

# A Sermon for DaySpring

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**“All that’s at Stake”**

**Ezekiel 33: 7-9; Matthew 18: 15-19; Romans 13: 6-14**

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Does it occur to you often all that’s at stake in the church being the church?

There’s a little scenario that’s been imagined along the way... can’t remember who first used it, some saint I’d bet. But here’s the picture... the imagined scene.

Jesus has finished his work here on earth and he returns to heaven and is of course welcomed home by the angels. He’s doing a little debriefing with one of them... Gabriel, I suppose, and Gabriel is asking him how it went and what’s next. **“What’s your plan?”**

Jesus just points down... **“I left it all in their hands. There’s a little band of people... my friends and followers and I’ve pretty much left it all up to them.”**

Gabriel looks a little doubtful and disappointed. **“That’s it... those guys?”**

**“Yep!”**

**“Well,”** Gabriel keeps at it, **“What’s the backup plan... what’s Plan B... I mean, assuming they don’t do what needs to be done?”**

**“Ahhh... there isn’t one... They’re pretty much it.”**

We’re pretty much it. The hope of Glory resides in the church being the church and there’s an awful lot at stake. It’s in our hands...

And I’m not just talking about that message we’re to proclaim, though that’s a big part of it... Going into all the world, and all, and saying, **“Here’s what we’ve learned about who God is in Christ and how much God wants you to know him.”** There’s a lot at stake, people need to hear what we know... There’s that good news to share. But that’s not really what I’m thinking about today.

And there’s the call to care. To take cups of cold water and give them in the name of Jesus to those who are thirsty... and homeless... and oppressed... and we know that calling, especially just now. There’s a lot at stake and lives depending on the church being the church with great compassion but that’s not really what I’m thinking about today.

What I’m thinking about today is what takes place inside the walls of the church... where the church must be the church. Where the church must be a community that is together in the way that Jesus has called us to be together.

Known...

Loving... supporting...

Accepting...

Blessing.

You might imagine Jesus looking down with Gabriel again this morning... looking down at 7900 Renewal Way.

Gabriel says, **“Still the same plan as always, I guess?”**

**“Yep”**

**“Hasn’t changed?”**

**“Hasn’t changed! I’m still counting on these frail creatures of dust to look like and be like me. I’m counting on them being a community.”**

I wonder what Gabriel thinks now about Jesus’ plan... based upon our progress here at DaySpring and the loving we’ve done or haven’t done?

These texts we just heard, are timely, I think. They’re all about the community and our responsibility to one another. They are timely because we’ve entered a new chapter in our church’s story.

We moved in here just over two years ago and in that time we've more than doubled our membership. We're in a new chapter... We've moved from literally everyone knowing everyone to a situation where you may not know those sitting next to you. Though we're still a small church, we don't know one another yet, do we? We have lots of folks hungry for community.

It's a new chapter...

even more diversity...

of age... of opinion... backgrounds...

We're definitely in chapter two of our story. More people... more differences... more to do. We've got buildings to pay for and tend to. We've got a staff. We've got a pastor who is getting old... can't see anymore... forgetful.

And in this new chapter, becoming and being a community... being the church together, is the challenge before us and really that's what I'm talking about today.

And I should say that I think we did well with that in chapter one, but... but... everyone who's ever written about community says that that's the easy chapter. There're stages in any community and the first one is always a breeze.

New communities are like newlyweds. It just so easy, isn't it... loving in the early years of a relationship? And there's a naïve kind of narcissism. I see it when really young couples... too young... come to me for premarital counseling and they say something like, "**we've decided that when we have problems we're just going to talk them out.**"

**"Ummm, good idea, let me write that down."**

The early days are easy and the reality of the human condition is minimized. And new communities are tempted to pat themselves on the back about it.

Don't you imagine that happened in the early days of the church? They were on such a high and everyone felt so full and alive and there was so much goodness... spirit and love.

They just reveled in it, and though they thanked God, it was easy to slip into a thinking that said, "**We really have it going, don't we?**" They didn't have all that baggage and structure... except maybe a little chart with who was doing what.

**"We're going to do community right, now aren't we?"**

**It won't be like in the old days when folks got excluded.**

**We won't fuss about insignificant things.**

**We'll take care of everyone's needs.**

**And if we have problems, we'll just talk them out."**

And in the first days... the first chapter... that was so easy. The spirit was so real and the honeymoon so good. But what we know from scripture is that eventually they had to deal with everything that any community had to deal with.

Some folks had egos to contend with... and personalities that were sharp.

People had different beliefs and ideas and backgrounds.

Some got neglected... some got hurt.

And people... being people... they sinned against one another... Not just irritated one another or didn't connect with one another, as real as that is. They sinned. They hurt.

That's why Matthew includes this teaching about going to someone who's sinned against you and confronting them... dealing with them. And I don't know about you... but most every fiber in my being resists this teaching.

In the first place, I hate conflict... makes me sick to my stomach. Of course, I hate things not being right between people, too... that makes me queasy, too. But most of all I dread saying to someone, "**We have to talk.**"

Some of you have been blessed with a thicker skin... and I mean that... it's a blessing. It's spiritual gift. It's in the Bible. Right there in I Corinthians. There are the gifts of wisdom, preaching, teaching, care

giving, miraculous powers, tongues and interpreting tongues... and “thick skin”, I promise it’s in there and some of you are blessed with it.

You do conflict with less energy expended. What a gift.

I don’t have that gift. It’s hard on me, so when I read this teaching I say, “**O yuck.**”

I also resist it, and I suspect you do, too, because we’re Americans and Westerners and we’re into being individuals and all... and in this neck of the woods we just don’t go to people and tell them they sinned. It’s just downright un-American... we have the right to life, liberty, and no one ever confronting us... it says so in the Constitution; I promise, it’s in there.

I also resist this because I know that these kinds of passages in the Bible have been used to justify and encourage all sorts of meanness and exclusion and witch-hunts. Seeking out the contaminating element. Every self-righteous crusade and inquisition was fueled by folks believing they had biblical authority... spiritual diplomatic immunity to treat people other than Jesus would treat them.

**Got to drive out those infidels, you know. Get rid of those fundies... cast out those liberals... keep those sinners from contaminating us.** Pharisees always know and feel privileged to say.

Who among us wants to go there? ... Of course, we resist saying to someone, “**You’ve sinned against me.**”

And on our best days, we’re taking the advice of scripture and looking at ourselves and wondering, “**Maybe it’s me... who am I to cast any stone?**” We know that this takes not only great humility, but great spiritual maturity.

So, for all sorts of reasons, few of us here are comfortable with this text. But it’s in there and there is so much at stake. The church being the church... living together in love and in the process bearing witness to the world of the way things can be.

That’s why Matthew included this... because in the church we don’t get to write one another off. If I’ve said yes to Christ, I’ve said yes to the church, and that means I’ve said yes to you and forfeited the option of not caring about how things are between us.

Paul said in the Romans passage we heard, that the only debt we’re to have is the debt to love one another. YOU OWE THIS. You don’t get to opt out on loving.

Not knowing one another isn’t an option... not reaching out... isn’t an option. Worshipping without regard for relating isn’t a choice for the church.

Just tolerating people in the church, isn’t an option.

Holding grudges isn’t something we get to do.

You don’t get to write anyone off.

Living with hurt feelings... with unforgiveness... is a sin. And so Matthew, who’s been at the real business of church for a while, remembers Jesus saying, **If your brother, your sister, sins against you, go and show him his fault.**

And there is great wisdom and guidance here. It doesn’t say, **go preaching... go condemning.** No... just show her... and keep it private. Notice the respect for the person and the community.

I’ve avoided all these years, as the Baylor Family has struggled so, ever saying anything... but I must say, “**Don’t you wish folks (all of us) had remembered and been obedient to this verse of scripture during these difficult years?**”

Some have, I’m sure... but it seems many of us thought the verse said, “**If your sister sins against you gossip about it... If someone sins against you, rally the like-minded around you... or if your brother sins against you, post something on the internet.**” Well, that’s enough and I promise not to return to it for another ten years... and please, if I’ve sinned against you in what I’ve just said, come show me my fault.”

Let me see my brokenness... that's the command. And if it's still there because I'm stubborn, don't give up, there's too much at stake. Go get two or three others and let's work through this. Living in grace and knowing grace is that important. Don't give up on me.

And maybe, love me enough to withdraw from me. Tough love... There's some very good thinking here and it's all for the sake of love and the church being a community that proclaims something other than what we see displayed every night on the news.

And do notice, that this invitation to confront and to show the fault is situated... sandwiched... between a text where Jesus talks about the good shepherd who will go to any end to find that sheep that had wandered off. He'll do anything to find the one who is lost.

That parable is one side... and then on the other side we hear Peter asking Jesus, **"How many times do I have to forgive my brother? ..."** And you know his answer... **"Peter, you never get to stop forgiving. There's too much at stake."**

The world is at stake...

the future of the planet.

And the church is the only plan Jesus has.

We're like that sentinel... that night watchman that is imagined in Ezekiel. That's what Ezekiel was for the people and that's what we are for one another.

And the image is this... the watchman is standing guard. And he sees something moving on the dark horizon... and he hears something. The sound of soldiers moving, gathering... a sword or two clang together. Someone stumbles in the dark and says, **"Ah, shucks."**

For sure, the enemy coming... sneaking up and surrounding the community. There's no question about it now. He's sees them more clearly... They're going to attack, to plunder and pillage the village.

And the sentinel... the sentinel says, **"O, I just hate conflict."** **"Who am I to say, 'Wake up'... I wouldn't want to appear bossy."** **"What if I'm just imagining things?"** **"I just think I'll let them see the enemy for themselves and decide if they want to get out."**

That's the image. It'd be like a New Orleans meteorologist seeing the satellite image of Katrina and saying nothing.

There's so much at stake. The church is here... and the church is called to live in unity and in love. Not sentimental... honeymoon naiveté. But real community that has been through the realities of life and relationship together. This is our ministry... to the world.

Not only as we model and bear witness to what can be, but perhaps even more importantly, as we let loose in this world the energies of grace and love. What we do impacts – everything reacts to everything. What you bind is bound, what you loose is loosed. In other words, the most important thing you can do for peace in the Middle East is to forgive someone here. Something happens... the world is that connected.

When you look beyond someone's fault and love them... here.

When you make a new friend... here.

When you bless someone... here.

You are offering something to God to work with, out there. **"When two or three come together in the name of... in the living presence of... Christ, boundaries and walls and distance began to disappear."** It's true, and you've known it in your own experience... When the Living Christ has been present, you've known healing in your heart and between persons... **"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for in the reality of Christ's presence, it will be done."**

Do you know how much is at stake? **"It's time for us to wake up... salvation is near. Put aside darkness and put on the armor of light... Clothe yourselves with Christ."**

Amen.