

How to Confront

Message #5 in the series "Beyond Hurt"

St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown
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Let's pray together.

Gracious, Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for your word and for the power of that word to speak hope and life into our lives. Lord, open us up to your word and open your word up to us. Teach us what you would have us learn Lord, as you conform our lives into the disciples that you have called us to be. All of this Lord, we pray in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior and all God's people said, Amen.

Well, we have been in a message series that we're calling Beyond Hurt. Beyond Hurt, and we've been over the past several weeks trying to engage the conversation of what do we do to get over the pain that we have felt in different relational dynamics that we've experienced, especially over the last two years? Ya know, the pandemic did a lot to bring out the best in us, it also brought out the worst in us. And if we all looked at society and what we have learned about ourselves, we could probably write multiple books about the different facets of who we have become and who we already were, but that this crisis of a pandemic revealed. And one of the clear things that was laid upon my heart as I was preparing for the series was that there's a lot of brokenness, a broken trust, broken faith, broken relationships, all because of our reactions and overreactions, as well as the legitimate reactions to this pandemic. So how do we get beyond it? How do we face into our pain? How do we face into our brokenness? How do we face into our grief? How do we face into the fact that trust has been broken and needs to be restored? How do we do it? How do we forgive one another? How do we represent the body of Christ? How do we represent the gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of the chaos in which we have been? That's the question behind the series. How do we get beyond the hurt? And lest we think also the series has been looking at very practical ways to get beyond our personal hurt. It's also about getting beyond our corporate hurt, our corporate hurt. And so we looked at some of the facets of what forgiveness is all about. And it's specifically we're focusing in on Matthew Chapter 18. Now, Matthew 18, historically has been a section of scripture that churches and Christian organizations for generations have used in order to kind of set up boundaries and figure out how do we navigate through the brokenness of our lives and still have that sense of unity?

So, Matthew 18, is primarily about unity and discovering and rediscovering what it means to be one. Oneness. Oneness really was dependent on our witness and witness is dependent on our oneness. That's what we have been discovering. Today, I want to take it a little bit more practical and get into the depth of how to confront another individual when they have hurt you. Now, through the course of this series, you have heard about boundaries. In fact, Dominic, you know, so effectively taught us about creative and effective boundaries and setting up the boundaries in order to get beyond our hurt. So, what I want to do is I want to go a little bit more specific and how do we confront one another? How do we engage in that confrontation while at the same time preserving those boundaries? So, in order to do that, I want to just remind us of something that we learned just about a week ago, and that is that the primary language of the new community and that new community is called the church, the Church of Jesus Christ. That's what we mean by the new community, not just here at St. Paul's, but at the capital C church. Wherever Christians are, that's where the church is. And so that new community has a primary

language, and that primary language is love. And as we learned last week, the best expression of that love is by how we forgive one another.

So let's ratchet this up a little bit and focus in on Matthew 18, a very specific segment of Matthew 18. I want to introduce this to you. Verse 15.

"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over."

Just want to pause here and reflect on a couple of things that we're getting out of this verse. Anybody here ever hear that verse before? So that verse is really an important verse. It has helped to shape us in who we are as a new community. Verse 15 If your brother or sister sins. Now that's a very interesting word in the original language of the Greek New Testament, that word is a very special word. It's the word Hamartano. Hamartano. That's the verb form. Hamartia is the noun. Hamartano literally means to miss the mark, to miss the mark, or to be guilty of a wrong. Missing the mark is an interesting image for me when I think about sin because when you kind of picture a mark in my mind, I don't know if you do this, but I consider a bullseye. That's the image that comes up and missing the mark is your arrow. When you shoot the arrow, it goes way off trajectory. So, if we're really doing that, if that's the definition of sin, then sin is about missing the mark that your life is consistently going off the trajectory it should be going on. And when our life is going off the expected trajectory we're missing not only the mark of the direction, we're missing the fullness of joy and the fullness of life as followers of Jesus that God has wanted for us to experience. We're missing the mark. And so, when we talk about confronting that verse becomes even more important.

So, if you're brother or sister sins, if they are missing the mark, if they're getting off the trajectory because of their choices in their behavior, we're going to do something with that. And what Jesus says is that we are to go and point out their fault, go and point out their fault. You know, this is a slippery slope, especially in our day. And what do we do with that? You know, when you think of it, is it is it our responsibility to point out somebody else's missing of the mark when realistically we know that we're missing the mark many times, too? It's a slippery slope that says go and point out their fault. Just stay with me for just a brief second. Notice the word go. It's in the imperative, which means it's a command. And Jesus is basically saying, if you see it, that a sister and a brother are going off mark, you have to take the initiative. That's the challenge, right? It's a challenge for us to take responsibility to go point it out to our erring sister or brother. But it's clearly a command to go and point out their fault. Notice the word their. At no point does it say that we're to take responsibility for the behavior. Ya hear me? That's where the boundaries come in that Dominic told us about. The boundaries are important because they help us to remember where we begin and where they end and where they begin and where we end. To use the image that Dominic shared, we must remember our fence, so I'm not talking about, and Jesus is not talking about, you know, when we're pointing out somebody else's fault, it's not about taking responsibility for the behavior. Instead, it's about being responsible to the one who is owning the behavior. That's what it means to be in relationship. We are responsible to one another in the body of Christ. So, we need to take the initiative if love is the primary language of the Kingdom of God, if love is the primary language of those who are followers of Jesus, then love compels us to care about the fact that our sister and brother is missing the mark, that they're going off course with the choices that they are making.

So, here's the main lesson that this verse reminds us of. How we confront someone always says more about us than it does about them. Told you it's a slippery slope. How we confront somebody is always going to say more about us than about the person we're confronting. Right now, in our society, something very disturbing is happening. So, this is me as a pastor, but also

me as a human being, I'm watching things happen just like you are. In fact, I can't even watch the news anymore. It's just so disturbing to me. But I happen to get wind of several things that are going on that really describe two extremes that we seem to be living within. On the one side, we have this extreme that when a sister or a brother and I'm using that kind of broadly here, when a sister or brother does something that is clearly off mark, that we just stand by and do nothing. Maybe we'll whip out our phones and videotape it and put it on Instagram because we want to get a certain number of likes, right? And something controversial that we record and post, it's going to generate some kind of 15 seconds or 15 minutes of fame. But that's what we tend to do. An illustration just this past week that's still being investigated, but a woman was sexually assaulted on a SEPTA train in Philadelphia, and the accusation was that all of the bystanders stood and did nothing except record on their phones. That's still being investigated. The district attorney stepped in and said, no, that's not true, but there was a media swarm saying that this is what happened.

So, on the one side, we have a culture that we have and culture exists because we have created it, so it's not like we can sit back and go, "Oh, they they they," cultures us. Cultures created when human beings do or don't do, allow, or don't allow whatever the behavior is. We have on one side of the extreme, allowed our culture to stand by and not do anything when we see somebody's sin. On the other side, we have a culture where we can also swing to the other side of the equation and overreact and overcompensate. So, we're angry at the government. And so, what do we do? We stormed the Capitol. And I'm not making a political statement here. I'm making a sociological statement here. Do you see the extremes? That's the culture that we're living in right now, and we have created it and hear me, hear me, my sisters and brothers hear me, it's up to the church. It's up to us to live differently. Why? Because we hold in the palm of our hands, the essence of truth that has defined reality, that Jesus Christ came into this broken world to set us free. And now we need to encourage one another in the midst of that freedom.

So how do we confront? How do we confront when our confrontation says more about us than it does about the person that we're confronting? How do we confront? I'm glad you asked. I have a few suggestions. Suggestion number one: when we confront somebody, we need to replace the need to be right with the need to do right. We have to get off of our self-righteous view that we have the right to point out somebody else's fault prior to analyzing our own. Now this is actually what contributes to the slippery slope is we don't know how to do that effectively and so we tend to say, I can't say to another person that what they're doing is wrong when I know that I do things that are wrong, too, so I shut down. I turn a blind eye, or I ignore it, or I choose to say nothing because I can't get beyond that obstacle. So, what we have to do is we have to allow love. Love, which is a commitment to the other person's best. We have to have that love help us to face into that obstacle. Jesus teaches us before you go and point out the speck in your sister, brother, take the log out of your own eye. That's what Jesus teaches us, and so it's this principle. Check your motive. What's your motive? If love is the driving force, then our motives and confrontation is to bring out the best and the other. Not to be right.

Any time somebody has ever confronted me and that's happened multiple times, I am a kid from New Jersey, right? It's easy to confront me. Many times, somebody has ever confronted me, I can tell, and so can you, when the motive of that confrontation is to build me up or to build them up. Because if it's the build them up, the emotion that I feel is shame. If it's to build me up the emotion that I feel, is appropriate guilt. So, we had to check our motive.

Second, when we confront, we need to focus on understanding rather than being understood. This too, you know, I take this phrase from one of my all-time historical heroes, St. Francis, his prayer. The prayer of St. Francis is just an amazing prayer, especially to give you a sense of focus when you're needing to confront somebody. Focusing in on understanding is really critical.

Why? Because another philosophy that some of you have heard me teach before, I'm a firm believer that behind every face and behind every behavior, there's a story and the story needs to be heard. People's behavior points, it points to a direction. It points to something about who we are and by understanding it rather than simply judging it, we open up a doorway for love to heal.

Way too many times we end up exerting our self-righteous reaction. And we shut down the discipleship moment for that individual in their brokenness. So, when we confront it could be that somebody just made you angry, somebody's behavior stepped on your space or pushed you against yourself or your wants or your needs or your rights. But maybe instead of reacting, we simply asked, "Hey, can you help me understand, why did you do that? What made you do what you did?" It may be that we will uncover an opportunity for love to invade and when love invades, friends, whenever love invades, healing takes place. Whenever love invades, healing takes place. It doesn't eradicate the pain that we may feel because we live in the ramifications of our mutual sin.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who is a theologian, a pastor, a theologian back in the days of Nazi Germany. Some of you may have read some of his stuff. Great, great thinker. Reformed theologian. He was a Christian in Germany during a time when Hitler was on a march to get rid of as many Jews as possible. I'm simplifying this story just for our time. What Bonhoeffer, as a Christian, couldn't just sit by and do nothing and so he joined a group, a small group of individuals who, as Christians, felt that they needed to get rid of Adolf Hitler, to assassinate him. Unfortunately, Bonhoeffer got caught, he got thrown into prison, and he ended up eventually being killed by the SS. So, while he was in prison as a pastor, his dear friend Eberhard was supposed to get married and Bonhoeffer was supposed to officiate at the wedding.

Unfortunately, he couldn't because he was in jail, and so he did what any good pastor would do who's in jail, right? He wrote his sermon in a letter and sent it to his friend, Eberhard. It's a very powerful, passionate letter that he wrote it's embedded in Bonhoeffer's book that was later put together by somebody else. The book is called *Letters and Papers from Prison*. It's one of my all-time favorite books and embedded into this wedding sermon, Bonhoeffer said to his dear friend Eberhard, and to his bride, "*live together in the forgiveness of your sin.*" Live together in the forgiveness of your sin. The phrase live together is really the important focal point here. Yes, forgiveness is important, but live together, it's that sense that we're committed enough to the relationships that we're going to hang in there through the tough time as best we can, realizing that on the other side of every one of our behaviors, every one of our sins, every time we missed the mark on the other side of that is a story that needs to be understood. And if we're committed enough to just listen first, we'll be able eventually to get beyond our own hurt.

A person's behavior can hurt us. It can hurt. Some of you know that better than others. But if we are followers of Jesus meant to be one for the sake of our witness in the world, then we got to turn towards each other and lean in toward each other in spite of the pain that we feel to get to the place where we understand. We can still apply appropriate boundaries, but understanding is really key to our confrontation. Also, when we confront, we need to go direct rather than the circuitous route. You know, I've put the word circuitous. You know, that's a tough word to say. Circuitous, circuitous. You know, every time I see the word circuitous in this kind of context, I think circus and circus reminds me of three rings like the three rings, a circus and you have different things happening in the different rings. Why is that all important here is because way

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too many times in our relationships, we make a circus out of things. Instead of being direct with one another about how we're feeling and in response to a behavior that somebody has done, we end up going to 30 different people to kind of express and vent all of our stuff, rather than going directly to the individual who has offended us or whose behavior we just don't understand. Have you ever done that? I know I have. It's our normal tendency why? Because misery loves company.

It's always more powerful when somebody can agree with us. It validates our pain, but it doesn't heal the relationship. It doesn't do anything with the relationship. So, we need to if we're going to confront as sisters and brothers in the household of faith, we need to commit ourselves to go direct to the individual rather than the circus route or the circuitous route. We don't want to triangle people into our issue. Also, we want to stay in the moment rather than magnifying the past. We want to stay in the moment rather than magnifying the past. You know, any time we think that we have kind of the upper hand in any kind of situation, somebody else does something wrong and we go, "Aha, yeah, I'm better than they are." Just talk to your spouse or talk to your parent. Or better yet, talk to your sibling if you have a sibling, because they will knock you right out of that platform of high and mighty, and they will do that. They will bring you right down out of the rafters and they will point out every facet of your life that makes it very clear that you are that sinner equal in the need of God's grace as you stand at the foot of the Cross of Christ with your offender.

So that's the important facet of who we are. We all have a past. And our relationships have pasts. So, when we're dealing with a specific behavior that's offending us, we got to deal with just the behavior, not all of the past. So, we can't go, "well, when you did this, it made me angry. Why? Why did that make you angry? Well, because 30 years ago this happened and you said this and it's like really 30 years ago, I said, Yeah, I know, and I remember it. And you, yeah, really." I don't even remember what I have for supper last night, let alone 30 years ago. So, if we're hoarding all of that pain for many different years, that's on us. It's not on the person. That's on us. I know we may not want to hear that. I don't want to hear that. But we got to empty the quiver of all of the different arrows that have been stored up over the years waiting for us to use them at the right time.

That may work out in the world. That's not what Jesus calls us to. Because the primary language of the Kingdom of God is the language of love. And we need to embody love. And we can do that within appropriate boundaries that Dominic taught us. We can do that by choosing to forgive, we can do it in a very tangible way. Not going to delve into this this week, I'm going to come back to this next week, but look at what Jesus says in verse 17.

"If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

OK, just a quick unpacking of this, knowing that we're going to come back to this next week. Well, if they refuse to listen, tell it to the church. It's not meaning that come Sunday morning, going to stand up and point across to another individual and go, "Hey, that individual did such and such." Although historically the church did that. John Wesley, who is a founder of the Methodist movement that eventually became our denomination used to lead part of this movement was he led a small group network is one of the first examples of small groups within our church history. So, he would lead a small group called the Holy Club, and there were a series of questions that Wesley would engage those believers every single week that they got together. And one of the questions was, how have you sinned over the past week? And you had to fess up in the group. I mean, it's called the Holy Club. Right? If you're not going to join in, you don't join



The Holy Club and John Wesley

the group. This is the Holy Club. So, he asked this question, how have you sinned. There was a certain way he phrased it, but it's old English. Our modern term that's what he's asking. How have you sinned since we last got together? And if there was somebody sitting in that room who knew your week and you didn't fess up to what you did, they brought it to the table. They called you out. Anybody want that for our group? Oh my gosh. What a challenge. But here's the issue. We have nobody to truly love us if nobody will call us to account. So that accountability becomes part and parcel of what it means to

be in the body of Christ. And so, taking it to the church is not just about bringing it to the whole group of people, it's bringing your pastors or bringing some other Christians into the conversation so that the process can be empowered. Because ultimately our concern is how do we love the other person?

And then it says here that if they continue to refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. For generations, what that meant is that the church would call this church discipline and they would excommunicate the person from the church. They would shun them. There are still some sects of Christianity that still do that. But that's not how I read this. When Jesus says treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector, how did Jesus treat pagans and tax collectors? He went after them. He tried to engage them. He had meals with them. Why? Because his heart was to reconnect them. It's not about excommunication. We can still do boundaries. It's about helping them to remember who they are.

More on that next week, verse 18.

"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Has great responsibility that is given to the believers. That's the church to stay focused on one very important facet, and that is our motive. In any confrontation must first be one of reconciliation and restoration. That's got to be our motive. That's got to be our focal point. That's got to be what we strive for. The entire Chapter 18 of Matthew's Gospel is built around that principle. Because our witness in the world is dependent on our oneness. Our witness is dependent on our oneness. So, I'm asking you. As we apply this principle. Where are you on those extremes on that spectrum between not doing anything or overreacting? Is there a way for us to love the people in our lives enough that when we see them missing the mark that we can come up alongside of them and say, can you help me to understand what's going on? Because I really want to help. Can you help me help you? And when they push back, which they will, perhaps initially, that's when we introduce the boundaries. And when they absolutely shut things down in spite of how we have brought in additional people to help, then we reassert a different way of approaching them. Boundaries now are redefining the relationship, but our heart is still for them. That's what Jesus is teaching us and how to confront and how to be confronted.

Let's pray together.

God, we thank you. We thank you that love, love is to define who we are as the people of faith that you have called us to be. Lord, we know that love will ultimately win. So teach us in the moment of our need to confront by helping us each and every day to allow you to confront us. Give us the perspective of the speck in our own eye before we engage anybody else. And give us a heart to bring out the best in someone else. Allow love to heal. We pray this in your precious name, the name of Jesus. Amen.