

THE MESSAGE for Oct 10, 2010
Matthew 10:16-25 & 34-39
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Kingdom Conflict

Martin Luther wrote the following words and they still hold true to this day. They will probably hold true for a very long time to come. Luther wrote,

*Wherever God erects a House of Prayer,
 The Devil always builds a Chapel there:
 And upon closer Examination,
 The latter has the largest Congregation.*

How true! No wonder there is conflict in the church. Here in this place we have two kingdoms at odds with each other – God’s kingdom and the devil’s. Sometimes we participate in the wrong kingdom and we don’t even know it; although we might think and believe otherwise. Only God knows. Listen to Luther’s words again.

*Wherever God erects a House of Prayer,
 The Devil always builds a Chapel there:
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Truth is, where two or three are gathered together there is bound to be a conflict isn’t there? We’re human.

We have baggage, full of dirty laundry, and we bring it with us every where we go. So I’m inviting you to bring your baggage here to the church, bring your dirty laundry here and leave it at the foot of the cross. Leave it with Jesus and he will clean it for you.

Wouldn’t it be awesome if every time you came into this House of Prayer you left here a new person in Christ – clean and free from all your baggage – equipped to live the faith in your everyday world? That’s the result I hope to accomplish every time and anytime we gather in this House of Prayer.

I’ve come to realize in my 46 years that most conflict really isn’t a bad thing. Conflict is neither good nor bad. Conflict simply is – conflict simply is two or more opposing views, or ideas, or concepts trying to occupy the same place at the same time. We become the means for that conflict to get acted out. So how we respond (or react) can be either good or bad.

When we find ourselves in a conflicted situation, chances are pretty good it’s because we aren’t on the same page. We aren’t working on the same desired result or agree how to accomplish that desired result.

Picture a church choir or a praise band and each person trying to sing a different song at the same time. Could you imagine? The sound from that choir or praise band wouldn't be harmonious. It would be discord and terribly painful to the ears.

The devil loves the sound of discord in his chapel 'tis music to his ears, but not to God's ears, not in God's House of Prayer. In God's House of Prayer it's much better when we are singing the same song. When we are using the same music. When we share a common mission, vision, and values. What I call our MV². When we aren't on the same page there is going to be conflict and the sound is discord.

Jesus lived by a mission, a vision, and values that reflected the new life available in the kingdom of God, a new life lived in God's House of Prayer. Jesus resisted anything and everything that conflicted with God's kingdom reality on earth and he calls his disciples, you and me, to commit to the same thing.

Conflict put Jesus on the cross, commitment destroys the power of the cross.

We are forgiven sinners because of the cross of Christ. Forgiven sinners... Our conflicts need not rule our lives – especially in God's House of Prayer. It's our brokenness (our baggage) that creates the conflict around us, our brokenness (our baggage) causes a lot of pain we cause in our lives and the lives of others.

Jesus was very much aware that conflict would come as we commit our lives to him and his ways. Jesus talks about this kind of conflict in a very difficult reading for today in Matthew 10:16-25 and 34-39. (*Read the text*)

Those are hard words, aren't they. As Jesus points out there is a spiritual battle taking place on earth. Conflict happens. And we get sucked right into it, don't we?

The devil loves it when we are at odds with each other. The devil loves it when we are in conflicted relationships. But God's doesn't. Jesus offers us a new perspective for living by offering us advice about how to face the conflict in our lives:

First Jesus advises us -- to be wise as serpents, and innocent as doves.

I don't know about you but so often when I'm in a conflict with my wife... I mean someone. My emotions get the best of me. And it isn't the words that my wife hears, it's the emotional envelope I deliver them in. "To be wise as a serpent," is to respond not react. When I am driven by my emotions in a conflict, I react. So Jesus says be as wise as a serpent. A serpent has no emotions. So we need to keep our emotions in check so we can respond (not react) to conflict.

Jesus faced a lot of conflict in his life but he never reacted. He responded according to his character. That's wise advice for us. We are forgiven sinners. That's our character. That's how Jesus invites us to approach the conflicts in our lives, as forgiven sinners.

Jesus also says that we are to be innocent as doves. Have you ever watched a dove? They are so peaceful. They do no harm. Jesus is saying that we ought to do no harm when it comes to conflict but instead look for peaceful resolutions.

Innocent does not mean that we never sin or never do anything wrong. It doesn't mean we don't have dirty clothes in our baggage. Innocent means that we are moving in the direction that allows the Holy Spirit to mold us, shape us, and grow us into people who love God and love one other. As we approach conflict with innocence we can see it as a learning opportunity for strengthening our relationships. The Jesus' way to resolving our conflicts begins with wisdom and innocence.

I went to the computer and Googled the phrase "Steps to Resolving Conflict." I got over 54 million hits (54,400,000). There is a lot of conflict that needs resolved, it seems to me.

One particular webpage caught my eye "How to Resolve Conflicts Without Fighting." I thought it would help me with my marriage. (Pointing to Amber, my wife, she is going to kill me later. That's not written down up here. I love you honey...) Here are the four steps they offer... Stop, say, think, choose... (See --www.goodcharacter.com/YCC/ResolvingConflicts.html)

1. **STOP.** Don't let the conflict get worse. The less angry [emotional] you are the easier it will be to solve the problem.
 2. **SAY** what you understand the conflict to be about. What is causing the disagreement? What does each of you want or not want [expectations]?
 3. **THINK** of positive options. How can you meet each other's needs and be fair?
 4. **CHOOSE** a positive option each of you can agree on.
- If you still can't agree, ask someone else (an outsider) to help resolve the conflict.

They also offer the follow RULES:

- Agree to resolve the conflict.
- No name calling.
- Take turns talking. Don't interrupt.
- Be clear and truthful about what is bothering you and what you really need.
- Listen to the other person. Be sure you understand how he or she sees the problem.
- Use your brains, not your hands.
- Be willing to compromise (if that's appropriate).

Good advice. Our conflicts need not get the best of us but we can offer our best to resolving them.

The second thing Jesus advises us to do is -- love God above all other loves.

Oddly enough when we love God above all other loves, we can truly love others. As we love God above all others, we can love our father, mother, sister, and brother. As we love God above all others, we can love our neighbor next door and our enemy down the street. God's love rules.

Jesus doesn't say like one another, he says love another. As we allow God's love to rule in our lives, anything and everything is possible.

God's love rules. We should have T-Shirts printed up that have "God's Love Rules" on the front and on the back "Ask me about being a Forgiven Sinner." How can we make that happen? Who wants to get those shirts for us? When other loves rule our lives instead of God's love, we end up doing terrible, horrible, ugly things to the people around us. Let God's love rule in your life. Wear that shirt with pride.

Third and finally, Jesus advises us to take up our cross daily and follow him.

Jesus is calling us to die to everything except him. Here we face the ultimate conflict. Jesus wants all of us every part of our being to live for him and his ways. He wants our total commitment – no excuses.

To follow Jesus means we must be willing to reorient our lives so that he and his ways come first. It means putting our wants and our desires aside, which for me isn't always easy. It means giving faithfully of our time, our money, and our very lives for his kingdom work on earth. It means sacrifice.

The other day I saw something I really wanted. It has four wheels and an engine. And so I suggested to Amber that I was thinking about getting it. Now she takes care of the bills and so she said, "That's fine. You can get that but we are going to have to cut back on our giving to the church. We won't be able to tithe anymore." "Oh, never mind." I responded. She knows where to get me when it counts.

Jesus is calling us to do our part to make this church a House of Prayer and to live into the promise of peace that Jesus offers – a peace, in spite of our conflicts, a peace to help us deal with our conflicts, a peace that surpasses all human understandings. Peace, not as the world gives, but a peace that we already have in Christ Jesus, our Lord. **Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Love God above all other loves. And take up your cross daily and follow Jesus.**

Wherever God erects a House of Prayer, The Devil always builds a Chapel there: And upon closer Examination, The latter has the largest Congregation. But it need not be so in our lifetime. Amen.