

“Perfect Love” Binds the Church Together and Ultimately Convinces the World that Christ Is Ours, and We Are His

“Today we have the opportunity to examine two of the most misunderstood and misquoted verses in the entire New Testament,” the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said Sunday. “In Matthew 18:19-20 Jesus says, ‘If two of you agree down here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together because they are mine, I am there in the midst of them.’



“I must confess that most of my life I have understood these verses to be focusing on *gathering together* in Jesus’ name. . . . This is always very reassuring in those times where you schedule worship services or church activities, but attendance is very small. . . . At times it can be empowering, because if you are in the small minority, you can use these words to sanction the efforts of your small little group when the majority crowd is going a different direction. . . . All that remains to be done is to break out the guitar, form a circle, and sing a few verses of *Kumbayah*.”

However, “The context of these verses is . . . fighting and contention among believers. . . . At the beginning of this chapter, the disciples are arguing among themselves as to who is the greatest. . . . The words of (p. 2→)

“The Recognition of Joseph by his Brothers”, by Peter Cornelius (1783-1867), *Nationalgalerie, Berlin*, © Web Gallery of Art. In the O.T. reading this Sunday, Joseph will tell his brothers, “Am I God, to judge and punish you?” In Ps. 103, we’ll hear, “The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” In the Epistle, Paul will say, “Who are you to condemn God’s servants?” In the Gospel reading, Jesus will tell Peter to forgive not seven times but “seventy times seven”, and Jesus will tell the parable of the servant who was forgiven a large debt but refused to forgive a fellow servant’s comparatively small one.

On the 100th anniversary of the publication of

G. K. Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy*:



A series of discussions about this book by “possibly the greatest thinker of the 20th century”

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September 7 Sermon (cont’d.)

Jesus to them in this passage serve to warn them that they need to wake up and smell the church coffee. In language that is so practical and concrete that you would think he was the Apostle Paul, Jesus sets forth instructions and procedures for how to resolve pain and conflict in the church . . . and bring healing to the body of Christ when it is hurting.

“This passage,” he continued, “is not a spiritual Vitamin B12 shot to bolster us when we are few in number. *It is a recipe for reconciliation* of damaged relationships in the church. The church, the body of Christ, is to be a community of reconciliation.” This “presupposes conflict in the church and among church members. Reconciliation is only necessary in the presence of conflict or where relationships have been strained. Jesus’ words to the disciples here are not so much ‘if conflict occurs, do this,’ but ‘when conflict occurs, do this.’ . . .

“Reading Jesus’ words here again this week, I see now that *the true mark of unity in the church is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of a reconciling spirit*.”

“By the grace of God and the help of Jesus, the church is to be a place where relationships are valued, even when those relationships are damaged by sin. It is to be a place permeated by a reconciling spirit, which means that persons are committed to walking *toward* each other and not *away* from each other when they are in conflict. . . . And ultimately, the church is to be a community that loves and cares enough to confront others in a spirit and attitude of reconciliation.”

When we need to go to someone who has hurt or offended us, we should focus on the *end result* of the action which caused us pain” and “not presume to know or to judge another person’s motives, because we cannot know for sure. . . . Instead, . . . keep the emphasis on you and how the action affected you. . . .

“You may find yourself in a situation where someone comes to you and shares that you have hurt them. And as the person talks, your mind is racing with all the various ways that this person misunderstood you, misconstrued your intent, and totally got the situation wrong. . . . You must ask yourself, ‘Do I want to win an argument, or do I want to effect reconciliation and make peace?’ . . . You have two basic choices: Insist that you were right, or make peace.” The life “that Jesus calls us to in his Church is . . . growth toward what John Wesley termed ‘perfect love,’ the love of God (that) binds the Church together, and ultimately convinces the world that Christ is ours, and we are his.”

On 9/11, “I Called to Say I Love You”

“Something terrible had happened. Life was reduced to its essentials. Time was short. People said what counted, what mattered. . . . No one said anything unneeded, extraneous or small.” And what callers from the towers or the airplanes said on 9/11, Peggy Noonan wrote in her September 8, 2006, column, was, “essentially, *In spite of my imminent death, my thoughts are on you, and on love.*”

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Sundays, 10:00 a.m.: Word & Table Service

Sundays, 11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation

Sundays, 11:45 a.m.: Moderated discussion

Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.: Evening Prayers

For the Poor: Meat, fresh produce; canned fruits and vegetables; dairy products; peanut butter; cooking oil; pancake mix; syrup; spices; diapers; baby wipes; bathroom tissue; for personal care: soap, shampoo, conditioner, razors, shaving cream; new underwear (adults and children); cleaning supplies; bleach.

Readings, 9/14: Gen. 50:15-21; Ps. 103; Rom.

14:1-12; Mt. 18:21-35. **9/21:** Jonah 3:10—4:11;

Ps. 145:1-8; Phil. 1:21-27; Mt. 20:1-16.

Prayer Emphases: South Africa; United Brethren in Christ; Episcopal Church of St. John the Evangelist, San Francisco, CA, and the Rev. John Kirkley; World Vision; parishioners on Weaver Circle