

Reconciliation When You're Hurt!

Your Reconciling Mission

Matthew 18:10-35; Ephesians 4:26

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About the time that Diane and I had Joe, a woman our age was having triplets. Collene gave birth to three healthy boys. Her journey to that wonderful moment was difficult, however. Collene had a four and a half year old daughter. I said "had" because she was shot and killed accidentally by the neighbor's 8 year old boy only 15 seconds after she had given Collene a kiss and left her side. Words can't describe the anguish and anger that ravaged Collene. She hated her neighbors. Secretly she wanted to kill their boy. She wanted to kill the parents as well. Those bitter thoughts lingered in her mind day after day and began destroying her life. Finally, she turned to Jesus. In turning to Christ, she forgave and was forgiven. Collene had her tubes tied after giving birth to her daughter, and elective surgeries to reverse the process failed. Finally, she had five fertilized eggs implanted in her uterus, and three of them took. All the uninsured medical procedures involved totaled \$30,000. But on the day, Collene and her husband had their three sons baptized, the boy who killed their daughter was there, and his parents stood at the baptismal font with Collene and her husband as sponsors, godparents of the triplets.

All of us dread the kind of experience Collene encountered. It's one of the deepest hurts any parent can experience. Her path from inner hatred of her neighbors to an intimate, life-long friendship with them is what we call reconciliation; and reconciliation is the ministry to which all believers are called.

In this series on reconciliation, we have exposed three myths. *The first is that saying "sorry" is an adequate response when we hurt someone.* There is a path we must follow if we want to reconcile with God and others. The path includes feeling the pain we cause, confessing our faults and so on. There's a lot more to receiving forgiveness than saying your sorry. *The second myth is that we can be close to God and distant from others.* Jesus tells us that our relationships with others are pivotal. They dominate our destiny and our spirituality. *The third myth is that sins of past generations are unimportant and do not*

affect us. They do affect us. They continue their life of destruction, breeding bitterness, creating victims, long after the original sinners die. Past sins dominate the destiny of all succeeding generations until they are dealt with.

The fourth myth we unveil today. Many of us think that good Christians are beyond hurt or that they simply turn the other cheek when they are hurt. We should be silent, stoic and show no one we are hurt. After all, love is patient. Indeed, love is patient, but is it silent? What does Christ teach?

In the gospel of Matthew Christ focuses on the value of even little ones by reminding us that their angels are constantly before their heavenly Father. Jesus furthers the argument by pointing to the value of one lost lamb in a fold of 100. Jesus's point isn't just little ones, he is declaring how vital each person is to God.

Have you ever seen a courtroom drama where someone foolishly and repeatedly offends the judge? Finally, the person is fined and jailed? If you think it is dangerous and dumb to offend a judge in a courtroom because of a judge's power, how much more dangerous and dumb is it to offend *God* by insulting or belittling someone *he* made in *his* image? It is less risky and dangerous to berate and belittle a judge's family in his courtroom than it is to insult a single human being. When we understand that, we realize that our treatment of others and their treatment of us is of utmost importance.

In the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus gave us the beatitudes (you know... blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the merciful and so on), he told his listeners to pray for those who mistreat them: not so they would stop mistreating him, but so they might escape judgment. When Jesus prayed for his enemies, he didn't say, "*Make them stop, Father;*" he said, "*Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.*" In the crucifixion, the real danger wasn't for Christ who was suffering, it was for his enemies who were heaping wrath on themselves. In the same way, Jesus warned in the Sermon on the Mount that people were in catastrophic danger when they belittled or insulted someone. Whoever insults or injures you faces God's wrath. They don't face a teeny weeny bit of wrath. They face the same intensity that comes with rejecting and belittling Christ. You are held with the same kind of love.

Reconciliation is then not so much for you if you are hurt as it is for those who hurt you. It is their healing, not yours. Your choice to forgive restores you. Reconciliation is the service and work you do on their behalf. It's the way they receive forgiveness and free themselves from sin and wrath. When it happens, you regain a friendship and they regain their lives.

Reconciliation is so important that Jesus gave us specific instructions for when we're hurt.

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of

two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (Matt 18:15-17, NIV)

The words, "*If your brother sins against you,*" speak of a Christian brother or sister because the recourse is to treat them as a pagan or tax collector, a non-Christian. You see... believers are expected to reconcile. Jesus makes it plain that we are to be known by our treatment of each other, by the love we demonstrate for each other. Therefore, we are not to let resentments simmer among us. We are to be a community of friends developing trust in one another. That doesn't happen unless we take care of the things that violate our trust in one another. We're not to let the sun set on our wrath. We're to deal with whatever pulls us apart.

To remember and implement what Jesus commanded we can use the four letters of the word HEAL. The first is **H - Hold the person in forgiveness and prayer**. There are two reasons why we need to do that. First, you do no one any good until you forgive them. If you confront someone before you forgive them, you'll probably wound them in your anger and become guilty of sin yourself. Second, reconciliation is a work of God that you get to participate in. Prayer prepares both you and the person for God's work of reconciliation. John Wesley believed that God does nothing except in answer to prayer. I'm inclined to believe that. Behind every success I know of, there's a prayer: sometimes years of prayer.

The next step is **E - Express in private with the offender your hurt and their offending behavior**. How many times do we tell everybody about the sin except the person we're upset with? Then, we are guilty of gossip and quite possibly slander if not everything we say is exactly true. Stop telling others and forgive the offense. Then go to the offender privately so he or she won't be embarrassed in front of others.

A few years ago, I heard Duane Sarazin, a tremendous United Methodist preacher, teach on reconciliation. When he approaches people who hurt him he often says something like this: "*I have a difficult matter I would like to discuss with you. Is this a good time or bad time for you? Is there a better time when we can get our heads together.*" Those may not be his exact words, but they convey the attitude Duane expresses when he confronts someone. He's bent on restoring the individual rather than exacting a pound of flesh. Because of that, he's concerned about timing.

The next step comes only if you meet resistance. **A - Ask others to join you in visiting with the offender**. Jesus wants us to take this step when a private conversation doesn't resolve the conflict. Independent parties can often help us sort out messy conflicts and self-defeating behavior. Frequently, there is no completely innocent party. Asking these independent people to join you can defuse emotions that get in the way of truth. However, when their presence fails to bring reconciliation, Jesus calls for the

involvement of the church's leaders. At this point the issue is now no longer that of an interpersonal conflict; it is a breach in the church. The church's teamwork and ministry are now in danger.

The final step is **L - Let them be**. When a person refuses to listen to the church's leaders, distance is the appropriate response. This is not defeat, however. Frequently, this separation brings repentance. In 1 Corinthians, Paul tells the leaders to hand an immoral man over to Satan so that his flesh might be destroyed but his spirit saved. Paul understood that God uses even the radical step of separation, of letting someone be, to bring healing.

If you are hurting this morning because of what someone did to you, know that God will heal you through your choice to forgive; and God can help you contribute to the restoration of that person and your friendship.