in harmony can do. "If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

Does anyone other than me get a sense of the sarcastic in that last remark "even if **just** two of you on earth could agree about anything"?

God created us and loves us, but he must be frustrated at our ability to make the same mistakes over again, and letting pride get in the way of caring relationships.

This frustration has an underlying thread in our first reading as Paul sounds impatient that the people have not grasped the concept of living together so he lists again the commandments. This not as a nagging list of behaviours, but rather a reminder to live as we are meant to, to stay alert and be ready, because truly the day will come for us all when it is too late!

I've been saying it every week. Being a Christian is not a badge we wear on Sunday, and if we are doing it correctly, it's not an easy way of life.

Living and walking in the footsteps of Christ takes energy and commitment.

In order to be seen as a truly Christian Community, and encourage others to do the same, we must live with God in our heart, and at the heart of everything we do, and work through our differences together, loving each other despite them.

This applies not just in our church lives, but in all our relationships, and with all those with whom we have contact.

Amen