



## Wednesday Prayer

### 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Conflict and Forgiveness

**“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matthew 18:15-17**

In Matthew 18, Jesus gives instructions for how to reprove a church member who sins against you. He shares a set of progressive actions that start with a one-on-one conversation between you and the church member and continues until the conflict is resolved. If the offender refuses to listen and repent, then they are to be treated as an outsider and cannot be embraced by the community. It's a passage about dealing with conflict in the church, and it's followed by Jesus telling Peter that we are to forgive others not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Conflict can be uncomfortable and difficult, and many of us would rather avoid it altogether. But the reality is that we are bound together as the body of Christ, and unresolved conflict creates tension, hardness of heart, and brokenness in the community. Repentance and forgiveness are vitally important for the health of the church and for the members who make up the body of Christ.

But what of cases of child abuse and sexual exploitation? Is there an expectation of repentance and forgiveness? Is there still a place in the community for an offender who repents? What role does the process of conflict resolution play in cases of inappropriate and criminal conduct? These are difficult but important questions for communities of faith to address, ideally before instances of abuse or exploitation ever occur. The ELCA recommends that every congregation establish sexual abuse prevention training opportunities and policies. Find resources on the [Church Mutual Insurance website](#) and [Cherish All Children Safe Church Policies](#).

A final word about forgiveness and reconciliation. Expecting an abuse survivor to forgive and reconcile with their abuser is tantamount to spiritual abuse; and steps towards healing require a thoughtful, careful approach. But Jesus' call to forgive has merit, even in this context. Here, I turn to the powerful words of Morgan Richard Olivier, *“Forgiveness does not mean that what they did was ever acceptable then or now. Forgiveness does not mean that you will allow that person back into your life or that you ever should. Forgiveness means that you are releasing the feelings of resentment or bitterness associated with that person or situation. You are no longer allowing it to have power over you. You are moving forward for yourself and not taking the baggage of others or their offenses with you.”*<sup>1</sup>

**Healing God, we call on you to give us the strength to ask difficult questions, to confront conflict and work towards healing and reconciliation, and to care for our own health and spiritual well-being. Move in our hearts and heal our brokenness so that we can release the chains that bind us, and step into the world with freedom and new life. Amen.**