

Reconciliation: Worth the Wrestling

Source: Ezekiel 33:7-11, Psalm 119:33-40, Romans 13:8-14, Matthew 18:15-20

Can I tell you something true this morning? Somewhere along the way, somebody taught us that keeping the peace meant keeping quiet.

Somebody taught us; maybe your mum, maybe your first job, maybe a church that meant well, that the loving thing to do, when somebody hurt you, was to let it go. Smile through it. Smooth it over. Say nothing and hope it passes. And look, there's a reason we learned that. Nobody wants to be the one who makes it awkward. Nobody wants to be "difficult."

But then you get to Matthew 18, and Jesus messes all that up.

He doesn't say, "If your brother or sister sins against you, let it slide." He doesn't say, "Go tell your friends about it first, get everybody on your side." No, he says *go*. Go to them. Go directly. "Point out the fault when the two of you are alone." Just you. Just them. No audience.

That's a hard word, friends. Because a lot of us have been taught our whole lives that our worth is tied up in being agreeable. Don't rock the boat. Be the peacekeeper. But I need you to hear the difference this morning, because it's not a small one: a peacekeeper avoids the conflict to protect their own comfort. A peacemaker walks *into* the conflict to protect the relationship. Jesus didn't call us to keep the peace. He called us to make the peace.

The Turn

Now Ezekiel; Ezekiel gets a hard assignment. God says, "I've made you a watchman." And a watchman's whole job is to see trouble coming and open his mouth about it. God tells him straight: if you see it coming and you say nothing, and it happens anyway, that's on you. But if you sound the alarm, then whatever happens next, you did your part. It's not yours to carry anymore.

But watch, please, this is not God trying to catch somebody in a 'gotcha'. Look how the passage ends: "Turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" God is not keeping score. God is not interested in being right. God says, plain as day, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live."

That's the whole point of reconciliation. It was never about winning. It was never about being vindicated, standing there with your arms crossed saying "I told you so." The point is that both people get to *live*. Both people get to turn... back toward each other, and back toward God.

And that's why the psalmist doesn't pray for a win. Listen to this prayer; it's not "God, straighten them out." It's "Teach *me*... Give *me* understanding... Turn *my* heart to your decrees." Before we ask God to fix the other person, the psalm is teaching us to ask God to turn something in us first. That's a hard prayer to pray. Try praying it about somebody who hurt you and see how it sits. Someone that betrayed you, that deserted you, that insulted you, that left you holding the bag. Tough one!

Growing Up Into the Courage to Go

Now let me talk about growing into this for a minute, because nobody wakes up one day just able to do this. It's a process.

See, there's a place a lot of us live for a season ... spiritually, developmentally ... where right and wrong isn't really ours yet. It's borrowed. It belongs to whoever we trust most: the family, the church, the tradition. And in that place, conflict feels dangerous; not because of what might get said, but because disagreeing with the group feels like it might unravel who you *are*. So you stay quiet. You go along. You call it humility. But underneath it; a lot of times, that's just fear wearing humility's clothes.

Something has to shift before a person can walk up to somebody and say, out loud, "What you did hurt me." That shift is *you* finally owning a conscience that's actually *yours*; examined, chosen, not just inherited. That's what Matthew 18 is asking of us. Go to them. "Just between the two of you." Not the group chat. Not everybody but them. Just you and them. Because this is a matter between two souls that belong to each other, and that kind of direct, grown-up courage doesn't tear community apart; it's actually what holds it together. A community full of people who never say the true, hard thing to each other isn't peaceful. It's just quietly falling apart and calling it "fine". Everything if 'fine'.

But hold on, please. There's a further place to grow past that one too. Because you can get so good at speaking your truth that you start thinking truth-telling is the whole ballgame. You can become a person who's excellent at confrontation and not nearly as good at communion. The deepest maturity isn't just having the nerve to name the wound. It's holding, at the very same time, in the very same breath, both the truth of what happened *and* the truth that the person who hurt you is still, fully, a whole and undiminished creation of God, loved by God. You don't get to pick one. That's a rare kind of grown. We can only truly live in the love that is God.

When Somebody Won't Come to the Table

Now Matthew doesn't pretend every reconciliation works out. He builds in the hard part: what if they won't listen? What if they keep on with that thing that hurt you in the first place? Not after you went alone, not after you brought witnesses, not even after you brought it to the whole church. The behaviour continues, so Jesus says: "let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

Now if you read that quickly, it sounds like a verdict. Cut 'em off. Write 'em off. Case closed. And honestly, that's how some folks have seen this verse; like Jesus just handed you permission to be done with those horrible people.

But hold on. Think about who's talking, here.

This is the same Jesus who got caught eating dinner at Matthew's house; Matthew, a tax collector, surrounded by tax collectors, while the religious folks stood outside wringing their hands about who he was sitting with. This is the same Jesus who looked at a Roman centurion, about as outside the covenant as you could get, and said, "I haven't seen faith like this anywhere in Israel." This is the same Jesus who let a Canaanite woman go toe-to-toe with him, argue him down, and then told her how great her faith was. This is the same Jesus who looked up into a tree, saw a tax collector everybody in that town despised, and said, "Zacchaeus, come down, I'm coming to your house today."

So when Jesus says "treat them like a Gentile and a tax collector" we need to ask: what did Jesus *actually* do with Gentiles and tax collectors? He didn't walk away from them. He sought them out. He ate with them. He made them the center of his ministry, not the edge of it. So if that's the standard, "let them be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" isn't a door slamming shut. It's Jesus redefining the door. It's Jesus saying, "Even the one who won't mend their way, won't turn, don't you dare stop treating them like somebody worth reconciling with."

You can't force a confrontation to become a communion. But you can still leave the table set.

And I want to say something to whoever's carrying this right now. Maybe you did all of it; went alone, brought a witness, said the true thing as gentle and as clear as you knew how, and they still wouldn't turn with you, or change. Hear me: you are not required to build a bridge that only you are willing to stand on. Refusal is real. It costs something. Jesus doesn't pretend it doesn't. But even there, this text won't let you land in contempt. It hands you a different posture, the same one Jesus took with every outsider he ever met. The door stays open. The table stays set. The welcome doesn't have an expiration date, even if nobody's walked through it yet. Some of the truest reconciling Jesus ever did was with the exact people everybody else had already given up on.

Owed Only Love

Paul tells the Romans, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." I love that word "owe". Like love is the one debt God actually wants you to keep paying and never finish paying off. We "owe" love.

Because here's the thing, reconciliation isn't really about fixing something broken. "Broken" makes it sound like the original thing is gone and we're just gluing fragments back together. But what if the wholeness never actually left? What if it just got covered up; covered by the hurt, by the silence; covered up by the version of the relationship that got twisted around an untended wound? What if the truth of who you are to each other never stopped being true but is just underneath it? Paul says love fulfills the law because love isn't a new rule stacked on the old ones. It's the deepest law that was already running underneath all of them. Reconciliation works the same way. You're not manufacturing a new peace out of nothing. You're uncovering the peace that was there the whole time; yes, even in the outsider, even in the one who refused, even in the person everybody else quit inviting to the table.

"Let us live honorably," Paul says, "as in the day, put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Put on the light. Not armor against the one who hurt you, light *for* them. And for us too.

Beautiful, Even Now

So here's what I want you to walk out of here with. In the hardest conversation you'll ever have, the sibling, the friend, the coworker, the parent, the ex, the stranger everybody's already written off, nothing that happened between you made either one of you one ounce less beautiful. Not the wound. Not the silence since. Not their refusal to change, if that's where you're standing right now. None of it touched what's truest and most beloved about either one of you. That was settled before any of this ever started. Settled before "tax collector." Settled before "Gentile." Settled before "how dare they". Settled before whatever label got hung on somebody to keep them outside the circle.

So go. Just the two of you. Not to win. Not to be right. But because God takes no pleasure in the death of anything, not the death of a friendship, not the death of a family, not the death of any relationship that still

has breath in it. God takes pleasure in hearts entwined and meeting at that table. And if the ones at odds won't change, leave the table set anyway, the way Jesus always did. Go, trusting that "Wherever two or more are gathered there I am with you", even in conflict, even in tears, even across the widest distance you've ever crossed, something holy shows up right there with them.

Turn my heart, O God. Turn both our hearts. And let us live, together, in the beautiful light of your day.

Now I ask that we sit in this moment together for a bit. Enter the silence, and let it hold you. As you rest in the quiet, let your mind go, without needing to resolve anything, to a relationship these words may have touched. You don't need words for it. Just let it be there with you. (Monica begins background music)