

"It Takes a Village"

March 17, 2019 (Youth Sunday)

St. Paul's UCC Church

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**Matthew 18:15-20**

[Jesus said to them:] "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 by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

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Parent 1: Here at St. Paul's, we as a church have baptized a lot of our children over the years, right up here at the font!

Parent 2: When we do this, when we baptize our children, we are making promises to love, support, encourage and help them as they grow more and more into the people God would have them to be.

Parent 1/3: When we do this, we are committing our children to God. It's a pretty big deal.

SONG: "Shall We Gather at the River?" (refrain)

Kid/youth 1: Up there at the font, you use beautiful words and you make beautiful promises...

2: ...but then what?

3: What does the day-to-day look like?

4: I guess what we're asking is: what kind of a church does it take to follow Jesus?

Pastor: You've probably heard before that "it takes a village," but what *kind* of village do we need to bring up children, to make disciples, to truly live into what it means to be the Body of Christ? Here at St. Paul's Church...

**ALL: *What kind of people are we called to be?***

SONG: "Shall We Gather at the River?" (refrain)

7: Let's ask again: What kind of people are we called to be?

8: Well, the Gospel of Matthew pretty much lays it out for us this morning. Here, in chapter 18, Jesus gets right to the point.

9: Here, Jesus gives his disciples, and us, instructions – very specific instructions – on how to live together. He shows us ways to relate to one another, including how we deal with each other's flaws.

9: You know, reading these words, it almost feels like we are reading out of some church's by-law's:

Congregant 1: "[Step 1] 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,

Congregant 2: [Step 2] 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,

Congregant 3: [Step 3] then tell it to the church."

10: Jesus is not talking in vague, general terms here.

11: No, he is not.

12: He gets specific.

13: Very specific.

14: Jesus turns how we are to relate to each other into a carefully laid-out, step-by-step process.

15: Jesus spends an enormous amount of energy teaching us how to live together as the Body of Christ.

16: But why does he do it?

17: Why does Jesus spend so much time and energy talking about relationships?

**ALL: Because he knows it matters!**

18: Relationships matter.

19: It matters how we treat each other.

20: It matters how we relate to one another.

21: And how we relate to one another in the church *affects* us.

22: It affects *all* of us, of all ages.

23: And so all of this matters, it matters a lot to Jesus.

SONG: "There Is More Love Somewhere"

24: But of course what's so striking about this passage – what's so striking about what Jesus says here – is that people sometimes do the exact opposite of what Jesus is teaching.

25: Jesus says one thing; we do something else.

26: Jesus says, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone." But we don't always do that. We don't always go

directly to the source, and talk honestly about how we have been hurt. Instead, we go to... a friend.

27: Of course, church people don't gossip, we *share*. ☺ And we love to share. Church people are famous for sharing. The only trouble is, *sometimes* we don't share with the right person.

28: There's even a big, fancy word for this: *triangulation*. Person A upsets person B and person B talks to person C about it. Of course, triangulation can happen anywhere: in school, at work, even in our own homes and families. Sadly, though, the church is no exception. You have a problem with someone? You've been hurt by someone? Someone has made you so mad you can't even see straight? Don't talk to them about it! Talk to... somebody else. We all do it.

29: Triangulation is very common... and also very destructive. Instead of solving our problems, it makes them worse. Truth gets twisted; negativity spreads. It turns us against one another, and teaches us to choose sides. Triangulation drives a wedge into the heart of any community.

30: It happens in families, in friends, in businesses, and yes, even in churches. Triangulation is restless, relentless and very dangerous.

31: But you know, it doesn't have to be that way.

SONG: "There is More Love Somewhere"

32: The good news is that here in the church, we don't have to participate in triangulation. And more good news is that we at St. Paul's usually don't! We are pretty good at not triangulating. We know we are free to find better ways, healthier ways, to relate to one another.

33: We speak honestly, face to face.

34: We find the courage to talk directly to each other when we are hurt.

35: And, when all else fails, we pray for the person who makes us the maddest.

36: Here at St. Paul's, we get to do things differently, and that is a precious gift.

SONG: "I Thank You, Jesus"

37: Having relationships in a healthy way – a way without triangulation – leads us onto holy ground. As Jesus says in the end of the passage, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

38: The ways we relate to one another are so important that when we do it well, Jesus is right there in the middle of it.

Parent 1: Here at church, when we get our relationships right with each other, we become the kind of village that can raise our children well.

Parent 2: We become the church, not just occasionally up here at the baptismal font, but every day, in every way.

Parent 1/3: When we get our relationships right with each other, we just may find ourselves standing on holy ground.

SONG: "Shall We Gather at the River?" (refrain)