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Confrontation and the Kingdom of Heaven

If you've ever been married, or shared common space, ample time, and the intimacies of your life with another person, you know the first year (sometimes longer) can be... challenging. Learning the habits and behaviors of your partner, compromising on thermostat temperatures, finding out you had somehow been incorrectly loading the dishwasher your whole life. Basically working (some more than others) to reorder and recenter your entire life and way of being to align or at least coincide with your partners, can be, like I said... challenging. When Drew and I were first married (and still to this day) we began the ritual of the end of work day phone call. Drew would call me every evening on his commute home from work and would always begin the conversation by asking me how my day was. Which I loved, because it prompted me to spend my entire day filing away tidbits to share with him during our telephone rendez-vous. And, I always eagerly anticipated the call when I could finally share all the parts of my day that I thought he would enjoy hearing about. But, one day, not too long after we began the post work phone call, Drew confronted me. Saying, "everyday I ask you about your day, but you never ask me to tell you about mine." UGH. That hurt. Because I knew I was not being as considerate as I should be, nor as considerate as he was being. And, so in kind, I immediately became defensive. Blurting out, "well I just kind of thought we were sharing, I wasn't aware you needed to be prompted to tell me about your day. I am just as happy to tell you about mine without being asked." But, the more I thought about it, the more I realized he had a very valid point.

When I first read our Gospel passage for today, I was immediately overtaken by an immense feeling of stomach churning discomfort. "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault." Gross. I mean, I thought we were just supposed to turn the other cheek, give the cloak off our back and walk the extra mile. What's up with all this nitty gritty, no fun, almost always painful, conflict resolution stuff. Honestly I would rather choose the taking up my cross, and giving away my life lesson from last week over and above confrontation.

While no one likes confrontation, least of all me. Ultimately, I was thankful that Drew was able to come to me, and tell me how this made him feel. Allowing me the opportunity to become more aware and considerate of how my actions or inactions affected him, and us, and others. His confrontation allowed me to realize, it wasn't about "me" as an individual unit anymore. It was, now, about us as a newly formed community. A community built around creating wholeness through love. Which meant I needed to be looking and thinking beyond my own wants and desires, my own perspectives and assumptions. Holding up my partners well being and needs with and alongside my own. Not simply to "keep the peace", but to keep the love at the center of how we lived and moved and, now, had our being together.

I wonder sometimes if too often we make Jesus, heaven, salvation, and the whole Christian thing simply about the individual. About me, mine, my. My sin and my repentance, Christ died for me and grace is for me, Jesus is my savior and salvation is mine. What if instead it was about, we, us, ours. We sin and we repent, Christ died for us and grace for us all, Jesus is our savior and

salvation is ours, together! Might that change not only how we look at this passage, but how we look at our daily actions and reactions in this world.

What might be most unnerving about this passage, at least for me, is the fact that it is a reminder of our human capacity to cause harm, to wrong our fellow neighbor. No one wants to be the perpetrator, no one wants to be wrong, or bring pain to their fellow neighbor. I think, or at least I hope, because of the mere fact that we, as humans, are essentially good. We are made for goodness. And when we fall short of that, it's painful for all involved. But, if we can't be shown where we have fallen short. If we can't allow our companions on this journey to take our hand and say, "hey you missed the mark this time, but that doesn't mean I don't love you," how will we ever grow.

As Christians we are called to live into a community built around love and wholeness. A community we call the body of Christ. A community we believe, as Paul tells us in our passage from Romans, that is growing and coming closer to salvation, and the kingdom of heaven, everyday. How is this? Well, Paul tells us, and Jesus instructed us, through love! Real, hard work, challenging love! Love that says, we all matter in this community and we are here to support one another, even and especially when we are hurting or have caused hurt. Love that says, this is bigger and about more than just me, my, mine. Love that says, when we go astray we will work to bring one another back to the fold. Not through shame, guilt, or punishment, but through grace, compassion, and kindness.

Hearing that I had hurt Drew by failing to think about him and ask about his day (while a small mistake) hurt big time. We don't want to do wrong by others. But, realizing, it wasn't really about me, it was about us together, the family and community we were creating, helped me to become less defensive. Hearing him say, "it's okay, just try to remember to ask about my day next time," helped a lot. Ultimately there was beauty in the confrontation because just as Drew pointed the finger, he also opened the door.

We aren't perfect, Lord knows Jesus knew that. But, we are good, and we can come to live into that goodness more and more as we join together in love. I would encourage us to think about how we can look, just a bit, beyond ourselves. How can we extend a little more love, how can we move a bit beyond me, my, mine, and towards we, us, ours. When our neighbor falls, how can we help pick them back up. Moreover, when you fall will you take the hand that is extended? Because the more we can support one another as a community built around love and grace the more we can grow into the kingdom that Jesus so often reminds us is not just a pie in the sky dream, but a living breathing growing reality here and now. One that we can take part in creating and growing in and as much as we are able to stop unintentionally reacting out of a place of pain and hurt that so often causes and creates division and isolation, and allow ourselves to start intentionally living out a place of grace and love that allows us to continue growing, spreading, and sharing the kingdom of God here at St. Paul's, in this community, and in our larger world.