

“Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes.” AMEN!

(Sing!)

“So we’re different colors and  
we’re different creeds

And different people have different needs

It’s obvious you hate me,  
though I’ve done nothing wrong

I’ve never really met you so what could I have done?

I can’t understand  
What makes a man  
Hate another man  
Help me understand

People are people so why should it be  
You and I should get along so awfully  
People are people so why should it be  
You and I should get along so awfully?”

That was a bad rendition of “People are People”  
by the band Depeche Mode.

A song about racial prejudice and  
the way some hate people who are different.

It is also an ode to finding common ground in  
the face of hatred's many forms while  
reminding the listener that they believe  
that people are truly good deep down.

"I can't understand, what makes  
a man hate another man,"

refers to the inexplicable reasons  
why some humans hate other humans.

So why do we "get along so awfully?"

Now, I don't mean "us" specifically,  
but humans in general...

Why do most of us know that when  
"two or more are gathered together,"  
then conflict will soon follow. :-)

All organizations, even familial ones, will  
encounter its peoples giving and receiving  
wounds in ways we may have never imagined.

"People are People" wherever we find them.  
So, it's no surprise that the church is  
not immune to such conflicts.

It was once held sure that people who  
attended church services and participated  
in church community will encounter  
the rough edges being smoothed.

We believe that even the the nasty powers  
that lurk in us can be tamed.

Amazingly, these miracles do happen,  
yet just as often, the very communities  
that espouse love and acceptance can

also hurt and disappoint each other,  
even in their time of greatest need.

And what pain it causes when people  
feel like they've been treated like dirt, or  
discounted and laughed at, or  
gossiped about.

It can especially hurt when it happens  
in places of worship.

So, for one thing it is good to be reminded  
that people are people so that when conflicts  
arise we are not surprised when it happens.

Notice today that faith invites us on what to do next.  
(Pause)

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus gave  
a checklist of what to do.

A four step process of not only church discipline,  
but relationship discipline.

Step one: if you're sinned against  
then tell the offender, one on one.

Step two: if the person doesn't listen,  
repeat step one but with the presence of  
2 or 3 trusted witnesses.

Step three: if no reconciliation comes even then,  
tell the church or the community of believers.

Finally, if none of that works, regard the person  
as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Which on the surface feels kinda harsh.

Yet, the purpose of these steps is  
to care for people, not to issue a guilt free way  
to cut people out.

Jesus taught a message of inclusion.

We recall that Jesus called a tax collector

to be a disciple and by now he has embraced  
his mission to include the foreigner...  
the Gentile.

We might not normally see those truths.

A problem is churches these days  
(and back then, too) find these steps not  
as ways to reconciliation, but as ways  
to “whip people back into shape,” or

to “deal with troublemakers” so that they  
don’t come around anymore.

Jesus spoke about conflict resolution strategies  
that protected all the parties involved  
and encouraged continued dialogue. (Pause)

Most of us have heard the phrase, “when two or  
three are gathered in my name, I am there  
among them.”

We hear it and think beautiful thoughts of  
Christ being present in our worship.

Lovely words that remind us that even  
in small worship spaces or in sanctuaries  
that have dwindling in-person numbers...  
Jesus is there.

And it is true, Jesus is, but in this context,  
Jesus makes us aware of a different truth.

That truth is... when two or three gather  
to speak to one another and gather  
to resolve conflicts, using his method,  
then Jesus is there, too.

The next time we are working  
to resolve conflict with one another,  
knowing that Jesus is there, may help  
keep the tone and words from  
being hurtful.

The point is to be persistent in resolving the conflict.  
(Pause)

So, I'm a little sad while writing  
this message for today.

While we are not empty nesters yet,  
this time of year reminds me of when  
we took our first son to college and then  
a couple years later, our second.

This time of year recalls the significant changes  
that took place in our household after.

While we were making dorm room beds,  
buying laundry detergent, bathroom supplies,  
and snacks to help them be prepared and  
feel a sense of comfort;

a feeling of home in a new place,  
our hearts ached in our chests.

We performed the duties with stiff upper lips.

But then, the inevitable had to happen.

We had to stand in a parking lot and  
give extended hugs and make blessed  
prayers and then let go while they entered  
into the new adventure.

The drive home while leaving the child  
you've raised for 18 or 19 years is  
something you're never prepared for. (Pause)

What does this all have to do with conflict resolution?

Well, I guess I'm not totally sure,  
but it felt like the right time to talk about it.

We fear what is different because  
we can't really prepare for it.

And that fear makes us do things or  
say things or respond to things  
in ways we wish we hadn't.

We just can't always know what  
someone is going through. (Pause)

At the conclusion of this little sermon,  
we will sing "Beloved, God's Chosen."

Let the words of compassion,  
forgiveness and goodness wash over you.

Even our dissonant parts have love.

Perhaps, better to say, especially our  
dissonant parts have love.

Let wisdom dwell in you richly.

AMEN!