

ASSERTIVE CHRISTIANS

(Matthew 18:15-20)

Intro: Before there was:

- Stephen Ministries.
- Stephen Ministers.
- #Some in this congregation received that training.

There was Pastoral Care Team Training.

- In the basement of Luther Memorial Church.
 - #In Richmond Heights, Missouri.
- Led by Dr. Ken Hauck.
 - #Who was trying out his concept of lay pastoral care givers.
 - *On volunteer seminarians.
 - +Like me.
 - *Others.
 - #Before taking public.
 - *What eventually morphed into Stephen Ministries.
 - +So named because of St. Stephen Lutheran Church.
 - =In St. Louis.

One of the text books we used for that class.

- Your Perfect Right: A Guide to Assertive Behavior.*
 - #Robert E. Alberti.
 - #Michael L. Emmons.
- They categorize human behavior in three ways.
 - #Passive.
 - *What they call Non-Assertive.
 - #Aggressive.
 - #Assertive.
- Consider the differences.
 - #Passive behavior.
 - *Tends to allow other people:
 - +To run roughshod over us.
 - =Our feelings.
 - =Our opinions.
 - #Aggressive behavior.
 - *Tends to run roughshod over other people.
 - +Their feelings.
 - +Their opinions.

- #Assertive behavior.
 - *Expresses:
 - +Our feelings.
 - +Our opinions.
 - *Respects.
 - +Feelings.
 - +Opinions.
 - =Of others.
- I'll give you three guesses.
 - #Which behavior Alberti and Emmons consider the healthiest.
 - *For us.
 - *For others.

Our Gospel lesson.

- Recognizes that there can be conflict in the church.
- Encourages us to be assertive Christians.
 - #In resolving those conflicts.

I. There Are Conflicts In The Church?

A. Say It's Not So.

1. Isn't there one sacred space?
 - a. Where we can feel:
 - Safe.
 - Secure.
 - b. Where there is no conflict.
2. Nicene Creed.
 - a. We confess.
 - “We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.”
 - b. If the church is indeed:
 - One.
 - Holy.
 - Catholic.
 - #Universal.
 - Apostolic.
 - #Reaching out.
 - #In mission.
 - c. It is not because we Christians are always:
 - One.
 - Holy.
 - Catholic.
 - Apostolic.

- d. It is because the Lord of the church keeps:
 - Inviting.
 - Challenging.
 - Empowering.
 - #Us.
 - *To be more than we are.
 - *To live into our calling as the people of God.

B. Conflict Is Not New.

1. Early church.

- a. "What do we do?"
 - “Now that we’ve been excluded from the synagogue.”
- b. "What do we do?"
 - “Now that Gentiles want to become part of our fellowship.”
 - #“Do we circumcise them or not?”
- c. "What do we do?"
 - “With those who patronize the markets.”
 - #“Selling meat that’s been sacrificed to an idol.”
 - “Is that okay or not okay?”
- d. "What do we do?"
 - “If a Christian wants to marry a non-Christian.”
 - #“Should that be allowed?”
- e. "What do we do?"
 - “Pastor Apollos isn’t like Pastor Paul.”
- f. "What do we do?"
 - There was conflict.

2. Reformation.

- a. "What do we do?"
 - “About these indulgences.”
 - #Pieces of paper that promised:
 - *Forgiveness of sins.
 - *Eternal life.
 - Or at least a reduced sentence in purgatory.
 - #For a price.
- b. "What do we do?"
 - “With these priests and nuns who want to marry.”
- c. "What do we do?"
 - There was conflict.

3. Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

- a. "What do we do?"
 - “With seminary professors.”
 - #“Who read the Scriptures in their historical context.”

- b. "What do we do?"
 - "With Seminex students."
 - # "Who walked off the Concordia Seminary campus."
- c. "What do we do?"
 - There was conflict.
- 4. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
 - a. "What do we do?"
 - "With gay and lesbian pastors."
 - # There have been gay and lesbian pastors.
 - * As long as I've been a pastor and longer.
 - "Who want to live in:"
 - # Publicly-accountable.
 - # Life-long.
 - # Monogamous.
 - # Same-sex.
 - * Relationship.
 - b. "What do we do?"
 - # There is conflict.

II. Jesus Does Four Things In The Face Of Conflict.

A. Jesus Empowers The Church To Resolve Conflict.

- 1. Jesus says:
 - a. "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven."
 - b. "Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."
 - Matthew 18:18.
- 2. Jesus gives to the church the authority.
 - a. To establish:
 - Policies.
 - Procedures.
 - b. To decide:
 - What is forbidden.
 - What is permitted.
- 3. Two Sundays ago we had a similar passage addressed to Peter.
 - a. "Whatever you (singular) bind on earth will be bound in heaven."
 - b. "Whatever you (singular) loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."
 - Matthew 16:19.
- 4. In Matthew 18 Jesus gives that authority.
 - a. To the church.
 - b. To all y'all.
 - Congregation.
 - Synod.
 - Churchwide expression of the ELCA.

B. Jesus Promises To Be Present In The Conflict Resolution Process.

1. Jesus says:
 - a. "If two of you agree on earth about anything you ask,"
- "It will be done for you by my Father in heaven."
#Matthew 18:19.
 - b. "For where two or three are gathered in my name,"
- "There am I in the midst of them."
#Matthew 18:20.
2. Too often.
 - a. We take these verses out of context.
 - b. We interpret them as applying to prayer.
- That's a nice thought.
3. But in the context of Matthew 18.
 - a. These words are not about prayer *per se*.
 - b. They are about resolving conflicts.
- Between brothers and sisters in the faith.
- As we work out our differences.
#Jesus promises to be:
*Embodied.
*Embedded.
+In the process.

C. Jesus Encourages Us To Be Assertive Christians.

1. Not passive.
 - a. Where we suffer in silence.
 - b. Where we may be tempted to stop:
- Talking.
- Coming.
- Participating.
- Donating.
#Maybe thinking: "I'll show them."
2. Not aggressive.
 - a. Or as is all too often the case.
- Passive aggressive.
#Talking about the person with whom you have a grievance.
*Rather than with them.
#Scapegoating.
*Blaming someone else for all of our perceived ills.
+ "If only we had a different pastor . . ."
+ "If only so-and-so wasn't so:"
= Bossy.
= Controlling.
= Disagreeable.
= _____.

- b. Jesus never said:
 - “Tell everybody what that stupid jerk did to hurt you.”
 - c. Instead Jesus says:
 - “Tell that stupid jerk how s/he hurt you.”
 - #But maybe leave out the “stupid jerk” part.
3. But assertive.
- a. Expressing our:
 - Feelings.
 - Opinions.
 - b. While respecting the other person’s:
 - Feelings.
 - Opinions.

D. Jesus Keeps The Focus On CommUNITY.

- 1. Matthew 18.
 - a. Not meant to be a check list.
 - For getting rid of disagreeable people.
 - b. Although it has certainly been used that way.
- 2. Look at the context.
 - a. Matthew 18:12-14.
 - Lost sheep.
 - Shepherd.
 - #Leaves 99 sheep.
 - #To search for one stray.
 - b. Matthew 18:21-35.
 - Gospel lesson for next Sunday.
 - Forgiveness.
 - #How many times should we forgive?
 - *7 times?
 - #No, not 7 times.
 - *77 times.
 - *70 x 7 times.
- 3. That’s how God is.
 - a. Neither:
 - Passive.
 - Aggressive.
 - b. Assertive.
 - Asserting his love for us.
 - #Each and every one of us.
 - *Even when we’ve been:
 - +Contrary.
 - +Disagreeable.
 - +Gone astray.

#With:

*Cross and empty tomb.

*Water and Word.

*Bread and wine.

-Asserting that his church is big enough for all of us.

#Under the cross of Jesus Christ.

*We can:

+Talk about.

+Argue about.

+Disagree about.

=Anything.

=Everything.

-Short of the Gospel.

*Still be the church.

Concl: As we take the next step in our congregational renewal process.

-Rekindle the Fire.

We want to identify some objectives.

-To help us accomplish our goals.

We'll be working together.

-In small groups.

We may not all agree.

But:

-As assertive Christians.

-By the grace of God.

#We will continue to be:

*Church of Jesus Christ.

*Church of Jesus Christ together.