



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the City of New York
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, February 16, 2020
The Sixth Sunday After the Epiphany

Festal Eucharist
at 11:00 a.m.

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Ryan Bennett, *Assisting Priest*
on
Matthew 5:21-37
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Reconciliation

"True reconciliation is never cheap, for it is based on forgiveness which is costly. Forgiveness in turn depends on repentance, which has to be based on an acknowledgement of what was done wrong, and therefore on disclosure of the truth. You cannot forgive what you do not know"
- Desmond Tutu

Archbishop Desmond Tutu's words on Reconciliation cut to the bone of what Jesus is saying to the people of Matthew's community. The work of reconciliation is a work. A work which takes time, can't be controlled or manufactured to produce results as we want.

Reconciliation can be the work of a lifetime. Do we seek to be reconciled with others? Do we seek to be reconciled with ourselves? And let's ask the bigger question, if some chooses not to reconcile with us –following a genuine and sincere attempt? No. The sincerity and genuineness of the attempt speaks for itself.

And if someone desire to reconcile with us for something done against us, what would we do? Today, Jesus meets us in this place.

We hear the words of Jesus from Matthew's gospel:

"So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift".

To set things in their context, the writer of Matthew's gospel reveals to us that Jesus' desire's one thing. He desire's that the people in living out the mosaic laws won't live pay lip service to their commands, rather that the practice of the law pierces both their hearts and minds to discover living the law is as much in internal desire as much an external action.

To live the law faithfully and well can't be carried out unless the external action is motivated and fueled from an internal desire to do so. Jesus sees himself as the fulfillment of the law. He identifies himself as the ultimate interpreter of the law. The one who is fueled by the divine will to show how life can be lived deeply, lived well.

So then, like the one who is offering their gift in the temple, if we're going to church and we're moved on the way to seek some form of reconciliation, do that first. St. Thomas, Fifth Avenue will still be. The choir will still be singing...

On return, when the conversation or several conversations of reconciliation has taken place, we'll notice one important thing. Our part in worship will come from a different place. What we say with our lips and sing with our hearts will know a freedom which we haven't known before.

Equally, our part in worship may draw something out of have to have these difficult conversations, if it does, lets commit ourselves to this work. Our worship should always be an external offering of what's happening within our hearts and minds, interpreted through the lens of mercy and love.

If we're at the point of thinking Fr. Ryan sounds like a bit of a dream boat on the matter, let's hear from Desmond Tutu once more:

"Forgiving and being reconciled to our enemies or love ones are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not about patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth. It could even make things worse. It is a risky undertaking but in the end, it is worthwhile, because in the end, only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing. Superficial reconciliation can bring superficial healing" - Desmond Tutu

Deep breath...

Jesus inspires us to live a quality of relationship, which is based on mutual trust and loving. When this doesn't happen we know the consequences, both seen and bubbling away under the surface.

In every congregation I've been a part of, I've shared a life in faith with people who have been divorced and remarried. For many of them, coming to church on Sunday's such as this and listening to passages as we've heard read today can be a very difficult experience. Old hurts, hidden wounds can come to the surface. We need to remind ourselves that Jesus is talking about married life within a very different context we experience today.

Within his time, only the husband could initiate a divorce against his wife and for as little of over cooking the dinner. The women had no rights in this situation. If the husband wished to end the marriage, he could. The result for the woman could be perilous. Her options for security without a husband could be very limiting.

Jesus speaks to this situation in speaking for the rights and protection of the women who doesn't have an advocate. He aspires the listeners to view marriage as more than just a mere legal contract which can be broken at the whim of the male.

Jesus upholds marriage as an ideal where both the man and woman are equal partners, and the rights and protection of the woman need to be upheld and honored. It is a union then and now, where people enter into it with a promise of mutual respect and faithfulness.

Our church teaches that marriage is a lifelong partnership built on mutual respect and the promise to be faithful. Every priest has the responsibility to prepare a couple well.

We know from our experience that with every good intention, sometimes marriages can't always achieve this calling. Even with concerted work, sometimes the reality is that couples can feel so constricted within the marriage to the point that they became less the person God calls them be rather than the best God calls them to be. Resulting in hurting the other partner or each other. In the end of the marriage, comes a release, perhaps a long realized release and recognition that they are more the person God desires them to be outside the marriage.

In time, perhaps finding that fullness of mutual life within a new marriage.

Ultimately, as a Christian community, were called to live a life of lifelong faithfulness with mutual respect with each other. When we fail in this, we are called to acknowledge the fault for what it is. In so doing we can begin the work of moving towards reconciliation, at the pace it takes for authentic reconciliation to do its work. Here, "Yes" will mean "Yes" and "No" will mean "No" as we strive to live authentically as we can.