

September 6, 2020

Rev Jen's 20th Love Letter From Lockdown

September Labour Day Weekend Greetings to you,

Back to school. Back to work. Back to life. Back to reality...Here we are.

Facing the reality of it all. The NEW reality of it all.

It's September and I'm watching the Canucks play in the Stanley Cup Play offs. This is a very strange reality. And this is just one fragment of the strange new reality of life, sports, and the church in these pandemic times.

So let me get the public service announcement out of the way at the outset.

The AGM/Congregational Meeting is at 10:30 am on September 26, 2020 in person at the church or via Zoom (we hope!). Please plan to attend as we put 2019 to rest and address the realities of 2020. Your presence is essential. Your voice, energy, resources, opinions, and more are required now more than ever as we face the reality of our times.

Challenging times. Challenging options...limited timeframes before the money runs out. What to do? Close? Amalgamate? Develop? What do we have the energy, enthusiasm, resources to achieve? What does faithful stewardship look like? How do we discern and decide? How do we reach the unity and one voice needed to move forward?

We work it out!

"If any member of the church sins against you...IF? More like WHEN another member of the church sins against you...because we all know that where two or three are gathered there is the potential for disagreement, misunderstanding and conflict. When all are welcome to belong to the body of Christ, there is diversity, and difference. Conflict is inevitable.

So when the conflict happens...what do we do?

In the research and reading preparation to write this letter, I found this...

“As we enter the doorway of this passage, it’s helpful to bear in mind the classic, counterproductive, even death-dealing ways we’re often tempted to engage in conflict. First, we’re tempted to avoid it. Second, we’re tempted to gossip: to tell other people about the person or behavior that’s offended us, rather than to address our concerns directly to the person or people involved. Third, we’re tempted to gang up on each other, to recruit like-minded people to our side and create echo chambers of grievance. Fourth, we’re tempted to air our grievance only in such echo-chambers, or in front of overwhelmingly friendly audiences where accountability is minimal. And fifth, we’re tempted to regard our opponents as if they are unwelcome or better off elsewhere, outside our community entirely. In this week’s reading, Jesus takes on these five temptations, one at a time.”

The Matthew text (18:15-20) and the Salt commentary address what is required to deal with conflict within the church.

And we know there is conflict in the church. Personal, communal, and global; the conflict occurs at all the levels of relationship. Conflict happens.

And from the research it said...

1) Conflicts happen - even and especially in the church. Accordingly, the church is called not to be a place free from conflict (itself an unhealthy, conflict-causing idea!), but rather to be a form of “life together” where conflicts happen in healthy, constructive ways. The good news of the Gospel this week is that this is indeed possible, and that there’s a “deeper physics” of human conflict we can all follow, with the Spirit’s help.

2) The steps Jesus outlines here aren’t magical, and they don’t fit every situation. But they help make manifest a set of underlying principles worth bearing in mind whenever we face conflicts, large or small (which would be, um, just about every day!).

3) One such principle is this: always act with a bias toward direct communication, speaking with the person (or people) who have created - and can change - the circumstances of concern. Another principle: start with the smallest group possible (one-on-one, for instance), and then carefully, incrementally widen the group, if

necessary. And another: avoid echo chambers and friendly-only audiences. And finally: our actions, in large and small conflicts, have profound consequences, on earth as it is in heaven. Never underestimate the ripple effects our behavior can have, even in the most minor dust-ups, as we sacramentally model - for ourselves and others, near and far - how to manage the conflicts that make up so much of our lives.

4) Finally, Jesus' ministry writ large is one of reconciliation, liberation, justice, healing, and *tikkun olam* (Hebrew for "repair of the world"). Viewed through this lens, conflicts are nothing less than opportunities to participate in God's reconciling, reparative work. If we take this seriously, we can even learn to look forward to conflicts - imagine that! - as occasions to pattern our life together according to the "deeper physics," the dynamics of love, with which God made and remakes the world."

Our work as a community of faith and followers of Jesus is to seek to address the conflict in our midst so that we can grow in loving one another. With humility, unity, and discipline we can be the body of Christ in this world.

WTF!? Where's the fight? Sin takes us into the conflict, and Jesus shows us a way out...a way to right relationship...a way to life abundant. Please take your time with the text today and consider all the ways you deal with conflict in your life.

Whether offender or offended, we are involved. And as members of the body we are committed to working towards right relationship...to make things right.

So let us commit to "get better". Let us deal with the issues head on and without fear knowing that God is with us, we are not alone, and we do have a way to follow!

WTF!? What's the fix? "Again truly I tell you. If two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my father in heaven For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." So let us ask as one body...

Wtf!? What's the future? Our discussion and decisions on September 26th will determine the way forward.

And no matter what happens, we are not afraid. We move forward with faith. One step at a time. One AGM/Congregational meeting at a time. One conflict at a time.

Bless the way we pray. Bless our capacity to change, grow and learn. Bless our abilities to deal with the conflicts that arise in respectful ways. Bless our willingness to handle conflict and to do it well. And as we grow and learn how to handle conflict well, we are more able to focus on other things that matter such as "How shall we live and how shall we celebrate God's presence?"

Our work is to deal with the conflict in the ways that Jesus outlines, respecting all those involved and seeking the unity and oneness of the body of Christ. We are not to be divided, dispersed, or defeated by conflict within the congregation/community.

We are to work toward right relationship. Effort will be required. Discipline too, as we seek to follow the way...among the followers. Truth and reconciliation too.

As we gear up for the Back to school/work/life realities of September, may we be prepared to "fight fair" when the conflicts arise and may we use the spiritual resources we have been given to find our way forward with faith and with love.

From Rev Jen

God bless us all.