

Sermon September 6, 2026

Matthew 18:15-20

Reconciliation in the community of faith

"If your brother and sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If you are listened to, 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 that person 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.

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 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."

Colors of Love

In the first moments of creation, God used a palette of vibrant, life-giving color to create this world we love. Soon we will have a reminder of God's creative nature, as green leaves are transformed to yellow, orange and red. As we prepare to enter into a new season, we are reminded that God's love knows no bounds... our God colors outside the lines. God paints our world and our lives with the hues of compassion, justice, hope, and dignity.

The Israelites in Egypt lived lives of drab grey. The people have stayed within the boundaries set by Pharaoh, but God calls for the people to break free: *This month shall mark for you the beginning.* "It is the night before freedom, and God gives instructions that feel strange and vivid, like painting a canvas in the dark.

The deep red of the lamb's blood, marking the homes of a people God refuses to abandon. The earthy brown of unleavened bread, simple and honest, the bread of haste and hope. The sharp green of bitter herbs, reminding them of suffering that must never be forgotten. The dark midnight blue of the sky under which they prepare to walk free.

This sacred night is God's palette of liberation. God proclaims, *"I see you. I claim you. You are mine."*

The red painted on the doorposts is not fear; it is belonging. And no one paints alone. If a household is too small, they join another. If someone lacks enough, the community shares. Liberation is communal colorful mural.

This night is about becoming a people who carry the colors of God's love into every generation.

But just as the colors of one season are transformed in a new season, sometimes our memories fade and we forget. Thousands of years later, Jesus reminds the people of the fragile beautiful work of staying in relationship.

This is not a dramatic story like Passover. There are no plagues or midnight escape. Instead, Jesus paints with gentler colors of reconciliation and love.

Jesus knows that liberation can be lost if community fractures. Freedom fades when resentment grows. The promised land is hard to reach when we stop talking to each other. So, Jesus gives a process... not to punish, but to restore. In Jesus' teachings we are guided to a circle of discernment that brings about the hope of reconciliation.

And why should we invest in this process? Because *"Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."*

Christ offers us the courage to speak truth and the willingness to listen because we are always in relationship. Christ is in the holy work of beginning again.

And what better time than now for us to begin again... to forgive, to seek relationship, to love. We know something about the brokenness in our world today... the places that wound through racism, poverty, violence, and exclusion. We know nights when we long for God to say, "This month shall mark for you the beginning."

And we also know the fragile beauty of community. We know how easily relationships can fray. We know how conflict can drain color from our shared life.

Jesus speaks into the brokenness: *Stay. Speak. Listen. Repair. Gather. I am there.*

God calls out to us: *Prepare. Remember. Mark yourselves as beloved. I am bringing you out.*

These are not separate instructions. They are the brushstrokes of a people learning to live in the colors of God's love.

In a Baltimore neighborhood, local teens painted a beautiful mural. Swirls of orange, turquoise and violet, celebrating Black joy and neighborhood pride. One morning, the community woke to find that the mural had been vandalized. This bright, sprawling piece was ruined by someone who spray-painted hateful words across it.

The community could have responded with anger alone. They could have painted over the whole thing or let the damage stand as a reminder of division.

Instead, they gathered.

Two or three at first. Then dozens. Then the whole neighborhood.

They brought brushes and rollers and paint cans. They brought food. They brought music. They brought their children. And they didn't just repair the mural... they expanded it. They added new colors. New shapes. New stories. New hope.

One of the teens said, "They tried to take our colors away. But we just made more."

This is God's call in action. A community refusing to let harm define them. A community choosing repair over resentment. A community gathering— by twos and threes, trusting that love still has colors left to paint.

Liberation is not just the big movements of justice, though those matter deeply. It is also about the small movements of courage within our own community. Every time we choose honest conversation over silent resentment, we add a stroke of blue compassion to the canvas. Every time we choose repair over withdrawal, we paint with green healing. Every time we gather by twos and threes, we make space for golden presence. Every

time we remember God's liberating love, we carry the red sign of belonging into the world.

Freedom is not only something God does for us. It is something God teaches us to practice with one another.

So, let us be the people who mark our doorposts with belonging. The ones who gather in Christ's name, even when it's hard. The people who trust that liberation and reconciliation are two movements of the same Spirit.

God is painting us into a community that can carry the colors of love into the world. May it be so!

Amen.

Holy Communion

Invitation to the Table

Leader: This is the table where Christ meets us... in our longing, in our wrestling, in our hope for healing. Here, love is practiced, grace is shared, and reconciliation becomes real.

All who hunger for belonging, all who seek peace, all who desire to walk in Christ's way are welcome at this feast.

Great Thanksgiving

One: The Lord be with you.

Many: And also with you.

One: Lift up your hearts.

Many:: We lift them to the Lord.

One: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Many: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

One: Holy God, you formed us for community and breathed your Spirit into our lives. When we wandered, you called us back. When we were enslaved, you led us out. When we were divided, you taught us love.

In Jesus Christ, you showed us the way of compassion, the courage of truth, and the joy of reconciliation.

And so, with all who seek your justice and peace, we praise you:

Many: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and love, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the One who comes in your name. Hosanna in the highest.

The Story

One: Add Seder

On the night before he gave himself for us, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his friends, saying: "Take, eat. This is my body, given for you."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and shared it, saying: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin."

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim Christ's love until he comes again.

The Blessing

Spirit of the Living God, come upon these gifts and upon your people. Make this bread and cup a feast of healing and hope. Unite us in love, strengthen us for reconciliation, and send us into the world as bearers of Christ's peace.

The gifts of God for the people of God. Come, for all is ready.

The Meal

Prayer of Thanksgiving

All: Gracious God, you have fed us with love, strengthened us with hope, and renewed us for the work of peace. Send us out with courage to repair what is broken, to seek justice with joy, and to love as Christ loves. Amen.