

Sunday 6th September 2020
Held together
Romans 13:8-14, Matthew 18:15-20

The second reading for today is Matthew 18:15-20

Dealing With Sin in the Church

15 “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. 17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or 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 that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

When I was growing up I remember playing a game called ‘word association’. Who else remembers playing it? Let’s start with a quick game now. If anyone doesn’t know how to play, it’s really very simple. I say a word and you have to tell me the first word that comes into your head.

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The first word is... Breakfast

- Zoo
- Holiday
- Yellow

and the last word is Church

Church is an interesting word isn’t it, it means so many different things to different people, and I expect if we were to ask people outside of this building what the word means to them, we would get a completely different set of responses.

Matthew’s Gospel contains five sections where Jesus teaches at length on a subject. Today’s passage is part of the fourth section where he is focusing on life in the church, but of course it is important to remember that there was no formal church when Jesus was speaking and therefore the use of the word church in this passage doesn’t mean what it often implies today. The word in Greek is Ekklesia and it has to do with a group of people being called out from one place to another and speaks more of a gathering, an assembly or community. And of course as we read the New Testament we often see the early church meeting in one another’s homes, the homes of Cornelius, Lydia, Priscilla and Aquila for example, and more. So the Ekklesia of the New Testament is a group of people who have been called out of the world and to God; it is the church. I expect some of you may be

thinking about the echoes of the verses in 1 Peter 2:9-11 where he talks about the believers being 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.'

So today, what I really want to focus on is being the church. Both of our readings tell us something of how a community of believers should live. In Matthew, Jesus teaches about how to handle a situation where wrongdoing has broken a relationship within the community and in Romans, Paul places the value of loving one another above all others.

Today is the start of a new season here at Church of Our Saviour, we're physically back together as community here in the church building after six months apart. But, and it's a big but, we were still church during those last six months when our lives were totally disrupted by COVID-19, in fact possibly even more so; the Good Companions team have taken newsletters to their members, phoned them, visited them, people have shopped for those unable to get out to do their own, Stuart has delivered transcripts of our weekly services to those unable to access the Internet, we reached out to the local community in ways we wouldn't even have thought of at the beginning of the year through the picnic bags and My Clothes Rail. We need to learn from this, not going straight back to old patterns of being just because that is how it was always done before. We have the opportunity to build an even stronger kingdom community here in this place.

Whilst I was doing some preparation for today's talk I came across an article that described six characteristics of a strong family written by Dennis Lynn, a lecturer at Oregon State University which I think can be applied to us as the family of God just as much as to a natural family. His six points were

- Strong families express appreciation and affection
- Strong families have a strong commitment to each other
- Strong families spend enjoyable time together
- Strong families manage stress and crisis effectively
- Strong families have a sense of a spiritual well-being
- Strong families have affective and positive communication patterns

Families are complicated things aren't they? They love each other, but don't always agree on things, at their best they are places of encouragement, support, correction, teaching and much more. Being part of God's family is no different. And as our passages for today show us, we need to watch over one another in love, gently pointing out when a brother or sister fails to live by the values Jesus teaches, thus helping us to become more like Jesus and an ever more authentic representation of Christ here in Chelmer Village and Chancellor Park.

So what does 'being church' mean? It means being like Jesus, being part of God's family, it means we give of ourselves and our means, it means getting involved in the community. Our mission today is the same as that of the early disciples over 2000 years ago, to show God's love and the truth of the gospel. We have reached out to our community in new ways over the last six months. Our Facebook page has had many new 'likes', we've engaged with people we've never spoken to before and people are seeing that as a community we are interested in what is going on in their lives.

So let's build a strong Kingdom community, a strong church, a strong family of believers, a place of support, love and encouragement, where we are challenged to grow in our

discipleship, a place where we are there for one another, where there are people to walk through life with us, in the highs and the lows. And let's continue to get out of the building into our community and in loving our community sharing the love of God.

And finally I'd like to leave you with this thought. Mandy recently shared it on Facebook and it really resonated with me and my theme for today's talk.

I believe churches are meant for praising God. But so are 2am car rides, showers, coffee shops, the gym, conversations with friends, strangers etc. Don't let a building confine your faith because we will never change the world by just going to church, we need to be the church.

Claire Musselwhite