

*When you're weary, feeling small, When tears are in your eyes,
I'll dry them all. I'm on your side,
Oh, when times get rough and friends just can't be found,
Like a bridge over troubled water I will lay me down.
Like a bridge over troubled water I will lay me down.*

*When you're down and out, When you're on the street,
When evening falls so hard I will comfort you. I'll take your part.
Oh, when darkness comes and pain is all around,
Like a bridge over troubled water I will lay me down.
Like a bridge over troubled water I will lay me down.*

*Sail on silver girl Sail on by. Your time has come to shine.
All your dreams are on their way. See how they shine.
Oh, if you need a friend, I'm sailing right behind.
Like a bridge over troubled water I will ease your mind
Like a bridge over troubled water I will ease your mind*

Could you be a bridge for those in troubled water? As you know, our church has a long history. Think of how many troubles, conflicts, difficulties, and crisis occurred during the long history and ministry of our church. However, the congregation of our past church overcame those problems with love, patience, and prayer. When one of the church members was in sorrow, other members encouraged each other. When one had a difficult time in his or her life and ministry, they tried to comfort and help each other.

Sometimes we are like a cracked bridge in the relationship with others. We can't always mend our bridges. We can't always make peace with other people or other church members. If we try, we will go a long way towards mending our bridges and healing our broken relationships. And when we fail, we can still love them as we love ourselves. Amen.

February 18, 2018

New Beginning: **Mending Bridges**

Matthew 18:15-20

Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

This morning's Gospel reading gives us some real, concrete, step-by-step instructions from Jesus with regard to how we should handle conflict. Today's Gospel tells about one person who is a part of the church, especially when he or she has wronged another person in fellowship. Jesus lays out how these things are to be handled by the Christian community. And His prescription is to talk about things openly, honestly and directly, person-to-person. Jesus wants people who have been hurt to talk directly to the one who hurt them and to lay things out honestly. Jesus said, "*If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.*" (15) In other words, "You must talk to the person before you talk about the person!" Jesus says that we should speak honestly and directly with each other, not in anger, but also not hiding the hurt that has been done. He does not suggest that one person should be the winner and one the loser. No, what He wants from this direct communication is reconciliation. Both parties get back, as much as is possible, to a place of shared care and concern – of forgiveness and understanding.

Jesus wants all of His people to be reconciled to one another. He doesn't want that one is right and one is wrong, but that both can come together and put their differences behind them. He really wants the person who has been sinned against to engage in forgiveness, so that person can get his or her life back in order. He or she is no longer bound by anger and resentment that can extinguish the flame of Christian love.

Jesus said, "*Do it privately, just between yourselves.*" (15) When two are alone, misunderstandings can be clarified and miscommunications can be corrected. Jesus asks us to be sensitive enough to allow a person who has wronged us an opportunity to

hear how we have been affected. This makes it possible for restoration of a relationship.

C.S. Lewis in his book, *The Great Divorce*, describes Hell as a great, huge, dark place where there is no contact between people. He says that Hell started out small, but people quarreled with one another and moved away from each other. Then there was another quarrel and the people moved farther away. And so on, and so on, until finally no one could even see anyone else. And there they lived, alone in the darkness. That's what Jesus wants us to avoid.

Jesus says we should take our disagreements directly to those with whom we disagree. As children of God we are to love one another, and that requires contact and involvement in each other's lives. When we have any part in disrupting the peace and unity of the church, we are not simply devaluing a social club. We are doing damage to the Body of Christ!

This simple set of rules has been used to expel people from their worship communities because they don't agree with those who are in power and won't yield, regardless of how many times they're asked to do so. But there is a safeguard for that as well, Paul's call to the Romans to "love one another." For, Paul says, "If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. For the commandments say, *"You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet."* These—and other such commandments—are summed up in this one commandment: *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God's law." (Romans 13:8-10) Love is an important means to understand one another and to connect to one another. Let us watch a video clip:

<https://www.facebook.com/BBCStories/videos/10155697139050659/>

Love is about caring for the other person's well-being and wanting what is best for the other person, even when he or she has made you angry.

If we have that sort of love for each other, we will always want to be reconciled and will always accept each other's apologies – because that's what people who love each other do. That's what Christ did – and does – with us every day.

Our faith is a faith of community, faith of twos and threes and fours, not faith of individuals. We act together so we can help one another, thereby multiplying our resources and abilities to do what God calls us to do. Our community is the lifeline to the experience of God and to the power of God moving among God's people.

Today Jesus makes it clear how important we are one to another. Through our link to one another through Christ, there is a power in our community, uniting the values of God to our values on earth. This is how Jesus enables us to use God's power for making healing and life-giving love more effective among God's people. We come together, we stay together, we work together – in our Lord's name, bringing to focus the presence of God and unleashing the power of the Spirit to transform our lives.

Today's Gospel compels us to take a fresh look at the church. The church – the household of God – in the spiritual sense is an organism. It is not an organization, but the Body of Christ. The church lives its life on earth, but its roots are in heaven. When we are truly being the church, we are an outpost of the Kingdom of God on earth. What we do on earth has an impact in heaven. When the church is living in unity, its prayer life is the vehicle by which God accomplishes kingdom work on earth. When the church is gathered as the Body of Christ, the Head of the Church is present in its midst. *"Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."* (Matthew 18:20) The gathering – the connectedness – magnifies the Spirit for us and in us and with us.

At this time I would like you to listen to a song, "Bridge Over Troubled Water," sung by the well-known singers in the 70s, Simon and Garfunkle. You may sing along with the music.