

Pastoral Letter from Rev Richard Wilde for Sunday 13 September 2020

Greetings all

In Matthew's Gospel reading today (Mt 18:21 – 35) Jesus is teaching His disciples about living a wholesome and fulfilling life in community. Part of a larger whole these verses focus on the challenge of forgiveness. In our own experience many of us know how hard it can be to forgive someone who has wronged us, even harder to forgive someone who has hurt or wronged a family member especially if that is our child or grandchild. It can be hard too to forgive ourselves of our failings and when we have disappointed another person. The more love we have for that person the harder it can be to accept forgiveness even though she/he may have told we are absolved. Those of us who have been through relationship failures, as I have been, can find our own mistakes that hurt others hard to live with.

Some years ago, I was a volunteer counsellor for the Marriage Guidance Society (later called Relate in UK). I worked with couples who had major issues to work through when often one partner was more willing to try and make things work than the other. Or at least one party was more willing to accept their marriage was not as fulfilling as they thought it should be and therefore more amenable to change. Usually this was the one who sought help and guidance.

A tool we used to help couples was to try and see how their behaviours and words or lack of words might be perceived by their partner by getting them to role play their partner or at least think and talk through how their partner might be feeling and responding the way they did in the scenarios that ended in conflict. Another tool was to suggest she/he might approach things apologetically as if it was herself/himself who was in the wrong and not the partner who had disappointed her/him. An apology was more likely to get an apology in return than an accusation which was more likely to get a counter accusation.

Of course, no tool is ever 100% effective when dealing with humans who are a complex mix of emotions and experience and some of your reading the above will have thought 'that would never work' in my circumstance. And you are probably right but it's worth a go! As a church we are not married to each other and we don't have to live together seven days a week! But just as the Bible suggests "The two shall become one" when referring to marriage then the church which is made up of many members should, also strive to become one body which can be hard but rewarding work. We don't just look to Jesus words but also his lived relationships. What Jesus exemplified was an attitude of humility, taking the first step, offering costly forgiveness, and allowing for a new start and not just once. No church can function as she should when she is filled with people who will never admit they might be wrong in what they think or do sometimes. Indeed, it doesn't need many individuals who refuse to work

together to seriously damage our effectiveness in mission and sincerity in worship. We all need to develop an ability to forget mistakes and failings by individuals including ourselves so that we can move on and be fruitful. We gather for worship on the first day of the week so that we always start with a clean sheet as we return to our daily responsibilities and opportunities.

Richard Wilde