

23-A  
gospel  
William

11 If we were to take today's gospel reading in Matthew 18 and retell it in a way that reflected the Customs ~~ways~~ and failings of our own time, you can imagine how it might sound.

If your brother sins against you, phone and tell him his fault, making sure the tape recorder is working. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother and also have evidence, should he have second thoughts. But if he does not listen, take one or two lawyers along with you, that every word may be confirmed before you issue the press release. If he refuses to listen to them, threaten to sell the story to the highest bidder, and let him be unto you as a cash cow and ticket to fame. Truly I say to you, whatever you broadcast on earth shall be transmitted through the heavens, and whatever is syndicated on earth will pay residuals forever and ever. Again I say to you, if public opinion polls agree about your brother's sin, ask, and the court will award you a large settlement. For where two or three are gathered in a talk-show audience, there is 15 minutes of fame for the guest and the guest's entourage."

St. Francis - Sat  
Bergamo - Sun

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In today's gospel, Jesus instructs his disciples to consider <sup>2</sup> the person who misbehaves & remains within the church community. On the one hand, the community must be a place where forgiveness is at a premium & on the other hand, the church is committed to practicing "the surpassing righteousness" of God's kingdom. It cannot simply turn a blind eye to members who consistently act contrary to ~~central~~ values central to its identity (eg Mafia<sup>in Sicily</sup>). It must promote communal well-being. So it must have structures to promote reconciliation. To deal with this issue the gospel provides a carefully graded structure of fraternal correction which has close parallels to <sup>ancient</sup> Jewish practice. The steps aim to preserve the errant member as far as possible from public shame. The goal is to win the member back to full membership through conversion into the holiness of the community. There are three steps involved in the fraternal correction. 1<sup>st</sup> step: The offended member speaks to the offender & tries to resolve it one on one.

2nd step "If there is no resolution, then get one or two  
members as witnesses to establish the facts & to assist in a  
resolution. 3rd Step If that is not successful, then go to the  
Church Community & if the member refuses to listen to the  
Church, then the offender is to be treated as a<sup>a</sup>Gentile (pagan) or  
a tax collector" - equivalent to Ex communication. This is seen  
as a last resort intended ~~to be~~ to be remedial &  
temporary rather than final. These 3 steps would seem to  
deal with a serious sin & to work<sup>only</sup> in a small local  
community. And they invoke the presence & guidance of  
the risen X (Emmanuel).

4  
A professor was teaching a course in ethics. He introduced his undergrads to Aristotle's idea that ethics is rooted in the virtue of friendship. The professor explained Aristotle's argument this way: "Only a friend knows when to press and when to hold back. A friend has the right to tell you the truth, and truth-telling can be inherently painful."

During the semester, the students presented their own experiences of ethical dilemmas they had encountered and how they responded. At the end of the semester, the professor reviewed the students' experiences. He was struck, he said, by the number of stories in which a student avoided challenging a friend who was involved in some hurtful or self-destructive behavior such as using drugs, cheating on an exam, driving drunk, engaging in irresponsible and promiscuous sex. The students justified their silence along the lines of *Who am I to judge?* or *I didn't want to risk our friendship.*

The professor told the students: "You give friendship a bad name. Whereas Aristotle made friends the basis of ethics, you made friendship the excuse for unethical behavior." ||

*Navigating between keeping the peace and saving a friend from himself/herself is a fine line to walk. We resent being judged, so we avoid "judging others" — yet we are devastated watching someone we love destroy themselves. In today's Gospel, Jesus presents a model of what true friendship should be: trusting enough to challenge each other, caring enough to "risk" the friendship in order to preserve it, realizing that "peace" is not the absence of conflict but the presence of justice and compassion. Christ urges us not to silently tolerate the dysfunction in our lives but to confront with love and understanding those problems, misunderstandings and issues that divide us, grieve us and embitter us; he calls us to the hard, hard work of reconciliation and forgiveness, to be committed to seeking solutions to our problems not out of anger or a sense of injustice.*

~~justice~~ for what we have suffered but out of a commitment to imitate  
the great love and mercy of God. Today's Gospel is not a formula  
for judging those who hurt us but an understanding of the nature  
of true friendship — friendship that affirms, supports, and, when  
necessary, challenges with honesty, integrity and love.

## #2 STORY Personal conflicts in families & among friends 5.

Having an argument with someone we love is not unusual. We all experience rifts of various degrees with family and friends. There are times when we all act insensitively and say hurtful things.

The question is how we deal with those arguments and heal those rifts.

In a recent article [in The Wall Street Journal (July 15, 2014),] reporter Elizabeth Bernstein spoke with psychologists, therapists and counselors about how to best make up after an argument.

One psychologist summarized the process this way: "You don't want to avoid [conflict]. You want to manage it."

How? The ~~(journal)~~ article outlines five steps:

→ First: Wait to talk. Give time for both of you to calm down. If one side is still "hot," the other's apology will only escalate the argument.

→ Second: Give up the idea of being right. Remember that each of you believes that you are right and the other is in the wrong. Focus instead on each other's feelings.

→ Third: Verbalize your understanding of how the other person feels: "I understand that you are hurt because . . ." And ask if you are correct.

→ Fourth: Quash the impulse to defend yourself. If you apologize and the other person says, "Yes, you behaved badly," just nod your head. Explain to the other that you really care about him or her and that you are willing to modify your behavior.

→ Fifth: Accept the fact that it will take a while to feel better. Care enough to check in later. If each of you shows the other that you really care, the larger issues will resolve themselves.

And never use the word "but" in an apology: "I'm sorry, <sup>ea</sup> but" This undermines the entire purpose of apologizing.

The point of both ~~the two street journals~~ article and today's Gospel is that reconciliation takes determined and focused work. Elizabeth Bernstein offers several insights into healing a rift between family members and friends; Jesus outlines a process for reconciling a conflict within a community. Discipleship is the hard work of building community and the harder work of reconciliation — work that is grounded in love for the other, work that begins with respect and love for every human being, work that seeks God's justice and peace above all. Gospel-centered reconciliation confronts those misunderstandings and issues that divide us, grieve us and embitter us, not out of anger or a need to "even the score," but out of a commitment to imitate the great love and mercy of God.