

Old Testament Exodus 12:1–14

Psalm Psalm 149

New Testament Romans 13:8–14

Gospel Matthew 18:15–20¹

Today's readings speak of what it means to be community or perhaps better still neighbour. The duties and responsibilities to one another are not to be taken lightly.

It doesn't however mean that we need to point out every fault in someone's behaviour, only those things which bring the church into disrepute or could bring into disrepute. Minor irritations such as the person who sings loudly or who constantly blows their nose loudly in the middle of services, the one who laughs loudly or asks where are we up to when you have just been told, are not the types of behaviour we are talking about here.

Yes, perhaps we should take Jesus words to take it up with the two of you, but we need to also take into account Paul's words to 'love your neighbour as yourself.' Paul and Jesus are looking at conduct of one another toward each other.

"The striking rule by which they (i.e. the readers of Paul's letter and Jesus followers) were to live was that of forgiveness and reconciliation," says Tom Wright.²

¹ *Revised Common Lectionary* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2009).

² N. T. Wright, *Twelve Months of Sundays: Reflections on Bible Readings, Year A* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2001), 102.

He goes on to say, “Appropriate confrontation is the necessary prelude: reconciliation does not come by sweeping things under the carpet, or by pretending that nothing is really wrong. Equally, confrontation that does not aim at reconciliation is worse than useless.”³

What Tom points out here is that unless we are ready to engage with one another in a manner that doesn’t diminish the reputation of the church or doesn’t have conversation that attempts reconciliation, we might as well not bother.

“The model of Matthew 18,... is conspicuous by its absence in many church circles, where people prefer to associate with the like-minded rather than, so to speak, the like-faithed. What if our faith is precisely faith in God’s costly reconciliation?”⁴

Another challenge by Tom to us all; what if our faith was about God’s costly reconciliation rather than a gathering of like-minded or faithed people. What is the cost to us? What is the cost to the one whom we approach?

When we seek to live in community, we will no doubt be challenged and our task is to work on how we can live a faith life together. To ‘point out a fault’ costs both the pointer and pointee. One may be highly conscious of the problem, the other totally oblivious to it.

³ N. T. Wright, *Twelve Months of Sundays*, 102.

⁴ N. T. Wright, *Twelve Months of Sunday*., 102.

If we wish to work toward loving our neighbour, what are we prepared to let go in order to work toward reconciliation in love. Jesus says, "if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."⁵

For many years, I have heard sermons that say this means to eject the person from the church – somehow this never sat well with me. Jesus, after all never rejected people, he attempted to draw them back to God, he attempted to reconcile, he attempted to love his neighbour owing nothing to anyone except offer the love of God as he was loved by God.

What we have seen and heard today is a beginning of a new day, a command of God to let go that which has past and to look toward a new future; to walk from the darkness of our lives into the dawn of God's life. It is God's call to Moses to prepare for what God has in mind, to be ready and filled for the journey will be long but the promise is great.

The Passover is a time to prepare as well as a sign of God's action in the world. We have read the story of what happens next when the night of Passover comes and the wail of mothers over all Egypt comes. God invites us away from that dark night and into new life and light through reconciliation and love of one another. Not a duty to be taken lightly or frivolously.

We are invited into the love of God, to reconcile with one another and to be on constant guard for those things which draw us away from our faith. May God be with you, guarding you and bless you in your journey. Amen.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), Mt 18:17.