



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan
by The Reverend Andrew Van Culin, *Rector***

**The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
6 September, 2026**

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It might be tempting of us to think that we've just heard the first organizational guidebook provided, how to deal with conflict within your institution. Here Matthew says, "If one sins against another, the one who's aggrieved is to go to the one who has sinned and regain their relationship. But if it doesn't quite work, take one or two with you. If that doesn't work, bring the whole matter to the church. And if that doesn't work, we'll let the one who is aggrieved you be like a Gentile or a tax collector to you." If that's all we get out of this, well, it's useful conflict resolution. It's always best to deal with our conflicts directly and privately rather than publicly and indirectly. Sky writing is not very effective at reconciling and overcoming a conflict.

But if we look at this passage with a little broader lens, we begin to see that Matthew is reminding us not just of how to overcome conflict but giving us a sense of what our fundamental responsibility we bear as a church. You see, this section of the gospel is one of five sections within Matthew's broader gospel. And this section is dealing with the church, what we are and how we are constructed as a corporate body. That is not an organization, a corporation in a sense, but as a body of people in Christ's image. We've been reminded just before this, for instance, of Peter and his call, his renaming, and the claim that he will be the rock upon which the church, the ecclesia is formed. We have his great proclamation of Jesus, that he is the Messiah, the son of God. And now we find ourselves hearing about the church.

And the first thing we hear about the church proper is that we are about reconciliation. This isn't just a how-to guide. It is a purpose statement of who we are. We are about regaining one another and the world in relationship both to one another and to Christ, the God. That is a fundamental purpose that we bear. The model to the world, what reconciliation not only looks like, but how vital it is. Now you might say, but what about that ending? Are we to just think of one another when we can't resolve our conflicts, to think of one another as Gentiles and tax collectors and just cast them off? But you'll notice that this doesn't say anything about casting one off into the deep darkness.



In fact, as we look at the whole arc of Matthew's gospel, it ends with a call to go to the Gentiles in order that we might proclaim the good news of God again. And so if we are to recognize one as a Gentile, it's simply to recognize that we go back to the beginning in order that we can restore and establish the church in broader ways. Last week, or I mentioned the last two weeks we've heard these stories about Peter. Peter's an interesting figure. We wonder why is it that Peter is claimed to be the foundation of the church? Is it because he makes this great proclamation? You are the Messiah, the son of the living God?

Is it a theological affirmation that he gets right when nobody else does? But you'll remember that just after he makes that proclamation, as Jesus says, "Well, I must be given up into the hands of sinners," it is Peter who says, "No, Lord, this must not happen." And Jesus says the most damning words of all, "Get behind me, Satan." Peter, the rock. And we begin to see that it's not his theological affirmation, but perhaps something deeper in Peter's unique experience. You see, Peter, unlike any of the other disciples, will know what it is like to abandon Jesus.

He, the one who is cursed here, "Get behind me, Satan," is the very one who will say, "I did not know the man. I do not know the man. I do not know the man." And will run out of the courtyard at Jesus' trial in tears. He will have walked away from Christ at his darkest hour, and he alone will know the power of Christ coming to him again on the Sea of Tiberia saying, "Peter, do you love me?" Jesus coming privately, one-on-one to the one who has sinned and aggrieved him and saying, "But do you love me?" Three times Peter getting the opportunity to say, "I am sorry, Lord. And yes, I love you. I am sorry, Lord. And yes, I love you. I am sorry, Lord. And yes, I love you." Peter, unlike any of the other disciples, will understand what reconciliation means.

It is not simply a process of steps to go through to become of one mind. It is the opportunity to reunite our hearts and our lives with one another, to see our worth and our love in one another. Peter alone will understand that the only path to reconciliation is not agreement of mind, but forgiveness of heart, for he will receive that from Christ himself. This passage today offers us a very productive path to conflict resolution. Yes, but even more, it reminds us that we share in this principal purpose as a church to proclaim reconciliation to the world, to proclaim God's desire to be one with us as profoundly as we desire to be one with one another.

We are called into a holy purpose to proclaim this good news to the world, both in word and in deed, by the way we treat one another, by the way we receive the world into our midst. It is a holy purpose, the reconciliation of the world. Amen.