

In this week's Gospel, Jesus offers us rules of engagement, and the principles of love and respect that should undergird them. In fact, he doesn't just *offer* it; he tells us plainly that the way we conduct relationships here and now has direct consequences for God's coming kingdom:

*"Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

In other words, the depth, health, and quality of our relationships within the church matter eternally.

Jesus's teaching in this passage is its utter realism. Unlike us, who assume that because we're Christians, we should either not experience conflict at all, or cover it up with a bland "niceness" if we do, Jesus takes it for granted that we will disagree and hurt each other.

There are six principles I noticed and cherish :

Choose depth.

Preserve dignity.

Guard the truth.

Lean into the Body of the church.

Lament the brokenness.

Practice hospitality.

These can be referred to as Advanced Kingdom skills and desires.

That's what we need.

That's who we need.

That's who we need to be.

And who Jesus wants us to be.

And yet we're not.

Paul, years later, challenging disciples to outdo each other in mutual affection.

And as we heard this morning, the only thing we owe one another is love.

As disciples then were not able, as disciples now.

Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, we are challenged that the way we treat others – is in fact how we treat Jesus. As Jesus states

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

What we do, and not do, has eternal, cosmic reverberations.

We, of the church, try to be loving to one another and to neighbour. Yet somewhere along the way we have confused being nice and polite with being loving; we have confused being the most theologically correct person in the room with being righteous; we have confused blind agreement and assent with being in communion.

When we try being loving without being truth telling rather than loosening or binding what needs healing we are papering over problems.

While it needs to be said that we will not always be the ones doing the truth telling –

sometimes we will be the ones that need to hear other's truth about how we have impacted them. The quality of our listening and responding can help recovering wounds and deepening wounds.

To be a community of disciples is to be a collective of the broken seeking to grow into wholeness and loving maturity; and a tribe of wounded healers seeking to unbind the bandages of others while still needing treatment for our own wounds.

We follow the teachings of Jesus not as experts so much as enrolled in learning.

To be in community makes difference and relationship difficulties almost inevitable.

By the time of this teaching Jesus had already been dealing with dissent amongst disciples and certainly by the time this gospel was committed to written word the church knew about controversy and division.

We know of controversy and division.

Within the church.

Within this church.

Within families.

Within our family.

And will continue to know of controversy and division.

As clergy gathered recently at a school for clergy conflict resolution was the curriculum.

I have little energy for a sermon of what we don't do, or what we need to do according to Advanced Kingdom Skills 101.

Jesus makes all things very clear. Reinforced by the teachings of Paul.

We know what we need.

We know who we need.

We know who we need to be.

Kingdom people.

As a Kingdom person I have energy to share this Native American parable with you, fellow Kingdom people -

*An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life.*

*"A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy.*

*"It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves.*

*One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego."*

*He continued,*

*"The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith.*

*The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too."*

*The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather,*

*"Which wolf will win?"*

*The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."*

Wendy