Dealing With Conflict Mk 10:35-45 Oct 20, 2024

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”(Mk 10:33-34)

* Today’s gospel reading from Mark is very revealing about a number of things.
* 1st, it is a story that depicts the attitudes of James & John to be in exact opposition to the statement by Jesus that I began with.
* 2nd, it is a story about conflict.
* It shows how the disciples were human and imperfect.
* Besides being slow to learn what Jesus was teaching, they were ambitious and selfish.
* Reality is that the disciples were people, like you and me, who had selfish and ambitious thoughts and who on occasion disagreed with each other and who had conflict.
* That is certainly one thing that today’s passage highlights.
* Like to take a closer look at passage in terms of the reality of the disciples behaviour and how that may even point to ourselves.
* I would also like to look at the obvious conflict, how Jesus handled it, and how that might apply to us.

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* If we take a serious look at ourselves, I think we would all agree that we are not perfect.
* Church has rightly been called a hospital for sinners.
* We come to church, not because we are holy and righteous.
* We come because we are broken and sinful.
* But in coming we turn to Jesus Christ to take our sinfulness and brokenness and to empower us to go back out into the world to proclaim to others the good news about what Jesus has done in our lives.
* That is the model of a true Christian church.
* It is a place of broken people coming to be touched by Jesus.
* William Barclay in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark tells of the court painter who was commissioned to paint a portrait of Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell was afflicted with warts on his face. Thinking to please him (a bit like a photographer airbrushing out imperfections), the painter omitted all of the warts in the painting. However, when Oliver Cromwell saw it he

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said, “Take it away! And paint me as I really am, warts and all!”

* Just as today’s gospel passage shows the reality of the disciples’ faults – their warts and all, I think it may be helpful for us to also look at ourselves honestly – warts and all.
* Having said all that, let’s look at the passage.
* Read verses 35 – 37
* This request by James/John is not the sort of request from someone whose objective is to be a servant of all.
* It is a request of men who are looking for status and power.
* Before we are too quick to condemn them, I think maybe we should look at today’s church.
* Use the ACoC because it is familiar
* There were several dioceses who were locked in fierce legal battles in the supreme courts of both Ont and BC about who owns buildings.
* Is this about a servant ministry whose first call is to proclaim the gospel of JC, or is it about status and power and money?
* Even see in some local parishes where

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certain influential or wealthy people feel it is their entitlement to be in charge.

* Or possibly it is a men’s club or a women’s group who feel they have been working extra hard, and even have raised significant monies, and therefore feel they are entitled to be the ones to have the control.
* See how easy it can be to lose sight of the servant ministry Jesus calls us to and get caught up in seeking power and control.
* So the disciples were not too different from you and me.
* Despite Jesus’ earlier rebuke of Peter and his teaching then about denying self.
* Despite Jesus’ previous rebuke concerning greatness by taking a child as an example and despite Him predicting 3 times of His own suffering to come, James & John are still fantasizing about the coming glory and are scheming for positions of privilege.
* The real irony of it all is that while James & John are asking for the place to the right & left of Jesus, thinking the end will be glorious, it is two robbers who actually take that place.
* We read in verse 41: “When the ten heard

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about this, they became indignant with James & John.”

* While the other disciples were indignant at James & John’s ambition, in reality these other ten were angry because they wanted those places for themselves.
* So Jesus had dissention in the ranks – He had conflict.
* And that conflict is not a whole lot different from much of the conflict we see in many churches today.
* Maybe even our own.
* So, using Jesus as our model, I think there may be a few hints here about how we are to handle conflict.
* Right at the beginning we can see one very important principle – Jesus encourages communication.
* When James & John tell Jesus that they want Him to do whatever they ask, Jesus said, “What do you want me to do for you?”
* He draws than out and makes them say what they want before He replies.
* Where there is no communication, there can never be resolution.
* When people get angry at each other &

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stop talking, the situation will only get worse.

* Because usually there will be camps where one side will want to engage certain people to their point of view and vise versa.
* There will always be an element of truth to make it all legitimate but it will be slanted towards the teller’s point of view.
* This behaviour is totally destructive. It is ugly and can destroy a community.
* If this is happening, it must stop.
* Confrontation is not something that most people enjoy, but where there is conflict there must be communication, even if it must be through a mediator.
* Next to note in this passage is that Jesus does not rebuke the disciples but rather teaches them.
* This however presupposes that there must be an authority.
* In this church I have been given that authority, but my authority can never violate the authority of the Bible – an authority that I have been entrusted with.
* If it ever does, then I need to be immediately confronted by you, and reported to my bishop.

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* With the disciples, Jesus is the absolute authority in this conflict.
* There is no negotiation. There is no vote.
* Jesus doesn’t berate the disciples.
* He simply states this is the way it is and if you really want to be first then you must be prepared to be last.
* And notice also that Jesus is speaking to all the disciples
* Right after we read where the other ten disciples became indignant with James & John, we then read where Jesus called them together.
* Even though the disciples were in conflict with each other, what Jesus had to say to them applied to them all and he spoke to them all - together.
* There is no triangulation behind the other’s back.
* Some people have a very hard time with authority.
* Some people think the church is a democracy – but it is not.
* Our authority is God’s Word in Holy Scripture.
* We can vote democratically all we want on an issue, but if it is something that is

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already covered in Scripture, then that is the authority.

* That is precisely why the Anglican Church throughout North America is in such a mess today.
* It has lost sight of the true authority it has been entrusted with and has made herself the authority.
* It is a false authority that is disguised behind synodical and canonical procedures.
* Although there was conflict between Jesus’ disciples, there was also no question about His authority.
* Although disciples were depicted as slow-learners, ambitious & selfish, nevertheless they knew Jesus was the authority and while they had disagreements and conflicts, they continued to follow Him.
* The relationship was imperfect, but it was unbroken.
* The relationship was imperfect because the disciples were still being taught, just as hopefully we are open to learning and growth.
* Conflicts within churches are inevitable.
* They can be messy, but if we genuinely

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desire to grow as followers of Jesus, then we need to have the courage to be honest with each other and to seek resolution to our conflicts.

* I’ll let you in on a little secret.
* Clergy can sometimes be the worst offenders in promoting very unhealthy communities by avoiding conflict.
* British evangelist and author J. John in his book called ‘***A bucket of surprises***’ quotes a church leader as saying: “***Whenever the conflict gets too much in my church I go and visit the local kennels. There’s a whole group there that’s always pleased to see me!***”
* Many clergy have this desperate need to be liked, and consequently they attempt to please everyone – and I’ll tell you that is impossible.
* I know of clergy who have left their churches, completely burnt out, because of the conflicts and divisions in their congregations.
* Conflicts that eventually turned against the clergy personally.
* And it was something that could have been dealt with effectively if only the clergy had

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the courage to confront at the onset.

* No one as a rule likes confrontation and conflict.
* But a very important part of following Jesus is:

1. Having the humility to acknowledge that we are broken and imperfect.

2. Having the courage to choose to seek unity in Christ.

* That means being honest with each other, and that may mean confrontation when necessary.
* I’ll give you an example of being honest in a Christian relationship for the sake of the gospel.
* It was between St Paul and St Peter.
* No one questions the impact that both these men had on the Christian church and how both of them were martyred for their faith as followers of Jesus Christ.
* They however were imperfect and sometimes had to resolve differences.
* Galatians 2:11 St Paul said these words: “When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.”
* Yes, there were conflicts within the

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disciples and there will continue to be conflicts within all communities who are followers of Jesus.

* But Jesus shows us how we can work through them by knowing our authority, by being honest, and even more important having humility.
* Because we are all different, there will be times when we may not like each other, but as Christians we must love each other.
* That is a choice we make.
* And if we choose to love each other, then we must choose to be honest with each other, and we must choose to forgive each other.
* So suffice it to say that forgiveness is the glue that repairs broken relationships.
* It is in this kind of honesty and sincerity that we acknowledge our own warts – our brokenness.
* And in humility we come together in the unity of Christ to seek the healing and empowering touch of Jesus – our true authority.

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.