



55A PENTECOST 14A BIBLE STUDY

Held together – Father's Day

Abstract

Matthew 18:15–20

15 “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.

Matthew 18:15

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Sunday, September 6, 2020 | After Pentecost | Proper 18 | Year A

Old Testament & Psalm, Option I

Old Testament Exodus 12:1–14

Psalm Psalm 149

or

Old Testament & Psalm, Option II

Old Testament Ezekiel 33:7–11

Psalm Psalm 119:33–40

New Testament Romans 13:8–14

Gospel Matthew 18:15–20

Jesus says that those who live in a kingdom community should watch over one another in love, gently pointing out when a brother or sister fails to live by the values Jesus teaches.

This week's resources explore: finding patterns for building community.

Welcome and opening prayer

A prayer of approach

O Lord our God,

we sometimes tremble as we think of who we are and who you are.

Bring us now, in this moment, to know you.

See us as we are, and see our yearning to be more like you.

May we lay aside anything that hinders our journey with you,

and with our friends and neighbours.

Amen.

Read the text

Readings

Matthew 18:15–20 (NIV)

¹⁵“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or 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 that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

respond

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Mime script

The 'sinner' sits on the floor looking sad and lonely. The leader comes and stands over him/her, points an accusing finger, then displays a large card, made to look like a tablet of stone with '10 commandments' written on it.

The sinner looks up, pleadingly, miming asking for forgiveness. But the leader is having none of it and refuses to listen to the sinner.

The leader beckons some friends over, points at the sinner and at the card, and 'talks' to his friends. They all stand over the sinner, nodding their heads.

The leader turns to the congregation, then points at the sinner and at the card. The leader and friends forcefully turn their backs to the sinner.

By now the reader should be at verse 18. The reading is suddenly interrupted by someone who waves their arms and shouts: 'No! Stop! You've got it all wrong!' The action and the reading stop. After a few moments of silence, start the reading and the mime over again. Except, this time, the leader comes and sits beside the sinner and they start 'talking'. The leader nods to show they are listening carefully.

The leader's friends walk by, and the leader beckons them. They come and all sit down in a semicircle. They too listen to the sinner. Someone gives the sinner a leaflet. They are clearly friendly towards the sinner.

As verse 18 is read, the leader and friends shake hands with, or give 'high fives' to, the sinner, and all stand and slowly walk away waving goodbye.

Explore and respond to the text

What happens when someone in our circle is living in such a way that they deny their confession? Jesus' teaching here follows on from warnings about not putting stumbling blocks in the path of the weak or the young (18.1-14).

The words 'another member of the church' (NRSV) are not in the original; this section is more about interpersonal relationships than church discipline. Jesus says we each have the responsibility to gently correct one another (taking due note of the warning in 7.1-4). When disciples stray because of sin, we need to name it in the hope that the one straying will see that their actions violate the values of the kingdom and repent. If they will not listen to us, then we should take someone else so there are witnesses of our concerns and the brother/sister's response. Perhaps the witness will decide that we are wrong, not our brother/sister! Only if someone persists in blatant sin do we tell the rest of the community. The picture is of the community gathered together for fellowship and teaching.

Verses 18 to 20 put this in context. The community we are part of is not just a club, it is the kingdom of God; Jesus is at the heart of it – so how we live matters. Jesus' words echo the language previously used of Peter (16.19): every disciple is equally able to discern the mind of God in Christ

(cf. 1 Corinthians 2.15). Here the passage comes full circle and picks up the question about status: we are all equal.

'Binding' and 'loosing' are about things and issues, not people (the words are gender-neutral), so probably refer to the actions of the straying brother or sister. Jesus says that we are able to discern right and wrong behaviour (because we have heard his teaching; see Matthew 28.20) and have a duty to point it out. The clue to how this works is in the tense of the verbs relating to heaven (v.18). They are future perfects, indicating that we are let in on what God has already decided – that is, through prayer and the Scriptures, we discern God's mind and communicate that to each other and God, asking him what he wants us to ask him (v.19). This is possible because we are the community of Christ (v.20). Jesus looks beyond the resurrection to when he will truly be our Immanuel, God with us all the time, at the heart of all our gathering, however small (cf. Matthew 1.23; 28.20).



Live your faith

Write a letter or email about an issue that stirs your feelings, or join a campaigning group for such an issue.

Picture Pointers

- How well does this ordered pattern represent your community?
- What holds your community together?
- If your community was a hive, who are the bees? The drones? Where do you go for nectar?

End the session

A sending out prayer

Being Christian, O God, is not just about 'me and you',
not just about our conversations and our love.

Help us to see those we meet beyond these doors
in the way that you see them.

Help us to offer support from what we know of you.

Send us out from here to be a shining light for you,
a guiding light for those in confusion, aloneness and darkness.

Amen.