

**RE-MEMBERING**  
**Pastor Steven Molin**

CLLC  
September 10, 2017

Pentecost 14  
Matthew 18:15-20

Dear friends in Christ, grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

There was a time, back in about 1995, when the men's movement – Promise Keepers – was at the height of its popularity. In those days, it was not uncommon for 40,000 men to fill a football stadium, not to drink beer and make boys noise, but to sing hymns, and praise God, and listen to powerful messages on the issues that men face.

One young husband was particularly moved by a talk he heard on the man's role in the Christian family. He went home that night and announced to his wife, "I am the leader of this family! It says so in the bible. I'm the king of this castle, and I alone am the authority on all things." And he didn't see his wife for about a week. But then the swelling went down and he decided that he had better apologize.

When we live in community, whether that's in a family, or on a team, or within a congregation, conflict seems to arise. Our relationships can be tested and torn, and life becomes uncomfortable until the conflict subsides. Often times, we say or do something that wounds another, and we don't know how to make it right. In fact, sometimes we don't want to make it right. Sometimes we meant to offend. And sometimes we even want to be estranged from them.

That's the collateral damage that comes with conflict, and whether we caused the skirmish or we're the victims of it, being at odds with another is a symptom of our sinful world.

The gospel text from Matthew this morning is often referred to as the biblical way to resolve conflict among Christians. It's a sort of black and white recipe for getting someone to apologize, and punishing them when they don't. And this is the recipe Jesus offers:

*If someone offends you, you confront them.*  
*If that doesn't work, you use an intervention.*  
*If that doesn't work, you can kick them out of the church.*

It sounds a little out of character for Jesus, don't you think? But what if this text isn't about punishing the offender? What if the whole point of Jesus' words is about reconciliation?

Just before these words about confronting one who sins against you, Jesus tells the parable of the shepherd who had 100 lambs, and one of them went missing. The shepherd does not say, "Well, it was the lamb's fault; he shouldn't have wandered away. He made his bed, he can sleep in it."

No, that shepherd leaves the other 99 sheep in the mountains and he searches high and low until he finds the lamb that was lost, and he picks him up and brings him home. Through the shepherd's love for that one lamb that used to be a member of the flock, Jesus does whatever it takes to *re-member* that lamb. So perhaps this teaching of Jesus is not at all about punishing a member until they apologize, but rather, it's about loving that member enough to find a way to make the flock whole again. For Jesus, that seems really easy; but for the rest of us, going directly to the one who hurt us is really, really hard. Maybe that's why we don't do it very much.

I want to ask you to think for a moment about someone who had offended you. It might be somebody in your family, or somebody in this church family; they said or did something that hurt you and you can't get over it. Or maybe you are thinking about someone that you hurt – even unintentionally – but you never apologized, and that remorse has stayed with you. Think about that person, while I tell you about my own troubling experience.

Many years ago, as part of my training with Young Life, I had to spend a month in inner city Chicago, exploring the ugly, racist and dangerous social systems of that city. The coordinator that month was a black man by the name of Rudy Howard, and he would be the voice of the black community to us. After four weeks, we were all weary and homesick, and Rudy's voice had become tiresome. And on the final day, as the nine of us were sitting in a circle, Rudy gave us a handout; a handout that named us as the perpetrators of racism in Chicago. And I lost it. In frustration, I tossed the handout on the floor. And Rudy went crazy. For twenty minutes he ranted at me...at all of us, actually. His language would have made a sailor blush, and when he was finished, he walked out and I never saw him again.

Over the next five years, I didn't think about Rudy every day, but when I did, I felt sick to my stomach. What I did was petty and rude, and there was no recourse for me to make it right. Frankly, I didn't know what I would say, even if there was.

After those five years, I was leaving Young Life to return to seminary, and one of the final experiences would be a national staff conference at the Broadmoor in Colorado Springs. When we got to our room on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor, Marsha was looking over the list of participants at the conference, and she said to me, "Steve, Rudy's here." I got sick to my stomach all over again. "Well, there are 2000 people" I said, "maybe he won't see me."

The next morning, I got up early and had my quiet time. I mindlessly opened my bible to the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew, and this is what I read there:

*"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and then remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."*

I remember thinking that was really odd, that I would open my bible to that page. And immediately, adding "well this surely doesn't apply to me." So I closed my bible and decided to go down to the lobby to find some coffee.

The elevator didn't come right away, but when the doors opened up, standing alone in the elevator was Rudy Howard. I almost didn't get in. When I did, the doors closed and we began our descent, and then I did it. "Rudy" I said, "my name is Steve Molin, and five years ago at the urban plunge in Chicago, I offended you. I am so sorry, and I would like to ask for your forgiveness."

He studied me for a moment, as if trying to remember what I had done or said. And then a smile spread across his face, and he grabbed me in a big bear hug and said, "Oh, Brother Steve, I do remember, and I do forgive you, because that's what families do." And he hugged me tightly. And then the elevator door opened to the lobby that was packed with people, who looked in and saw this white guy and this black guy hugging, and they all went quiet.

I didn't get off the elevator when Rudy did. I rode it back up to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor, and sat on the carpet outside my room. And I wept. Five years of angst had evaporated in a 45 second elevator ride. "Oh, Brother Steve, I do remember, and I do forgive you, because that's what families do." Rudy Re-remembered me, and for that brief moment, my life was at peace.

Now, why would I tell you that lengthy story on a beautiful Sunday morning in September? It is because I believe every one of us, at some point in our lives, has been estranged from another. Like me, perhaps you are carrying around the weight

of a fractured relationship, and you don't know how to repair it. Maybe you're the victim, and you have been deeply hurt, and you cannot let it go. Or maybe you're the offender, and something – pride maybe – something keeps you from reaching out to that sister or brother that you hurt. And maybe today is the day that you pick up the phone, or get in the car, and go to that one, and say, "can we talk?" It sounds easy, but I know it's not. But it is a powerful thing to experience, and I wonder if today is your day to take that risk.

And Jesus said to his disciples, "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." May reconciliation come to our house today. Thanks be to God. Amen.

© 2017 Steven Molin