

Reconciliation:
September 6, 2026

Famously. Sir Winston Churchill... **[1 Churchill and Astor]**

Liked to fight.

Not only during the war...

But also in his social world.

His daily interactions.

He would say...

Really snippy snarky things.

Some might even call him...

Mean spirited.

Like the ongoing conflict...

He had with Lady Nancy Astor...

Who was the first woman...

To serve as a member of Parliament...

Way back in 1919.

But she and Winston Churchill...

Went around and around and around.

I'll give you one example.

She said... to him...

If you were my husband...

I would put poison in your tea.

To which he replied...

Madam... if you were my wife...

I would drink it.

Now... that's one way to engage in conflict.

You slam the other person...

With the harshness of your words.

To prove you are better and stronger.

You know.. this is not a good way.

It causes more hurt.

More conflict.

And sometimes...

It even creates a permanent divide...

That can't be repaired.

Not the optimal result.

Not what we...as people of faith...

Want to happen.

Here's another way to deal with conflict.

It comes from the poet Ogden Nash...

It's a poem called...

A Word to Husbands. **[2 Nash]**

And it reads.
To keep your marriage brimming,
With love in the loving cup,
Whenever you're wrong, admit it;
Whenever you're right, shut up.

This is what we call avoidance.
If you don't... at least try...
To talk about the problem...identify it...
And resolve it...

If you act like... there is nothing wrong...
Then it becomes bigger...
Under the surface...

It's like a festering infection.
That you can't see...
That you don't acknowledge...
But continues to get worse...
Until you have to do something radical...
To fix it.

Many years ago... someone I love very much.... **[3 Conflict]**
Here at church... looked me in the eye...
And told me that I don't like conflict...
That I tend to avoid conflict...
I can tell you...categorically...
That is not true.

Well... I mean... no one likes conflict...
Unless there is some unresolved...
Childhood need... to fight... and be right all the time.

If you're doing that...
Then please hear me for a minute.
You're ok. You don't have to prove yourself.
You are loved... just the way you are.
So quit fighting so hard.

But secondly... this pastor job...
Comes with an unlimited amount...
A lifetime supply...

Of potential conflict... on any given day.
There is no need for me... to seek conflict.
It just naturally happens.

And when it does...
We all work together...
To address our problems.

Did you know... that Joy Lutheran Church... **[4 Covenant 1]**

Has a covenant... that we read...
Before our meetings?

This is the first page.

The other day... at our staff meeting...
We were reading the covenant...
After the prayer...
And before we began... the business...

And it was Linda's turn...
If you went straight around the table... in a circle... like normal people...
But your staff members... are naughty sometimes...
Not me... but the other staff members...

And we collectively and psychically...
Decided... without speaking a word...
That we would all... repeatedly...
Skip Linda.

So... each time she took a breath...
Someone else... jumped in...
And read what she was going to read.

It was funny.
And Linda's a good sport...
Our actions maybe didn't capture...
The spirit of the covenant...
But it sure was funny.

The point is...
We read the covenant...
Each and every time...
Before our staff meeting.

And honestly... before every meeting...
We have at Joy...
That's how central...
To our identity...
This agreement...
Has become.

So let's take one minute...
And read it together today.

The way it works...
Is that the leader of the meeting...
Reads the introduction...
And then individuals...
Read one numbered line...

And at the end...
We read the last line...
Number 7... all together.

Let's do this.

I'll start. **[5 Covenant 2]**

That covenant is an agreement...

That was born out of conflict...

During a difficult time...

Here at Joy.

We... and the people who came before us...

Decided that restoring this community...

We share in Christ...

In this place...

Was and still is... a priority.

So please understand...

When we read this covenant...

We are not wasting our time....

We are not going through the motions...

We are not just saying...

A bunch of mumbo jumbo...

We are recommitting...

To the ideals...

That hold us together...

As people of faith...

As a community of love...

As God's people.

The reason I'm talking about conflict today...

Is because Jesus talks about it...

In the gospel lesson.

He gives us...

Three steps of resolving conflict. **[6 Reconciliation]**

I know it says... if someone sins against you...

These are the steps you should take.

But isn't that always the perception we have...

When we have conflict with another person.

We think they sinned against us.

They have done us wrong..

They have made a bad choice...

And for some reason...

Then its our problem.

So... sin becomes a source of conflict.

And it is a matter of perception.

Sometimes we think someone...

Has done us wrong...

And we don't talk to them...

For a very long time...
Because we are mad.

We put them into a passive aggressive... time out.

But you... that's not the way of love.
That's not how brothers and sister in Christ...
Are supposed to live.
We have been declared FREE...
By Christ himself...

So why in the world...
Would we want to bind someone up?...
To make them suffer...
To make them sorry...
To make them understand...
That they are wrong...
And I am right.

It's no way to live.

So Jesus gave us steps...
To try to reconcile...
With someone who sins...
Against us.

But let's just say...
Jesus gave us three steps...
To try to heal...
Our broken relationships.

First. One on one.
Go directly to the other person...
And try to resolve the issue.

Secondly. Bring one or two other people with you...
So that you can have an outside perspective...
And some clarity... and wisdom.

Sometimes we all need help...
Talking to each other.

And finally... seek the community.
Invite the whole church...
To help in working toward...
Resolution.

That one seems really extreme to me.
But I suppose if the conflict was really...
Eroding the foundation...
Of the community.

Then a whole church discussion...
Would be the next and necessary step.

But please notice... **[7 Restoration]**
THE GOAL OF EVERY STEP IS RESTORATION....
And healing...
And goodness...
And love.

These steps aren't designed...
To make anyone feel shame...
Or guilt...
Or pain...
Or have everybody...
Gang up on someone.

Not the goal.
This is not to punish other people.
It's to restore broken relationships... right?

Well... then Jesus says...
Something kind of strange...
And hard to understand.

He says... **[8 Gentiles and TC]**
If the offender refuses to listen even to the church,
Let such a one be to you... as a gentile and a tax collector.

TREAT THEM LIKE GENTILES AND TAX COLLECTORS.
The reason I think this is so strange...
Is because it sounds really negative...
Until you consider...
How Jesus treated...
Gentiles...
And Tax Collectors.

You know what I mean?

Gentiles have always been...
An important part of his life and work...
In the world. **[9 Magi]**

Remember when the Magi...
The Kings came from the East...
To visit the toddler Jesus.

Well... they weren't Jewish.
They were gentiles...
They were from a strange land...
They believed in other gods and had other traditions...

And yet... there they are... right in the middle...
A central part... of the Christmas story...
Every year.

And the Roman Centurion... [10 Centurion]
Who came to Jesus... asking him to heal his daughter...
Jesus did. And said...
He had not seen that kind of faith...
In all of Israel.

Jesus helped him.
Even though...
He was a gentile.
Not Jewish.

And you remember the feeding of the 5000... **[11 Feed 4000]**
That Jesus did... for all those good Jewish folks...
Who were following him.

Did you realize... he did it twice.
The second time... was on the other side of the lake.
He was preaching and teaching...
In gentile territory...

And it came time for supper...
And he feed 4000 people.
Not as many as on the Jewish side...
Of the lake...

But still a miracle...
And still an act of extreme generosity...
And inclusion...

They were gentiles...
Not Jewish.

And just recently...
We had the story... **[12 Canaanite Woman]**
Of the Canaanite woman...
Who desperately needed Jesus...
To heal her daughter.

He claimed that he came ONLY...
To the lost sheep...
Of the house of Israel.

He called her a dog.
And she said... even the dogs...
Get the crumbs from the master's table.

By the time...
That whole interaction was done...
He looked at the Canaanite woman...
And said...

No one has ever had... Greater faith...
Than this woman. Right here.

She was a gentile.
Not Jewish.

Now... stay with me.
We're almost there.

Jesus said...
If the offender refuses to listen even to the church,
Let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector.

Just think... for a quick minute...
About how Jesus...
Treated tax collectors. **[13 Call of Matthew]**

Jesus called one...
To work with him...
In his ministry.
Matthew was a tax collector.

Jesus sat down and ate with tax collectors. **[14 Eating]**
Which was a sign...
When you go into someone's house...
When you have dinner with them...

It's a sign...
Of love and intimacy...
They were friends.

So much so...
That the religious leaders said...
What is this guy doing?
He claims to be a teacher...
And leader of Israel...

And yet. He eats...
With tax collectors...
And sinners.

So when Jesus says...
If the offender refuses to listen even to the church,
Let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector.

Does he mean...
Treat them the way...
That the nasty old religious leaders...
The self-righteous...
Self-satisfied...
People of this world... treated them...
Like they were garbage...

Or did he mean...
Treat them... like I treat them.

You know.
If they refuse to listen to you...
A couple of you...
And even the whole church...
You know what you should do?

We should do...
What Jesus would do.

How Jesus treated gentiles.
How Jesus treated tax collectors.
We should... **[15 Love Them]**

Love them.
Love them like Jesus.

Don't give up.
Don't throw them away.
Don't disregard... or disrespect them.

Let them go...
And do their thing.

Let them be mad at you...

Let them continue to think...
That they never sin...
Never do anything wrong.

But don't stop loving them.
Leave the door open...
Just a crack...

So if they repent...
If they have have a change of mind...
And a change of heart...

If they want to come back...

That you and I...
Will be the first ones...
Standing at the door...
With our arms wide open...

Saying... welcome home.
I've missed you.

Welcome home...
In the name of Christ.
We are so glad... You are here.

Thanks be God.
Amen!