**9/10/23**

**Relationships, Relationships, Relationships**

**Matthew 18:15-20**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Today is actually a pretty cool day in our calendars, as it is Grandparent’s Day. As a matter of fact, “In 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed a proclamation marking the first Sunday after Labor Day as National Grandparents Day.” (5) We are reminded that "It’s a day when we stop to honor grandparents and grand-friends for their contributions to our families, neighborhoods and communities" (5) "It’s also a time to remind people of all ages they can do something grand with another or for another generation. People at all ages and stages of life have value and something valuable to contribute to making our world a better place." (5) I am forever thankful for the relationship I had with my grandmother, as she indeed shaped and molded me while helping raise me with my mother. Also, despite my relationship being a bit fractured with my grandparents on my father’s side of the family, I am glad those relationships existed as well. Thank God for Grandparents!

Now, since I am done with my history lesson you can blame on my recent seminary education, I want to extend a good morning to each and every one of you out there in the church pews, at home on your couch, or out and about on the conference call. I am glad that we all have another opportunity to join together yet again this Sunday morning to work on our relationships with one another, and with God.

Yes, I will admit this is indeed a very awkward approach and way to start things out here this morning, but nonetheless that does not make it any less needed or true. I know we all can admit that the purpose that we come together each week is to continue to grow in love, relationship, and understanding with God. We also can admit that we do that in an effort to grow together as the body of Christ, and a community of faith.

Now, I know for certain that we all do not share the same thoughts, feelings, concerns, issues, or perspectives; and that is perfectly fine. As a matter of fact, that indeed is what manages to make us even stronger over the course of time. That is of course if we keep in mind that we need to respect those differences, and use them as our fuel to grow stronger together, and not allow them to divide us and cause us to grow apart. We are forever reminded that at the end of the day, our love for Christ, our love for one another, and our constant hunger to be more like him in our approach to things each and every day is what drives us forward in relationship.

We at one point or another realize that relationships will and always will be one of the most important things. Unfortunately, they will also be one of the hardest things we will ever work on in our entire lives. It seems to be something rather easily understood, but then again it really doesn’t. There are several reasons for this of course, and despite a laundry list of relationship topics that we all can build, and may even inevitably think about here this morning, we need to constantly focus on the fact that God calls us into that very right relationship with our brothers and sisters. Now, this admittedly is a little easier to share with you as a congregation than it is to share with my individuals I work with at times, because I can come at you from the root cause and purpose of the heart of God. Where I kind of have to dance around that in different situations at work to be respectful of that particular individual’s set of beliefs or practices. However, it does not mean I am not coming at it from the same perspective, but it is just the words and examples I may use that may be just slightly different. Alright, no more dancing around the subject here with you folks.

If there is a person sitting here in the pews, a person sitting on their couch at home, or a person traveling about on the conference call that says they have all their relationships intact I will call baloney on you. Yes, I just said that, baloney on you! Whether you realize it or not, or admit to it or not, there is always a relationship or two that can be strengthened and changed with the heart and will of God. So, as I call myself to examine and realize what I need to work on, I also challenge you to do the same. You got this… I got this. However, I am not saying it is going to be easy, or that is not going to be uncomfortable. We are forever reminded that the “God whom we worship is a God of relationships. Humankind was created in God’s image. Our likeness to God allows us to be in relationship with God. Even when we broke our relationship with God through sin, God moved to restore that relationship.” (3) We are indeed called to restore and repair, and follow the very example he has set before us!

I also find it particularly funny that God always seems to put things at a place or time in our lives when we realize we need it or not. He indeed also has a sense of humor. Furthermore, he has a purpose far larger than we can ever realize.

Just this past week before I even had a clue of what the Gospel Reading really was, or how I intended on tackling it, I was talking to my mother about our broken relationship with some of our family. I was talking about some of the wrongs that occurred over the years, the pain and frustration that occurred. More importantly I was talking about how I sort of cast them off, or created a divide to protect myself from further hurt and anguish. Now, is that what we are called to do? No! Well… not exactly. We are reminded that we cannot expect individuals to have God in their hearts, and we cannot expect individuals to want to grow and change as we would like to. We also cannot be the only one in the battle to make things right, or change things. When God is not at the center of improving the relationship, and when God is not even allowed in the relationship on both sides to repair the relationship then sometimes, we need to let things go. However, that does not mean we need to let things go forever. “We live with the hope and prayer that the relationship will be restored, even if it takes some time for that to happen. We are challenged by Christ’s example never to close the door on a relationship.” (3) Things can be revisited, and should be revisited, as there is always a time and place ordained by God for everything. We are forever reminded that things need to be handled and dealt with on God’s terms and on God’s time, and not on our terms and on our time!

Now I feel that the two biggest things that get in our way of right relationships all too often are our… personalities and our… sense of pride. We all can admit that we are all not built the same, and we definitely can admit to the fact that we do not think the same. Our personalities are our biggest strength, and they indeed are our biggest weakness. So, we need to realize how to share them with one another in a way and manner that blesses God, and a way and manner that allows us to grow together in right relationship. Then, of course there is that big elephant in the room, our sense of pride. Sometimes we need to drop that for the greater good. We also need to come to the very realization that sometimes that very sense of pride is not even pride at all, and that is if we even choose to admit to that. It actually is plain old anger and resentment that can falsely represent itself as pride believe it or not. So, I call you to be a little more self-aware, and I call you and myself to be a little more forgiving and understanding than we ever really want to be, or feel that we can be. It all is indeed in the effort of the greater good, and God will take the burden off of our shoulders as long as we are willing to continually work with and through him.

Now, I will ask you some questions here in the context of our Gospel Reading today in order to flip our perspectives. Are you the Gentile? Are you the tax collector? There is always admittedly another vantage point or viewpoint to explore things from. We often tend to feel as if we are the ones that have done right in the relationship, and the other person has wronged us or God. However, we may indeed be the one that is wrong, and that is if we ever desire to admit to that, or even be willing to come to terms with it. In right relationship it is vitally important to realize that we also have to maintain the perspective that we can be the one that is wrong. We can actually be the one that is cut off because of our actions and our feelings, and we may not even realize that, as we feel we hold the proverbial power at times, and that we are the ones that cut the other person or group off. That is mind-blowing, isn’t it? To sit back and look at things from the other person’s perspective makes us have more context. It allows us to humble ourselves and admit to what we may have done wrong in the process of the relationship as well. It also affords us the opportunity and perspective of how to possibly approach things in a better manner to mend those so-called fences to rebuild and reconnect in our relationship with one another, and do what God has called us to. Relationships are hard, and they are also humbling, and we need to realize the only way we can grow and change in them is together with and through God!

We also come to realize that “The bar is raised for us within the community of faith. In our dealing with other people, we are not to be motivated by revenge or spite but, more than that, within the community of faith, we are to deal with conflict openly and quickly so that when people see us and how we deal with one another, they see Jesus. Love is to be our motivation above all and is to be seen in all our doings. Our dealings with one another are to be so transparent that we are seen to be Christ to our community.” (4) Yes, you and I are called to that very essence of being Christlike, and sharing it with others!

So, as I close things off here this morning, for some reason or another I keep getting called back to an all too familiar TV show, statement, and memory I have. So, let me share that with you and see if you catch where I might be going… “Marcia, Marcia, Marcia!” Yes, if you are sitting there shaking your head, saying it yourself, or even thinking it you realize I comparatively have had the same kind of statement running in the back of my head the entire sermon… and that would be Relationships, Relationships, Relationships. It was hard in the Brady Bunch house as a blended and combined family to make things work, and at times it is hard in this blended and combined house of worship and community to make things work as well. However, we are called to make it happen, for relationships are vital, and right relationships with God and our brothers and sisters are where it’s at!

Amen.

**References**

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 By Kait Hanson

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**Matthew 18:15-20**

 Jesus offers practical advice to his disciples on how individuals—and the church

 as a whole—should go about restoring relationships when one member has

 sinned against another.

 [Jesus said to the disciples:] 15“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. 16But 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. 17If 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. 18Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on

 earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in

 heaven. 19Again, 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. 20For where two or three are

 gathered in my name, I am there among them.”