

Pastor's Message – 9/10/23  
Matthew 18:15-20

These last few weeks, we've been focusing on Jesus' call to discipleship: what it means to be a follower of, and a believer in Jesus. Back in chapter 14 of the gospel of Matthew, we hear the amazing story of Peter walking on water – at least for a few steps. We heard about the faith of the Canaanite woman and how Jesus then expanded his ministry to non-Jews. Then, we heard last week that it is in sacrifice that followers can be identified. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (Matt. 16:24).”

Now, beginning in chapter 18, we seem to have made a major leap forward. Jesus now starts to talk about what can happen after one has become a disciple. He starts talking about falling away and not acting like a disciple. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones ... (18:6).” “If a shepherd has 100 sheep, and one of them goes astray ... (18:12b)?”

Time seems to have passed, for now Jesus seems to be talking about life among believers in the church. At this time, there was no church – certainly no organized churches. Matthew, like the other four gospel writers, is writing to a particular group of readers, with a particular intent. Matthew is the most Jewish of the gospel writers and addresses an original audience that was probably Jewish Christians no longer associated with the Jewish synagogue and so they are learning how to be in relationship with each other and what it means to be a church of Jesus-followers. Many of the gospels include the same sayings of Jesus and the same parables and miracles, but, except for Matthew 18:15, do not include any of our Bible passage for today. Matthew alone concerns itself with matters of the Church and how Christians are to live together.

The reading deals with that most human of problems – how to deal with the wrongs of one person against another. It stresses the importance of settling things and the process of settling things as quickly as possible for the sake of the whole church. The church is meant to be a body of believers who bring no self-righteousness, who sacrifice themselves for others, but who all stand equally in need of





