Sermon from
September 6, 2026
Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
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Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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Can you hear me now? Is the well-known Verizon commercial that has a representative located in various places checking phone reception and asking, "Can you hear me now?" Sometimes location isn't the issue when trying to get someone to hear us. Sometimes there's a relational distance that keeps us apart. Our text today, seems to be asking that same question over and over again. Can you hear me now?

One of the topics I lead couples through when doing premarital counseling is conflict resolution. There are exercises and worksheets that lead them through steps: naming the conflict, discussing what has helped or not helped in the past, brainstorming possible solutions and then choosing one or two to work with, and creating a path forward. The couples I have had the privilege of working with have not had any major conflicts, at least not at this point in the relationship, and so for them it's simply been practice- tools to have in their relationship toolbox. Anyone that has been in a relationship for longer than ten seconds knows conflict is part of the package. Conflicts can be small like not

agreeing on a restaurant for dinner, or they can be big like how to parent the kids or where to live or how to deal with in-laws or extended family. Conflict is hard and we all handle it differently, some in healthier ways than others but always asking the question, "Can you engage with people: marriage, family, school, work, groups we connect with, and even church.

In our text today, the conflict Jesus is addressing is one involving sin within the Christian community. This is not an "I'm mad at you because you can't decide on a restaurant" kind of conflict. This is a "You hurt me" kind of conflict. Damage has been done to the relationship. Pain has been caused. "If someone sins against you" suggests the relationship is broken and in need of healing. When we sin against each other, we are not practicing love. Most of us have probably experienced this kind of brokenness. There is tension, avoidance, snapping at each other, or yelling, hurtful words said, the silent treatment, and the longer it lasts the more difficult it seems to find your way back to some semblance of wholeness. Our tendency is to sweep conflict under the rug; to fake niceness; to hope that time really does heal all wounds. Minnesotans are good at indirect communication… We often end up talking to everyone else about the problem except the person it actually involves, venting and spewing and sometimes gossiping about the other. Our side of the story becomes more inflated and exaggerated than the initial conflict. Does any of this resonate?

Author and theologian Debie Thomas comments, "The first thing to notice about Jesus's teaching in this passage is its utter realism. Unlike us, who

assume that because we're Christians, we should either not experience conflict at all, or cover it up with a bland "niceness" if we do, Jesus takes it for granted that we will disagree and hurt each other. He starts with the baseline assumption that conflict within the beloved community is normal and natural. The question is not whether we'll wound each other with our words and actions, but how we should proceed when we do."

How we handle conflict matters to Jesus. How we address problems in our relationships matters to Jesus. How we treat each other in these awkward and difficult moments matters to Jesus. Jesus gives us a process; a path to healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation if we're willing to lean in, risk, and love deeply. There is a lot of talk on social media and a lot of relationship advice being given by apparent experts out there. One of the words used quite a bit is "toxic". Now, there are certainly toxic relationships and people who abuse and use others. And sometimes it seems, our culture would have us walk away from anyone and any situation that is not bringing us happiness, that is not gratifying for us, that doesn't encourage and lift us up, forgetting the dignity and worth of the other human in the equation. Our culture is quick to announce when wrong has been done but is slow to engage in any act of healing and restoration. Jesus cares about healing and restoration.

So, step 1: Go. Go and talk to the person. Sounds simple, but it's not. Be brave and approach the person who has hurt you. Name what happened. Be mature about it. Don't blurt it out in front of everyone but confront them when you're

alone. In other words, remember their dignity and allow for privacy. Modern psychology and sociology teaches us to concentrate on our feelings rather than accuse. Saying things like, “I felt hurt when you lied to me.” or “It really upset me when you didn’t seem to care about my property enough to treat it with respect” or “When you said those things about me in front of everyone, I felt worthless and humiliated.” And we also need to ask for what we need. “I need you to be honest with me, so I can trust you as a friend.” “I need you to respect my things and leave them alone.” Or “For us to be able to work together, you can’t talk about me like that.” Learning how to use our words is an important skill, and communicating with maturity is necessary for any relationship to be healthy. And as we try, we continue to ask, “Can you hear me now?” “Go and point out the fault,” Jesus says, “and if they listen you will have regained that one.” There is hope when we’re willing to talk.

Step 2: If they don’t listen, bring another person with you, or maybe two, and try again. Understand, this is not to gang up on them, but to provide a witness of the truth, someone else to listen and perhaps share some wisdom. This is when the situation gets a little more intense, right? There are some situations where we might go directly to this step- situations when we’re uncomfortable or even afraid to approach the person on our own. We might bring a friend or a professional with us. And that’s good and helpful. Bringing others into the conversation does a couple things. It communicates a seriousness to what has happened asking again, “Can you hear me now?” The person at fault is less likely to blow it off or feign innocence. They still might defend their actions, but now there are others there to listen and make sense of the situation. It also

allows others to interpret what's being said. Sometimes we hear what we want to hear, and when we're upset, our minds can distort what another person is saying. Our interpretation is not always trustworthy. Having one or two others with helps in discerning truth and accuracy, "so that every word is confirmed as evidence." This is language of courts and legal systems, of process.

Step 3: Bring it before the Church. Right. Our culture rebels against this idea. Debie Thomas reminds us though, "When conflicts arise in our midst, what's at stake is not my personal feelings or your personal liberty; what's at stake is the health and well-being of the entire body." Our health and wholeness matters, but it goes further than that: Our emotional and relational health impacts the emotional and relational health of the Church, of the whole Body of Christ- and that really matters to Jesus. Sin kept secret, swept under the rug, can undermine the health of the Family of God. Jesus says, at this step- at this point in the conflict- it's possible we'll lose them. It's possible they will walk away, or the church will need to ask them to leave. That happens on rare occasions, and it hurts. It doesn't feel good to anyone. But it also doesn't mean it's the end. Jesus continues to seek out the lost, inviting and showing hospitality and care. We don't shun or ignore. We continue to love but with boundaries that protect the vulnerable. Jesus invites us to engage in healthy relationships that ultimately lead to a healthier Church. And a healthier church matters to Jesus and it should matter to us too. Jesus doesn't desire fake peace or false restoration. Jesus doesn't desire niceness in place of true unity. Jesus asks for truth and that often requires repentance and change that not everyone is willing to make. But he asks, "Can you hear me now?" It is in our work of reconciliation that Jesus

promises to be with us. It is in our work toward unity Jesus says he'll show up. "Where two or more are gathered in my name, there I will be with them." Relationships within the Body of Christ matter to Jesus. So lean in, risk talking, and love deeply.

It matters. Amen