

Shawnee Presbyterian Church
So This Is a Church!
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Matthew 18:15-20

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.”

In the beginning Christians weren't even called Christians yet and the fellowship of believers made the church up as they went along. Two thousand years later we're still making church up as we go along. Sure there are precedents and traditions to guide us. We have the history of all the things that went wrong in the past and what seemed to go right. Our mothers and fathers in the faith responded to situations by drawing on their culture and society with that unmeasurable influence of the Holy Spirit. Their legacy is not a list of solutions for problems we don't have but a way to approach the new challenges of each age. At least two things happen over the centuries of Christian *churching*. One is people haven't changed very much so some of what they did in the early days instructs us directly. The other is a legacy of meeting challenges not imagined by the first of us believers.

The rallying cry *Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda* that swept the church in the 16th century called people to do what was being neglected by the institution of the time. We have, from the beginning, been a people engaged in culture in unique and constructive ways. There have been many sad times when that zeal led to abuses and suffering. These illustrate that just responding to culture is not enough, we must be aware of God's spirit in the formation of the church in our age. While I marvel at the Presbyterian system that assumes many believers agreeing on what God's will might be is a better process than one person's biased opinion but, if those who vote do so without self-reflection and humble prayer we might as well consult Punxsutawney Phil. Do we consult Punxsutawney Phil here in Shawnee or is there some other groundhog taking on the role come February 2nd? Anyway, as to determining how God wants us to meet the challenges today there is good information found in the Bible.

It's just that the Bible can be so delightfully negative at times. Matthew 6:34 “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,” is one of my favorite passages.” That is a

glass half empty approach to, “forget about tomorrow for tomorrow never comes.” So instructing the early church Matthew goes dark. What do you do when some *recalcitrant miscreant* I had to look that up to be sure of the meaning. Anyway a stubborn mule of a bad person who has done you harm is hanging around the church, what do you do about it? At that time it seemed right to make several attempts at reconciliation and as a last resort shun. Human nature just loves to go to the shunning part but it was offered by Matthew’s Gospel as a last resort. It’s been a long time since we’ve had the luxury of asking people to leave. Most of the time they have already taken their toys and stormed off in a huff or what I find most sad quietly melt away. In the first case “God” in quotes told them to do outrageously bad things to other members of the body of Christ. In the second the church failed to incorporate the Holy Spirit in planning to meet the needs of the current time.

So, we are still making it up as we go along, meeting the same kinds of people in very different circumstances. There are answers in the Bible and answers in the leading of the Holy Spirit. Don’t overlook the answer to why you are here because while you are each precious and unique you are also nothing special, God doesn’t love you more; God loves you as much as all of these others. Whatever we get about doing here this will define a Church. We may come to look very different from what others think of as church or we may tick all the boxes as the default mode of church as long as we do not stray far from the source of our reformation.