

## Sermon Notes

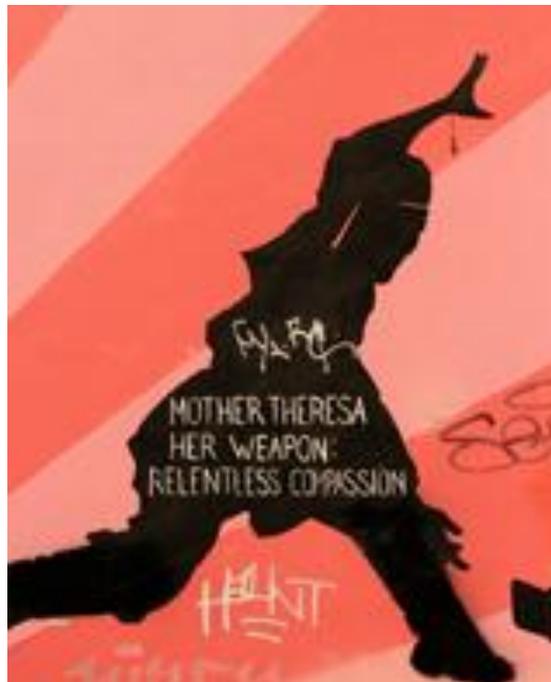
Romans 13:8-14

Matthew 18:10-20

*Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. Romans 13:8-10*

*(Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven- What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.)*

*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. 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. If 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. 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. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you. 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. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. Matthew 18:(10-14)15-20*



Mother Theresa, Her Weapon: Relentless Compassion; Outdoor mural in the Mission District of San Francisco

Whenever we gather together we can be sure that we will not all agree! Our stories, our eyes, our ears and our minds and our passionate hearts bring different perspectives! (Wondering if we see differently? Just ask someone who has had a cataract removed or wears glasses!) As we bump up against one another in what Matthew calls "church" or community, we learn more about truth in ourselves and in our larger communities. Stumbling along, we strive to listen to God. It is hard; our voices are not alike, we hear different things, we make mistakes, we are complicit in sins of omission and commission. Yet, as people of faith we believe the Spirit helps us to love one another. How do we recognize that Love? God's justice and compassion comes into the world—now—in our own faltering attempts to be faithful, even in the midst of conflict.

What do we do when someone has sinned against us? Jesus in this text in Matthew is not prescribing how to prosecute a member of the community, he is instead offering an alternative narrative that focuses on the person who has been deeply wronged, suggesting first to talk to the other person, and secondly, inviting a loving, praying community (ekklesia,) to be a part of a reconciliation. This is not a calling out of the sins of a member— or the marginalization of the wounded—it a move toward wholeness. The binding and loosing is the power of the community to restore. For Matthew, that power to bring reconciliation is in the promise that God is with in in Christ, even in conflict.



Three women praying - fresco from Gondar church in Ethiopia

Jesus requests that when there is a conflict, a deep dividing trespass or sin between people, that we are to first seek out our sister or brother to bring about reconciliation. If there is no reconciliation, or if it is not safe, bring two or three witnesses. The invitation to have witnesses is again, not to ask them to also testify against another person, but to witness the conversation between two members of the community. The conflict affects not only the individuals, it affects the whole community of church. Jesus asks that we find a way toward reconciliation, not *if* it is convenient, but because the power of forgiveness *is* present—and that is a sign of God’s in-breaking grace. From the Book of Common Prayer “*we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against thy holy laws, we have left undone those things which we ought to have done and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.*” We have turned away, turned “a blind eye,” on the exchanges of faithful people seeking justice and need to ask for God’s help in order to bring reconciliation. Sometimes it appears that community cannot be restored; yet parable after parable reminds us that God continues to call the sinner and the lost. God desires to heal the brokenhearted and rejoices when the lost are restored and brought into community.

Who is lost? Jesus tells stories of religious people, rich people, poor people, farmers, fishers, tax collectors, young, old, people who are not Jews and people who are Jews—even the beloved Peter gets lost...All of us go astray. We sin and are in broken relationships with our sister and brother and the stranger in our midst. We are in conflict as communities. Living together is hard to do!

Jesus is present whenever we gather together—even as few as two or three people. Can we ask God for the grace to be part of the transforming power that brings change and new life into our personal worlds and change and new life into our larger communities and the world? The Gospel suggests that when we see the world in a new way—the world turns upside down—. The continuing promise of God given to us in Baptism where we are marked as Christ’s own forever allows us be forgiven and reconciled again and again—as individuals and as communities.

### Reconciliation by Josefina de Vasconcellos at Coventry Cathedral



The Good News is that we can live together in a new way, not based on gender, culture, age or economics but on serving one another and protecting the most vulnerable in our midst. We have the power to heal the wounded, feed the hungry and forgive the “tax collector” who climbs out of a tree and invites Jesus into their home. We can carry the lost sheep until it is safely in the green pasture and rejoice with the one who has found their way back--to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” In this way of a compassionate heart that serves, we find new life in Christ.

*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 36:26*