

# WE WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER

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There are few passages in the Bible  
I dislike as much as the one we have just heard:

*“If any member of the church sins against you,  
Go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone.”* Matthew 18:15

I hate that passage.  
There are parts of the Bible I prefer over others,  
But there are none I would say “I hate”  
Except this one:

*“If any member of the church sins against you,  
Go and point out the fault ...”*

It’s not that I hate the passage, actually.  
And maybe “hate” is too strong a word for it.

But I have found that what was intended to be a model  
For building reconciliation and healing in the life of the community,  
Has become a model for fracturing that community, and  
Beating up on those with whom we differ.

Jesus is talking about sin.  
Just sin. Nothing but pure, unadulterated sin.  
The phrase “against you” isn’t in the oldest manuscripts, by the way.  
(I suspect it was added by some poor scribe who was working for a cranky  
abbot way back when ☺)  
But Sin is the garbage that destroys relationships,  
That destroys life,  
That runs counter to God’s intent.

A man comes home.  
It’s nearly 2 a.m.  
He’s been drinking since he got off work at 4 o’clock.  
For years his drinking has increased.

He used to get off work,  
 Stop for a beer, and then go home.  
 And then he would get off work,  
 Stop for a couple of beers, and then go home.  
 And then, in the fullness of time,  
 It was Beer that consumed the man.

His wife had thought about divorce,  
 But she had married this man for better **or** for worse,  
 She taken him to be her husband in sickness **and** in health.  
 So she prayed for wisdom and guidance.  
 She secured the services of an alcohol and substance abuse counselor.  
 She rallied her family, and  
 With the help of their parish priest  
 (Who was, himself, a recovering alcoholic)  
 Did what is called (in the business) an Intervention,  
 They got her husband into a treatment facility  
 Where he received the counseling, training,  
 And support he needed)  
 To overcome his addiction to alcohol.

He has been clean and sober for over 24 years,  
 And is a beacon of hope to people and families  
 Like him, and like his.

**This passage from Matthew is talking about creating a climate in which restoration and healing can take place in families and communities.**

Jesus is talking about issues that can shatter a community,  
 Like pedophilia, embezzlement, adultery, pornography, gossip, slander ...  
 THOSE are the kinds of issues Jesus is addressing.

But they're tough to get a handle on in this day and age.  
 We live in a world where everything seems relative  
 (Rather than relational)  
 Where everything is geared to meet the needs of the individual,  
 No matter what the cost is TO that person,  
 Or the community in which they live.

Rather than living in community  
 and supporting one another ~ as God intends,  
 Rather than looking for common ground  
 and understanding one another ~ as God intends,  
 Rather than striving for justice and peace  
 And forgiving one another ~ as God intends,

We pit our own needs and feelings and experiences against “the other”  
 And give our time and energy to litigation,  
 Rather than redemption.

But that’s the world we live in, isn’t it?  
 Fractured, broken, and violent ...  
 Exactly the kind of world Jesus came to heal  
 (Which is what the word “*saved*” means, in the Greek).

*The concept of “church shopping” was unheard of before WWII.  
 But for fifty or sixty years, things have changed.*

We are a much more mobile society;  
 We don’t need to find (or expect to find)  
 a church within walking distance of our homes.

We don’t understand *church* (or experience it) as:

A community of believers in covenant with God,  
 United in Christ,  
 Empowered by God’s Holy Spirit  
 To minister Health and Healing  
 To a Wounded and Hurting world.

Rather,  
 We look around for a church  
 That provides the kind of music we like, and  
 That has good programs for the kids.

We look for a church  
 Where the sermons speak to our needs (as we perceive them)  
 ~ I think the phrase is “that feed us”  
 And make us feel good,  
 Rather than sermons that challenge us to delve more deeply into the  
 mysteries of God.

If there is a disagreement with a staff member,  
 We withhold our money and badmouth that person to others.  
 We wash our hands of them,  
 Because they have committed the cardinal sin  
 Of being different,  
 Or not being up to snuff.

If too many changes take place,  
 Or not enough changes,  
 Or the right kind of changes we want,  
 We pull out and look elsewhere.

All of this takes place because our sense of community and belonging has  
 been lost.

We are like folks in an elevator.  
 We get on board, on different floors.  
 We each have our own destination.  
 We avoid direct eye contact at all costs.  
 We keep conversation to a minimum.  
 We take up as little room as possible ~ and hope we don't touch anyone.  
 We can't wait 'till our floor arrives and we can get off.  
 If something smells bad, we hope no one thinks WE did it.  
 And when our floor comes,  
     And the door opens,  
     We flee, relieved, that the ordeal is over.

Isn't that how church feels to you, sometimes?  
 Not all the time, and not all of you.  
 But sometimes it just feels like we're on an elevator,  
 We're here because it's taking us where we want to go,  
 And it really makes no demands of us,  
 Except to push the right button.

*Do you know what keeps us from being “Church”  
The way Jesus envisioned it?*

It's not selfishness, laziness, inconsideration, or even the rampant rugged individualism we often complain about. Those are just symptoms.

No, **I think the problem is amnesia.**

We have **forgotten** what it means to be the children of God  
~ inheritors of God's kingdom.

We have **forgotten** the joy of being the children of God  
~ free to worship in Spirit and in Truth.

We have **forgotten** the exhilaration that comes with being the children of God ~ given an impossible task to perform, and accomplishing it because it was God leading us from the front, and it was God pushing us from behind, and it was God blessing us in the endeavor.

It is a **fearful church** that thinks her mission is to control people with rules  
~ because rules are easier to manage than relationships.

It is a **boring church** where the people have exchanged the adventure of faith for the security of religion  
~ because religion is easier to manage than relationships.

It is a **dying church** where people have turned the mystery of life into a series of problems to be solved  
~ because problems are easier to manage than relationships.

But it is a **dead church** where people have taken the vibrant love of God  
And turned it into a Kodak Moment,  
Choosing to live in the snapshot, rather than the reality,  
~ because the snapshot is easier to manage than relationships.

It is a **forgetful church** that thinks its mission is  
(or should be) market-driven,  
Rather than being a people  
Called by God to proclaim the good news of God's salvation.

It is a **forgetful church** that fails  
 To invite people to share in new life,  
 In relationship with Christ,  
 And free to serve the world in love and healing.

We forget that **love will not be contained**.  
 We forget that love constrained withers and dies.  
 We forget that Jesus came to give us life ~  
 ~ abundant life,  
 ~ overflowing life,  
 ~ healing and forgiving life.

We forget that **we are called to experience God's love**,  
 ~ And to **express** God's love.  
 We are called to experience **God's forgiveness**,  
 ~ And to **express** God's forgiveness.  
 We are called to experience **God's healing touch**,  
 ~ And to **express** God's healing touch.

It is interesting that the watchword these days,  
 As we approach the anniversary of 9/11, is  
 "*We will never forget.*"

I think the watchword for the church is,  
 And should forever be,  
**"We will always remember."**

We will always remember, not what others did to us, but what God has done for us and for our healing. Christ Jesus came into the world to heal sinners, says the Bible. And whenever we gather, wherever we gather, we remember God's promise to be there with us, and God's call to love one another, just as Christ loved us.

THAT, let us never forget.  
 THAT, let us always remember, through Christ our Lord.

Amen.