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Gospel lesson

Last week we talked about how the disciples had to accept what kind of Messiah Jesus really was (and is). After that in the Gospel, they started arguing about who was greatest, and Jesus told them to be humble, like children, because God values everyone. That brings us to:



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/gnpi-059-christian-relationships/>;
courtesy of Good News Productions
International and College Press Publishing

Matthew 18:15-20

NRSVue

¹⁵ "If your brother and sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If you are listened to, you have regained that one.

¹⁶ But 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.

¹⁷ If that person 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.

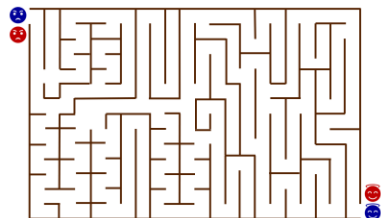
¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

The Word of God for the people of God

<Children's/Interactive time>

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picture from MMMS design

Have you ever done a maze? <Let them respond>

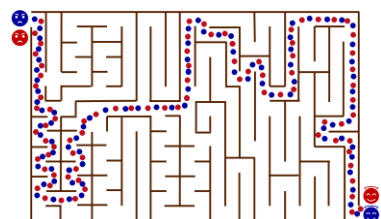
Can you solve this one, getting the angry faces through the path to being happy together?

<Let them respond/try>

Is it easy to get stuck in a maze? <Let them respond>

How many ways out are there? <Let them respond>

In this one, there is a shortest way out, and you cannot get out without essentially covering that path.

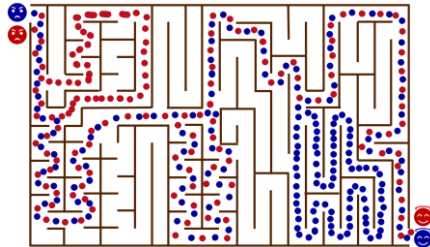


picture from MMMS design

Did anyone find alternate routes through?

<Let them respond>

There are other routes you can take, but they circle back to the main track very close to where you left it. Essentially, you add a lot of unnecessary track to your path by taking them.



picture from MMMS design

When you get mad, is it easy to get stuck being angry with someone? <Let them respond>

Who can help you both work through the reconciliation process, so that you can be happy together?
<Let them respond>

Do you always take the easiest or shortest path to get there? <Let them respond>

A lot of times we choose to take side paths on the road to reconciliation, for a variety of reasons. We may not understand why the other person chooses to, but it is important for us to be patient and remember that Jesus tells us to show love.

What does that look like to you? <Let them respond>

We are to forgive those who repent, but if they will not repent, we need to show love for ourselves too and walk away from the unrepentant. It is not right to subject ourselves to abuse but it is right to help people to do better.

I pray that we may all live with the love of God flooding our lives.

<Hymn "Where Charity and Love Prevail"

UMH #549 vv. 1,3,4,5>

Message: Conflict



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/lessons-in-leadership/week-3-fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a/week-3-fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lessons-in-leadership-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Holy God of peace and reconciliation,
as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may live with one another in Your grace and teach the world the joy of life as Your disciples.
Amen.

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We continue our "Lessons in Leadership" series today with "Conflict."

"This worship service addresses the uncomfortable but unavoidable reality of conflict, looking to Jesus' clear roadmap in Matthew 18 for faithful reconciliation. Rather than airing grievances, we will use this time to practice empathy, praying for those we experience friction with and

recognizing them as fellow image-bearers of God.

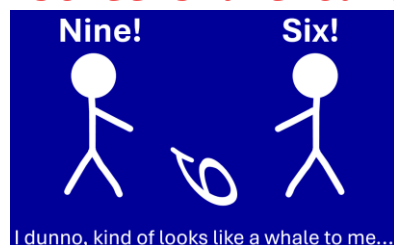
Ultimately, we will be reminded that we do not navigate these difficult challenges alone, finding our refuge and strength together in God's protective presence.”

Have you ever watched kids playing a game without an adult referee or written rules? Every so often they will have a disagreement about how the game is to be played, and they will navigate through it in a variety of ways.

Sometimes they come to common agreement, sometimes one insists on setting the rules and the rest just acquiesce, and sometimes they end the game because they cannot agree. It usually works out best when they all respect one another's views.

Prior to today's Gospel reading, the disciples were arguing. I can hear it now: “You listen to me!” “No, you listen to me!” – a clash of egos, each demanding to be acknowledged as **right**, as the one in charge.

<briefly screenshare cartoon in Zoom>



picture from MMMS design

It reminds me of that old cartoon of characters on opposite sides of a number with one claiming “Nine!” and the other claiming “Six!” Both views are equally valid, and an onlooker may not even understand why the two are so adamantly arguing about what their

numbers must be because the onlooker sees it as...
maybe a whale?

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Much of life is like that. Each of us gets so comfortable in the way we do things that when someone else tells us we should do it differently, we start with “No!” instead of “Why?” and an unnecessary argument ensues, perhaps even requiring time to cool off and consult with other people before a reconciling discussion can occur.

What should we do instead? Perhaps we start by actually listening to the other person first. Jesus said to go to them one-on-one, have a discussion with them. In one of my classes this week, it was emphasized that power in relationships is NOT like pie – influence grows rather than stays at a set level. The more likely I am to influence you, the more likely you are to influence me, and vice versa.

Ideally, we can influence one another directly with love. If that does not work out, Jesus says to take the matter before a small group, that one or two others can provide perspective and bring out the truth. If that still does not work out, then make it very public, and if the wrongdoer yet refuses to repent, know that you are not going to change them.

Do not subject yourself to frustration and potential abuse by continuing to try to get them to change. Show yourself some grace and walk away. Jesus gives you permission – and even instruction – to do so!

The Israelites did that in the Old Testament reading.

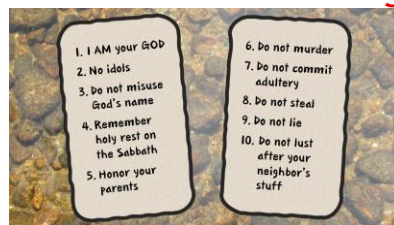
They had given Pharaoh many opportunities to repent and when he did not, they finally walked away. It was scary for them – they needed the signs from God to build up their courage and trust that this was the right thing to do.

There is tremendous symbology in that Passover ritual. Aside from the sacrifice of the lamb of God, there was the sharing of the meal with their family and neighbors – all of them were in it together, sharing the experience and supporting one another. When we get into conflict with somebody, we are not the only ones affected by it.

The blood on the doorposts was the blood already spilled by the innocents, which left a mark in the world of the wrongdoers that would remain even after the victims were gone. Unresolved conflict leaves a mark too, maybe a bad taste in your mouth or maybe worse. We need to work on reconciliation to wash away the stain of bad blood left behind by conflict.

Jesus died to wash away the stain of our sins, to give us a path forward for living in love.

<briefly screenshare image in Zoom>



picture from MMMS collection

Paul wrote to the Romans about how all the second half of the commandments and all the laws relating to living with neighbors were summed up as “You shall love your neighbor as yourself... [for] love is the

fulfilling of the law.”

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Love seeks what is best for all, makes sure the needs of the least are met before passing the excess on to those who want to indulge in more. For example, I believe that everyone who does honest full-time work should earn a minimum living wage that enables them to support a spouse and two children. They used to do that everywhere in this country in the seventies; today, two adults working full-time cannot even manage that at minimum wage in many states.

Therefore, I think any executive whose net worth increases in one year by [more than a thousand times what that minimum living wage would be] should be required to pay all of their workers at least that minimum living wage – and supplement their health care insurance as well, as long as we do not have universal health care coverage, even if they only work part-time.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/lessons-in-leadership/week-3-fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a/week-3-fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lessons-in-leadership-graphics>

Maybe that is my “Nine!” to someone else’s “Six!” – I don’t really know. I do know that society is hurting right now because conflict is rampant in the world. Yet when our lives bring us to conflict, God guides us on a path of love out of it if we trust and follow Jesus.

So this week, I would like for you to:

- ✝ Note the conflict in your life. Where is it coming from? How much of it did you cause with what you chose to say and do?
- ✝ Give your conflict to God. Pray for guidance and help in dealing with it.
- ✝ If you wronged someone, go to them contritely and see if they are willing to reconcile.
- ✝ If your conflict involves another person who wronged you, follow Jesus's instructions as we heard in the Gospel reading today.
 - Try talking with them.
 - Be humble and listen to what they explain, yet firm about your needs as well.
 - If they refuse to listen to you, ask one or two witnesses to help you work it out with them.
 - Stay humble, especially if the witnesses note that maybe the other person is not entirely in the wrong.
 - If you need further recourse, you can go to the larger group - in the UMC, that is the Administrative Board.
 - And if the person still refuses to reconcile, show yourself grace, and stop beating your head against the wall of their stubbornness. Walk away until they are ready to reconcile.

In all of this, try to reconcile in a spirit of love. Work for a world where all needs are met with constructive, nurturing love - the kind of love Jesus showed us through what He taught and how He lived, died, and lives again. And now,

Christ our Lord invites to His table
all who love Him, who earnestly repent of their sin
and seek to live in peace with one another.

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Therefore, let us confess our sin before God and one another.

<slide change>

<Confession and Pardon

UMH p.12>

Let us pray:

Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you
with our whole heart.

We have failed to be an obedient church.

We have not done your will, we have broken your law,
we have rebelled against your love,
we have not loved our neighbors,
and we have not heard the cry of the needy.

Forgive us, we pray.

Free us for joyful obedience,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Hear the good news:

Christ died for us while we were yet sinners;
that proves God's love toward us.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!
Glory to God. Amen.



picture from MMMS collection

<Communion - UNCOVER elements>

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.

You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.

When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.

You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke through your prophets, who looked for that day

when justice shall roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream,

when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

<slide change>

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ. Your Spirit anointed him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to announce that the time had come when you would save your people. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners.

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection you gave birth to your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

<hold hands out over bread/elements>

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:
“Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

<hold hands out over juice/elements>

When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:
“Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,

<slide change>

we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ's offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.
Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

<hold hands out over elements>

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on
on these gifts of bread and juice.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,
redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each
other, and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory,
and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit
in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours,
almighty God, now and forever.

Amen.

And now, with the confidence of the children of God,
let us pray: <Lord's Prayer>

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<Breaking of the bread and Lifting of the cup>

<Serving of the elements;

hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" UMH #298>

<Doxology>

<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Reconciling God, you mark our lives not with fear,
but with mercy, and you gather us into a people
shaped by grace.

As you delivered your children at Passover and taught
your church to seek peace with one another, teach us
to live in our “church clothes” every day—clothed in
patience, truth, and love.

Receive these gifts as signs of our trust in your
saving power and our commitment to your work of
healing and restoration.

Use what we offer to mend what is broken, welcome
those who feel outside, and build a community where
forgiveness and hope have the final word.

(above prayer from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>)

- Lord, please help {these members of the body of Christ
whom we lift up} with Your healing touch and comfort:

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- -

- Thanks for

- -
- -

- Keep our distant family, shut-ins, and those

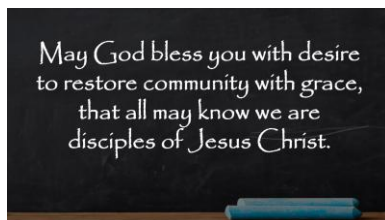
traveling safe/healthy until we see them again.

- Lord, please help all people who struggle, especially those to whom we remain oblivious.
 - Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
 - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
- Guide our Leaders – local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church – to work toward reconciliation of the nations and care for all people, to put needs ahead of greed, grace ahead of pride, and bring peace with justice.

All these things we pray in Your holy name, Amen.

<Hymn “Make Me a Channel of Your Peace” TFWS #2171>

<Benediction>



background picture from
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/Lessons-in-Leadership/week-3-fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a/week-3-fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lessons-in-Leadership-graphics>

Family of God, the lessons of reconciliation and peace-making are not easy.

As you move into the week ahead, may God bless you with the desire to restore community when it is broken, to hold boundaries with firmness and grace, to listen with curiosity, and to speak with gentleness, that all may know we are disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Benediction written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, May 2026 and posted on <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/Lessons-in-Leadership/week-3-fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a/week-3-fifteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lessons-in-Leadership-Liturgical-resources>