

## **Pentecost 15 A - 09/10/2023 – Rally Day**

Healthy communication is the key to all healthy relationships. I believe that you would agree with this. As soon as there is a disagreement, our healthy communication is tested. How can we continue to hear each other and in communicate in a healthy manner?

In reality we know that we will never agree on everything. If this can be used as a premise for a relationship, then it is not so much of a surprise when there is a disagreement. Too often it is not, and communication breaks down. There are many stories of churches splitting because a person was not invited to a party. In reality we know it is how it was handled that caused the split.

I have done couples counseling. Unfortunately, often by the time that they came to see me, I had to interpret English between the two. I set the chairs up so that they were facing each other. Boundary lines were set. Many times, they could just not hear what the other was trying to communicate. I understood what they were saying but needed to assist them in hearing what each other was trying to say. By this point in their relationship, usually one had already decided they were done.

No matter what type of relationship it is, healthy communication continues to be what will keep the relationship healthy. I believe in our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus is saying that disagreements that can continue into conflicts will happen in the earthly kingdom in our communities of faith. Jesus gives us a way today to handle this which begins with only two people. Jesus knows that we can often unintentionally hurt someone in the way in which we communicate.

We don't always know their story. Too often when we don't know how to say something we kidding around and that can be risky if we do not know the person well enough. In a singing group that I directed where we were on the road for a summer, kidding around went too far one day. There was a concert that not all of the group sang in as they were to upset. I told the group that if they were not able put it aside for the concert, that they did not have to sing.

Some chose not to sing. I was emotional before beginning the concert. I gave people the space that they needed. We were able to process the conflict in the next few days. Everyone stayed with the process, and we became closer after that.

Almost every time that there is a conflict, there is hurt involved with one or both parties. Jesus is saying that we need to listen to each other. He didn't say that we have to agree with each other on everything.

Listening takes work. It means that we have to be quiet. I remember in a small group class that I took, that we could only speak if we were going to share

something about what we were feeling or thinking. At times there was a great deal of silence which can also be uncomfortable.

There are times to be silent and there are times to speak. Listening takes silence for one person in a dyad of communication. It is difficult to listen without immediately thinking of a response without the other person finishing. Jesus is saying there will be disagreements that can turn into major conflicts and to resolve them we need to listen as fully as we can.

I believe we often forget that there is an unseen person in every communication that occurs and that is Jesus. I wonder if our conversations would take on a healthier tone sometimes if we realized that Jesus was there. Also, the fact that Jesus is not there to take sides but love each person, equally.

Every conversation that we have, remember that Jesus is present. When a disagreement/conflict can be resolved within the dyad, no one else needs to be involved. Human nature often takes over though, and we feel that we need to involve other people and then it gets messy. Listening then becomes more difficult.

If we can't hear each other, we will probably not hear Jesus or be cognizant that Jesus is present. When we realize that we are not hearing the other person, it may be good time to find a neutral person or two or three that you and the other person can agree upon. The witnesses would only be there to help each other hear each other. Also, to keep it honest. Jesus will still be there.

So why spend time talking about this? How we manage ourselves and our community of faith is a model to others of Jesus' love. This does not mean that we will ever do this perfectly, but others are watching how we handle disagreements/conflicts. Jesus gave us a model of how to do it in his kingdom and today we are reviewing it.

In Chapter 15 of our church's constitution under Discipline and Adjudication this Gospel lesson is used as a guide. I'm sure you all have a copy of the constitution at home. Council members, do you have a copy of the church's constitution? All of this to say that this is the model that Jesus gave and the ELCA has made it part of the way we are called to function as a community of faith.

Jesus says to us, look I know that you are not perfect. Feelings and emotions, though, are part of you, and can often make you somewhat deaf and not able to hear each other. Jesus says I have asked you to love your neighbor as yourself and this includes listening to each other. I have asked you to love me with your heart, soul and mind and this means recognizing that I am a part of every conversation you have, whether with one person or a group of people.

The more people that get involved the messier it gets. Out of love for Jesus' kingdom we are called to address disagreements with the person you have a disagreement with first. Try and resolve it and remember that Jesus is there for both of you.

Thus, it still boils down to Love God and neighbor even if you disagree by striving to listen to each other and acknowledge what you have heard out of love. This is the model of healthy communication that we are called to have as Christians.

Let us pray, Gracious God and yes we need your grace as we are not always the best listeners. You have given us a model to address disagreements that thoroughly involves listening. May your Holy Spirit remind us that you are present and you have called us to love our neighbor and you. When we experience disagreements, help to take a minute to breathe and that you are there to help us express ourselves in a loving manner. In Jesus name, Amen.