

## Finding Peace in Fighting

14 Pentecost A – Sept 6, 2020

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Matthew 18:15-20

[Jesus said:] 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. 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. 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. 20“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

*This is part of Matthew's fourth great discourse of Jesus (18:1-35), which is devoted to teachings about relations among members in that community, relations between those inside & those outside that community, & the nature of life within that community. The passage concludes with a decisive statement from Jesus on what constitutes the church. "You have regained" is the reward of successful private reproof. Errant behavior produces personal estrangement naturally, & the loss is not only the sinner's, but the wronged as well. The perspective is articulated in the parable of the lost sheep, which immediately precedes this passage (18:10-14). (This also shows the Matthean insistence on the church assisting those with "no/muffled" voice to find their voice or at least to have those in "power" listen to the voice of the marginalized [women, widows, orphans, etc.]*

*"Two or three witnesses" (v. 16) were required by Jewish law of Jesus' day to convict a person of any wrongdoing (cf. Deut 19:15), & the presumption of the present passage is closer to criminal than civil procedure. The guilt of the offending party is presumed in this example, & the purpose of the witnesses &, eventually, the assembled body of the church, is confirmation & reproof, not discernment or adjudication of conflicting claims. Persistent recalcitrance (v. 17) leads to excommunication "as a Gentile & a tax collector." The choice of outsiders is odd, given the author's own history as a tax collector (Mt 9:9, 10:3) & Jesus' personal relations with tax collectors & others traditionally excluded from respectable circles (e.g., Mt 9:10-13, 21:31-32). Presumably, the crucial distinction is repentance, from which no one is excluded. Gentiles & tax collectors who responded to the message of the new life became*

*symbols of the dramatic power of the gospel; those who did not remained symbols of lost & neutral outsiders, rather than hostile opponents, such as the scribes & Pharisees. Thanks to:  
[www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/commentary\\_display.asp?installment\\_id=2944](http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/commentary_display.asp?installment_id=2944).*

*The work of reconciliation is the goal of a Christian community **NOT** elimination of conflict; conflict just is....it exists. The church community is one of the few places that should teach people how to effectively and constructively fight with each other.*

*Listening is a PRIME dynamic in conflict. Without mutual Listening, reconciliation is often elusive, premature, baseless and without strength. Agreement is not as important as LISTENING.*

*Listening has as a natural expectation – understanding. Fully listening births understanding....not necessarily agreement. To join with another in mutual understanding brings reconciliation (peace) even if there remains a disagreement in perspective, experience and decision....and perhaps even a change in the relationship.*

So HOW TO FIGHT.....And Find PEACE in it.....(See Savage's Role Renegotiation Model)