



*Christian Conflict*  
*Matthew 18:15-20*  
*Sunday, September 6th, 2020*  
*The First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*  
*The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.*

"Conflict is not a good thing in marriage. Agree. Disagree."

That is one of the questions in the Pre Marriage Awareness Inventory that I frequently use with couples who are planning to get married.

In exploring this statement with the couples I tell them that Jesus promised that "where two or three are gathered in his name, Christ will be in their midst." A corollary statement, though, that is equally true is that where two or three are gathered together you will also have conflict.

Conflict can be big or small. A simple question like "Where do you want to eat tonight?" can bring about a low grade conflict.

Conflict can either be constructive or destructive. It can build or tear down.

In his book *In Search of God*, Conrad Simonson wrote about a lakeside vacation with his parents and sister. The day was beautiful. Clear blue sky and calm waters; it was the kind of day when you can just relax and let your troubles float away...at least for the moment. But that is not the way it went. Simonson's sister had just returned from visiting her brother in one of the western states. When she mentioned the visit in passing the previously serene mood turned tense as if black storm clouds suddenly appeared. Her brother had borrowed money from their father and never paid it back. The more the father thought about it, the angrier he got. I guess that the father never learned that when it comes to family, there is no such thing as a "loan"; it's always a "gift", that is, if you want to keep harmony.

Simonson decided to write his brother a letter telling him how the unpaid "loan" had ruined an otherwise beautiful vacation. It got so bad that at one point that when his mother expressed the hope that she'd see the absent brother, the father replied, "Not until he does something about that loan."

The absent brother responded to Simonson's letter by writing his own letter to his father. He acknowledged his debt, explained his financial situation, and why he couldn't pay off the loan at the moment, but that it was not forgotten. All it took was one letter. The father's anger evaporated.

A few months later the parents visited their son out west and had a wonderful time enjoying the breath-taking beauty of the country. Shortly after that visit, though, the parents were involved in a serious car accident. Simonson's brother flew home immediately. When the mother died the father and "wayward" son were together in their grief. They were able to comfort each other. Seeing the father and son together Simonson concluded his story with these words:

"The thought went through my head: If God has ever acted in my life, it was then."

By taking the time, making the effort, no matter how uncomfortable or difficult it was, Simonson broke the log jam between father and son. He encouraged his brother to reach out to their father and begin the process of reconciliation. Fortunately, his brother did. He wrote the letter.

Not everyone would have done that. Some would have ignored the situation or justified their inaction or done any number of things to avoid taking the first step toward reconciliation.

Earlier in Matthew's gospel, in what is commonly referred to as The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said if while offering your gift at the altar you suddenly remember that your spiritual brother or sister has something against you, abandon your offering and go quickly to take the first step toward reconciliation.

Anyone who has ever been involved in one knows that nothing is more destructive to the work of God's Kingdom than a conflict within the Christian community. Over the years I have come to believe that nothing makes the devil happier than stirring up strife because if a community can spend its valuable emotional and physical resources battling one another the work of the Kingdom cannot be done.

Our gospel lesson acknowledges that where two or three are gathered in Jesus name you will not only have the Risen Lord, but you will have conflict, differences of opinion. The job of the Christian community, though, is to let that conflict be constructive not destructive. Let it be entered into prayerfully and forth rightfully.

Go to the person first. Don't triangle by going to someone else, don't talk behind the back, and for goodness' sake don't gossip. If first talking to the person does not help, take two or three others with you, not to gang up on someone, but but to provide fresh insights and to keep things honest. The whole point of doing this is to seek reconciliation. After all, in the words of the Apostle Paul,

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation. (II Corinthians 5:18)

So seek reconciliation with those to whom you are estranged. If not for yourself, or the sake of your family, or your community, or the church; do it at least for the sake of and glory of God.

Amen.