



# Grow, Pray, Study

Servants of Christ United Methodist Parish

— Sunday, September 6, 2020

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*Grow, Pray, Study ---- for Sunday, September 6, 2020*

*Matthew 18: 15 “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ 17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector... 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”*

*The Church is a special gathering of people who seek to live like Jesus in a difficult world. That means that communication is extremely important. Did you ever play the ‘telephone’ game as a child? Remember whispering something in someone’s ear and have them tell the next person, and so on? I don’t know about you, but what the last person heard was not what the first person said.*

*Communication is a central factor in any family system. One of my favorite books is ‘Intimate Worlds’ by Maggie Scarf. In it she lays out five different types of families and their overall health. A level 1 family communicates very well--- they are also only 3% of families. A level 5 family is where everyone just talks past the others, and if you were an observer you would get confused quickly. Thankfully, most families are about a level 3 so that’s good news.*

*Here, Jesus and Matthew lay out a process to make the Church a level 1. This process is to be concentrated in the Christian Community; Don’t go trying to catch up with the guy who almost rammed you on the interstate and say, ‘You sinned*

*against me!’ You might get a wave with only one finger at a time. No, this process is for the Church. When Paul writes about morals he also is referring to the Church because we can’t expect people who are not actively learning about Jesus to behave like Mother Teresa (Neither she nor we has done a great job at that).*

*But the Church can be steamrolled by out of control conflict and rumors. It doesn’t take much. At one church, a lady started spreading rumors about me mainly because I wasn’t the former pastor who was beloved. I dealt with it directly with some other church leaders, and it was never a problem again. At another place, members texted negative things every 5 minutes, sometimes in a meeting talking about someone else in the meeting! That one didn’t end as well. But it doesn’t take much for negativity to spread... in a church, in a business, in a family. And when things are not dealt with directly as Jesus says, it creates a cloud that produces a storm with no end in sight. Perhaps you’ve seen it happen.*

*One reason dealing with conflict directly is not easy is because no one likes conflict! I always saw Jesus’ words ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in the midst of them’ as good news. But do we really want Jesus that close all the time? Jesus is the one who stands up to the cruel religious leaders and sets his disciples right when they go way off the path. Hopefully it is good news, but sometimes...*

*While Matthew is the gospel for this Sunday, we will focus on the epistle, Romans 13 in which verse 10 says, ‘Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.’ Paul is saying love should be the number one claim on our lives. We can only love God as much as we hate our neighbor. If we do not love God and ourselves, then we cannot love God’s creation. It’s just the way God made the world.*

*So, until Sunday imagine if our cellphones could ‘buzz’ us before we started spreading a rumor, or before we said something we are going to regret, or before we dealt with conflict indirectly. We would have some serious background noise in many churches! We would have a ‘buzz war’ in the grocery store parking lot!*

*Well, our smart phones aren't that smart (yet). We have Jesus' words which are always wise and smart and loving. Even when he is 'in the midst' of us and looks at us like Whoopi Goldberg with her glasses pulled down, he still loves us and knows what is best for us. And for the Church. And for the wild and crazy world.*

*Let us pray: Dear Lord who stills speaks his word of love to us, may we take the power you have granted us and use it to love you by loving others, not for selfish gain but because we want to be the light that you shine upon the world. We need your light and we need your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.*