

Reflection for Tuesday August 18, 2020

## Mutual Respect and Love

*Matthew 18:15-16*

*“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out that 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.*

Part of seminary training for every ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). During CPE we learn about ourselves and how to provide pastoral care to others. Pastors who specialize in chaplaincy do at least two additional units of CPE and because I thought about being a chaplain, I did an extra unit of CPE. I was blessed to be at Lehigh Valley Hospital for both units of CPE. CPE usually has a group of four or five participants with a certified chaplain supervising the group.

During my second of unit of CPE one of the members of my group was Richard and I had real issues with him. Our theologies were diametrically opposed, his view of women as clergy was not welcoming, and I guess the best way I can put it is that I really did not like him. Eventually my supervisor challenged me to deal directly with my feelings for Richard. During group one day I told him that I really did not like him. From that statement we began to have an honest talk about our feelings and issues. At the end, I came to respect him and although I can not sincerely say that I liked him as a person, I found a way to work with him for the remainder of the unit.

You may be wondering why I am telling you this story. It was difficult to talk directly with Richard about my issues and feelings toward him. And it was absolutely the right thing to do. When we have an issue or concern with an individual, Jesus teaches us that we need to go to that person to try to work it out. It is sound advice, yet often we don't take that advice. We complain to others and we avoid conflict at all costs. Totally human responses and ones that we all share. And yet, that is where so many problems begin, gossip takes place, sides are drawn, and feelings are hurt.

As Christians we are called to follow Jesus and that often means following a difficult and challenging path. It was not easy to tell Richard how I felt and yet it was absolutely the right thing to do. In the end we could agree to disagree and still work together for the good of our patients and colleagues.

My sisters and brothers, we are entering into talks on how we might formally come together as one community of faith. Along the way we will have many disagreements with each other. It will not always be easy, and some conversations will be difficult. My hope and prayer is that we will follow Jesus and when we have an issue with one another we will talk one to one with the person. Hopefully, we can resolve the issue and if not, then we can agree to disagree and move forward.

I trust you to talk to me when you have a concern with something I have said or done. I can assure you that I will talk to you, one to one, if I have a concern. At the end I am perfectly willing to agree to disagree if we each feel compelled to maintain our position on an issue. Let us recognize that together we are stronger than we are as individuals. We are coming together so that we can spread the Good News of God's love and forgiveness to all peoples. And that commission is more important than any one

of us. We don't have to agree on everything, and we won't, and we can still form relationships built on mutual respect for the good of the community.

In Peace,

Pastor Suzanne