

## *'Holy Manners'*

a Sermon preached at Knox United Church, Parksville

By the Rev. Hilde J. Seal

September 4, 2011

And so we pray....

Creator God, in the dance of life you are the lead,  
so teach us how to follow gracefully and calmly.

Open us to the new rhythms of your love and compassion,  
and bless us as we lean into your Spirit.

And may the words of my mouth and the thoughts of each heart,  
honour the dance and your lead. AMEN

Oh, that we could skip down to verse 20,  
and forget the first five verses.

Wouldn't it be nice to forget about sin... especially sin in churches,  
especially when, according to this text,  
we are suppose to do something about the sin...

and perhaps even more...

lovely to forget, even more....

that it may be our sin, that other church folk want to do something about.

Skipping down to verse 20 would be nice....

but **can** we? .. **shall** we?

Well, we can... and in my experience, many do,

even preachers and scholars.... because verse 20 on its own, is easier.

Note that I did not say verse 20 is **easy**...

just easier.

Easier because we like it that Jesus is willing to hang out with us.

*'For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'*

Easier because we often gather in two's anyhow.

Easier because it seems we are not really expected to do much,  
just gather with someone else, and – wow – Jesus is among us.

But not so easy when we realize that we must gather in his name...

we are called to gather in the name of Jesus....

We **could** skip down to that lovely verse of assurance...

but today .... we shall begin at verse 15,

we shall begin at verse 15 remembering...

remembering verse 20....

and leaning into the knowledge that Jesus **is** with us,  
among us... because here...we do gather in his name.

Context is so important when looking at texts like these.

Context and culture... time and space.

The author of this Gospel,  
unlikely the tax collector and disciple Matthew,  
but an educated Jew who used the disciple's name to honour him...

The author; situated this text -- **after** Jesus elevates children declaring:  
*'Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.  
Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.'*

The author; situated this text after Jesus elevates children,  
and **between** two parables...

The Parable of the Lost Sheep,  
comes before this mornings text ....

The Parable of the Lost Sheep,  
with the shepherd rejoicing when the one gone astray returns...  
comes before this mornings text ....

The Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor follows it.

First, we must remember to humble ourselves as a little child,  
and second....  
as both Parables dramatize...we remember that God's desire ....  
is that the sinner be saved, not condemned.

Now... to the text itself...

It is never easy to confront the miss-deed or offence of another person.

Thinking of my own life,  
and the times I have been called upon to mediate disagreements...

many of us are inclined to figure out a way to ignore the offence, forgive in advance,  
rather than confront a guilty party, and give repentance a chance.

We dismiss the situation and/or the person,  
rather than risk an uncomfortable confrontation.

And I suspect.... most of us would rather not be confronted.  
Yet, then we are never given a chance to repent, change, grow....  
but anonymously and unknowingly.... we receive a shallow forgiveness.

Are we responsible for those who .... as our text names it...  
sin against us ...

Are we accountable when others behave badly?

As products of the 'me' generation,  
we tend to focus on individuality, and independence.

We worry about just what effects us,  
and sigh when things around us go amiss.

Have we moved away from being concerned with the  
collective spiritual health of the whole congregation...  
loosing our sense of inter-dependency ...

In this morning's text, Jesus challenges the early church to pay attention  
to the relationships with-in the community.

Jesus tells the early church and tells us,  
that we need to maintain 'Holy Manners' with one another.

This phrase, 'Holy Manners' was made popular in the United Church,  
by Past Moderator the very Reverend Dr. Marion Pardy, in 2001.

The healing task of being gentle with one another,  
even in the midst of our diversity, is the call of the Gospel.

When we truly 'gather in the name of the Christ',  
we meet, communicate, and relate to one another,  
remembering that we all belong, and remembering to whom we belong.

We belong to the One who lived and died and lives among us still.  
In the Christ, God is present and intimate.

The one who thinks that feeding one another,  
forgiving and healing one another, and working out our differences,  
are the most important things in all the world.... abides with us.

I am not sure if our Ministry and Personnel Committee  
used Matthew 18: 15 – 20 for a reference when they wrote  
the their recent guidelines for conflict,

but somewhere along the line,  
we as a church still find good council in this text.

First go the person,  
don't talk about things in the parking lot with others,  
go trusting that they will listen,  
and celebrate when that happens.

If things do not go well,  
meet with someone who will assist you both.

Jesus is about reconciliation.

Jesus is about 'Holy Manners' and community.  
Gathering as church, means willing to risk being in relationship and inter-dependency.  
And the blessings are bountiful.

When we gather in the name of the Christ,  
When we gather in the names of Jesus,  
we agree to commune with the good shepherd, the light, the bread of the world.

We unite our spirits with gentleness, and calm,  
strength and wisdom.

We commune with deep joy, and lasting peace.

As the church... the church of Jesus the Christ,  
we walk in the ways of truth, and justice and love.

And never, never do we walk alone....  
Jesus loves to hang out when two or three, or all of us,  
gather together.

May the truth of community be known among us.  
AMEN

[\[Back\]](#)