Two Gather - Part 2

# Faith To Forgive

## Luke 17:1-6

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. Today we are continuing in part two of our series “Two Gather” and we need to understand that the Lord is concerned about the welfare of his children. He cares about each one of us, about our relationships, how we are living together, and so he is watching how we treat one another. That’s why as we began this series last week, we found Jesus telling his disciples,

“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” (Matthew 18:15).

And so, he’s talking about dealing with people who have offended us, sinned against us, and who have hurt us.

And yet today, we are living in a time where everybody is offended, you can’t say anything about anything that doesn’t offend somebody, somewhere. You could post “One plus one is two” and surely somebody will argue with you saying, “Who made you an expert on one plus one?” And so, it doesn’t matter whether you’re taking a position as a Democratic or Republican, pro-life or pro-choice, guns or no guns, taxes or no taxes, masks or no masks, vaccines or no vaccines, homeschool or public school, no matter what it is, everybody is offended.

And now we’re raising up a generation of children that are offended too, and so, we’re living together in the same house with a bunch of offended people. We are separate, we’re divided, but then we come to church together, praising God and declaring,

“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

And yet the truth of the matter is that me and my household aren’t even talking. My daughter is mad at her mother, her brother is mad at me, I’m not talking to my wife, and the in-laws aren’t even allowed to come over for Easter.

Now, even though that’s not true of my family, that’s an exaggeration for the point of illustration, but that is the culture that we’re living in today. We are a society the pits us against each other, telling us what each other is thinking, creating these mass generalizations of race, gender, religion, politics, or whatever, and we get offended because of what we’ve seen or heard.

This is why as Jesus was preparing his disciples to change the world, he reminds them that offenses are surely to come, and so he sets the standard for them, giving them this command:

"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

And so, this is the litmus test of our walk with Jesus, and yet now just 2000 years later, we’re living in a time where you can’t say anything to anybody, because everybody’s upset, everybody’s nerves on edge, and many don’t even know what they’re upset about. We are living in a land of offense and yet God calls us to live lives that are the exact opposite. In fact, Jesus said don’t even come to worship if you have sinned against your brother. He said, you can’t worship like that.

"If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24).

And so, if it’s impossible to worship with offense, maybe we as the church should be talking more about offense, more about the things that drive us apart and keep us from being together, instead of acting like once you come to Jesus that you will never be offended. In fact, there are some of you who are going to be offended before you get out of this building, and so we’ve got to learn to deal with it, because offense affects the unity of the church and how the Holy Spirit moves in the church.

Now, last week I talked about God’s desire to purify the church, to confront sin and deal with it. We saw in Matthew chapter 18, that this is what Jesus expects us to do in the church, because we’re never more like Jesus than when we’re dealing with sin. Seriously, have you ever thought about that? That’s why Jesus came, to deal with sin, and that’s why the Bible tells us,

“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

And so, when we’re dealing with sin, cleansing the church by the washing with water through the word, following the pattern given to us in Matthew chapter 18, verse 15 through 20, we are helping God’s children to mature and attain to the fullness of Christ. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in the church, because the will of the Father is that his people would be holy and blameless.

Therefore, as we join together around the Word of God in the presence of the Holy Spirit, wherever there is unconfessed, unrepentant sin, whenever there is continuing sin, whatever the sin, the attempt is to be made to gently restore the wayward believer. And as difficult as this is to do, it must be done, because without confronting sin, without proclaiming holiness and the fear of God, our gathering together is a waste of time. In fact, Jesus said,

“If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place” (Revelation 2:5).

And so, where sin is allowed to remain in the church, it hinders our worship together, it changes the atmosphere in the church, and Jesus threatens to shut it down. In fact, he tells us in Ephesians chapter 5,

“Of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Ephesians 5:5).

And so, as Jesus is preparing his disciples to go out and share the gospel, in our passage today from Luke chapter 17, he is warning them that they are going to have to be resilient. And he says, you’re going to have to be tough, you’re going to have to be strong, because:

“Things that cause people to sin are bound to come” (Luke 17:1).

In other words, it’s unavoidable, there’s no way to live your life without offense coming your way. It’s like eating, if you chew long enough, you’re eventually going to bite your tongue. And so, Jesus warns his disciples to watch themselves, because if they’re not careful offenses will become a distraction from his purpose in their lives. And he says,

“Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

And so, Jesus says those offenses, those things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but don’t get distracted by them, let nothing move you, because I’m going to take care of it. He says, stay the course, remain faithful, don’t be that one that causes people to sin.

“It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves” (Luke 17:2-3).

Jesus says, don’t worry about it, I’m going to deal with it, I’m going to take care of it, you just watch yourselves. And it reminds me of my mother whenever I got in trouble in school, because we had a long driveway and before I even made it in the driveway, she would come out to meet me. And that’s what God is saying here, I’m going to come down on you like your mother if you hurt one of these little ones, and that ought to make you think twice before you recklessly hurt one of God’s children.

You see, as followers of Jesus, we have a responsibility to care for the people in our lives, not to be careless in the way that we treat one another, but being concerned about one another’s feelings. Because even though I may not get upset by what someone has done to me or to the church, we know that God is watching and he said,

"It is mine to avenge; I will repay," … He says, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” because whatever you do to the least of mine you have done it to me (Hebrews 10:30-31).

And so, God is our security team, he’s watching, he’s going to take care of it, and so we don’t need to take offense, allowing our hearts to be filled with anger, because he doesn’t want us to be distracted from our divine assignment.

In other words, you’ve been called to love one another and share the gospel, but you can’t lead people to Jesus when you yourself are hurt, angry, and offended. And so, that’s why Jesus said, “Watch yourselves,” because it doesn’t matter how gifted you are, if you’ve got a bad attitude, you can’t use your gift until you get your horizontal relationships right. The apostle Paul said it this way,

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels… If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-2).

And so, attitude is important, because love is important, and God is not interested in hearing what you have to say when you’re not speaking to the person next to you. And so, your relationships matter, how you feel about others matters, because we’re in this together and Jesus says,

“If your brother (or sister) sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3).

This is so important, because covering up an offense doesn’t deal with it, it will never make it better, and so we have to have the courage to deal with the offense. The disciples were okay with that, we can do that they said, we can confront our brother or sister in love, it doesn’t have to be confrontational, we’re good with that, but what if they do it again and again and again? Jesus replies,

“If he (or she) sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive them" (Luke 17:4).

Now, the disciples were like, “Lord, I’m not sure that we’re able to do that, I mean we love you and everything, but we’re going to need some help. We don’t want to over commit ourselves, and so they said to the Lord,

"Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5).

The disciples recognized a connection between forgiveness and faith. They said, in order for us to be able to forgive like that, to overcome our feelings, we need you to increase our faith. In other words, we need you to help us do this when our feelings are hurt, when we’ve being publicly humiliated, and we don’t know what to do. And so, they said, “Increase our faith to believe something good can come out of this,” because they recognized the importance of faith.

They believed that nothing could separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus, and they knew,

“No matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:19).

And now hell began to get nervous, when they started talking about faith. Demons started trembling, because sin and death had lost its grip, offenses lost their power, and bitterness was falling away. And so, they said,

"Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5).

Because they wanted to walk in faith, they wanted to believe, and they wanted to follow Jesus no matter what other people said or did. And so, they’re like, we want to trust you in this season, we want to trust you even when it hurts, being able to say as the psalmist did,

“You, Lord, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living” (Psalm 116:8-9).

And so, the apostles want to walk in faith, trusting God when they can’t stop crying, trusting God when people rise up against them, and trusting God when things don’t turn out the way they wanted them to turn out.

And it’s kind of weird, because they said, “Increase our faith,” but Jesus replied, “If you have faith.” And so, the apostles thought the bigger the faith, the greater their forgiveness, but Jesus said it’s not going to take that much faith. He said,

"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed...” (Luke 17:6).

Now, I thought this was interesting, because at another time Jesus said,

“If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move” (Matthew 17:20).

But this time he said,

"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you” (Luke 17:6).

And so, I’m wondering what caused the Jesus to change from a mountain moving faith to a tree uprooting faith? You know, at first glance it doesn’t even seem comparable, but what I discovered was that the type of tree mentioned here had some very interesting characteristics.

This type of mulberry tree was actually a type of fig tree that was very common in Palestine. It had widespread branches that reached out just a few feet from the ground, but the most interesting characteristic of this tree was its enormous root system. In other words, the roots of this tree were just as thick and numerous and widespread as the branches were that extended into the air, making this tree incredibly steadfast. And so, these massive roots grew wide and deep, twisting and turning around roots, vines, rocks and crevices, making it virtually impossible to uproot the tree.

And what Jesus is saying is that whatever situation you’ve tried to break free from, whatever has you entangled, ensnared, and intertwined in its grip, whatever it is, the only thing that will untangle you from those roots is your faith in God. And so, he says, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, just a little bit of faith, you can say to this seemingly immovable object with these tangled roots, be uprooted and it will obey you.” This is so important in our lives, because the roots of sin and offense are just like the roots of the mulberry tree, they will get you so tangled up that you won’t be able to tell one from another. And the same thing that was happening to you before is happening to you again; first it came at you from one direction, but now it’s coming from another; and that’s why the Bible warns us,

“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (Hebrews 12:15).

In other words, these roots are deeply intertwined, affecting every area of your life, and they defile many. And so, the same thing that happened to your father is now happening to you; and what happened to you is now happening to your brother or sister; and because the roots of the mulberry tree spread out so wide, now they’re touching your sons and your daughters.

That’s why Jesus wasn’t talking about a mountain here, because mountains don’t have roots, he’s talking about sin and the things that cause people to sin and it’s those roots that are so deeply intertwined. And so, when it comes to forgiveness there are roots of unforgiveness, resentment, and bitterness they can become so deeply entangled in your life that sometimes you even forget what you are mad about in the first place. And so, Jesus is talking about those deep roots of unforgiveness, and he says just like the immovable mulberry tree you just need a little bit of faith, just a mustard seed of faith, to untangle yourself from those roots.

Today there are some of you whom Jesus wants to bring you to a place of freedom, healing, wholeness, and restoration; untangling patterns that have been going on for generations in your family. In other words, it didn’t start with you, it started with your father or your mother, or your grandfather or grandmother, and now the roots have gone wide, and your past is trying to get wrapped around your future.

There are some of you that know the devil is a liar, and you’re about to throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, running with perseverance the race marked out for you, fixing your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Some of you are ready to tackle this head on, because you know it’s just a little bit of faith, and you’re believing that today is the day that you’re going to experience that breakthrough that you need. You’re about to get loose from the sin that has entangled you, that’s affecting your thoughts, your emotions, and your peace. Many of you have been a prisoner in your own head, it’s been affecting every area of your life, but you’re going to take that little seed of faith in God, you’re going to water it, you’re going to feed it, you’re going to fan it into flame, and God is going to destroy that root system that has entangled you, trying to destroy you for so long.

And so, right now I want you to name that root, name that thing that has had power over you, that thing that has kept you bound, and that has you entangled in its grip. Today, there is a greater power that is about to take over your life, those roots are against you, the situation is against you, the culture is against you, but greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. The Spirit of the living God is in this place, and there is a tree uprooting faith that is rising up, loosing you from the grip of that root, because the Bible says that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17). And so, wherever you are, I want you to grab hold of this word, take hold of that mustard seed of faith, name that root that has you entangled and watch as God untangles you and sets you free.

You see, wherever the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom and I believe there is a tree uprooting faith in this place that is going to bring healing to your mind, your emotions, and your body. The Spirit of God is in this place and God is uprooting everything that has had you entangled. He says, I just need a little bit of faith, just a mustard seed of faith, because I’ve got this, you’re no longer bound, you’re not tangled up, you’ve been set free, but you’ve got to let the Word do its work.

I’ve come to you today and preached the Word of God, I taught the Word of God, and now we’ve got to apply what we’ve heard, we’ve got to let the Word do its work. God is not only uprooting that which has entangled you, but if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can profess it, you can confess it, and he is going to pull the entire tree up and cast it into the sea. And so, I believe that there are some of you here today who are going to be the first generation not to be entangled in those deep roots of unforgiveness, resentment, and bitterness.

If you are here or you are watching online and you have a mustard seed of faith, and you have something that needs to be cast into the sea, something that has been working against you, something that’s holding you back, you’ve been carrying that pain, you’ve been holding onto the things that happened to you and you believe God, I want to encourage you to forgive and let it go right now. Trust God to untangle you, removing that tree, uprooting it, planting it in the sea, and setting you free.

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