

Matthew 18:15-20
September 4, 2011
The Church of St. Leonard

May only the truth be spoken, and only the truth be heard: This I pray in Jesus' name.

In the gospel reading that Anna-Claire has just read, Jesus discusses how broken human relationships may be handled so that forgiveness and restoration can take place.

I would like to tell you a story that, I believe, nicely illustrates this for us this morning.

Once upon a time, there were two brothers. Their father had a large farm and when he became too old to work, he called his sons to him.

"I am too old to work anymore," he said. "I will divide my farm in half and give each of you one half. I know that you will always work together and will be good friends."

When the brothers first started farming on their adjoining farms, they were the best of friends and would share everything together. Then, one day there was an argument between the two brothers, and they stopped speaking to one another. For many years, not a word was spoken between them.

One day, one of the brothers was at his house when a carpenter came to the door and said, "I would like to do some work. Do you have any work that I can do?"

The brother thought for a moment and then answered, "I would like you to build a fence on my property. Build it down near the stream there that separates my farm from my brother's. I don't want to see my brother any more and I would like you to build a high fence there please. I'm going into town and I'll be back this evening."

When he came back that evening, he was shocked to see that the carpenter had not followed his instructions. Instead of building a high fence there, he had built a bridge over the stream. The man walked down to take a look at the bridge, and as he did, his brother walked toward him from the other side. His brother said, "After all the terrible things I've done to you over the years, I can't believe that you would build a bridge and welcoming me back." He reached out to his brother and gave him a big hug.

The brother then walked back up to his farmhouse to talk to the carpenter. "Can you stay?" he asked. "I have more work for you to do." The carpenter answered, "I'm sorry, but I can't stay. I have to go—I have other bridges to build."

[www.sermons4kids.com—"building bridges"]

Sometimes you and I may have a disagreement with our sisters and brothers in Christ. When that happens, we often build a fence between ourselves and them. We stop talking to them. We don't want to see them. We don't want to be around them.

That isn't how Jesus wants us to behave. Instead of fences, Jesus wants us to build a bridge of love between us.

When we are the injured party, we are to seek out the person whom we think has done the injuring and initiate reconciliation. We are not to nurse our grudges, whine about our wounds, and resist efforts at healing.

We are to take the first step, to risk the engagement that can lead to a restored relationship. That surely is easier said than done, but Jesus promises to be present with us when we take a leap of faith like this.

As I said at the beginning, forgiveness and restoration are the themes of our gospel passage today. I can say, from my own experience this summer, that forgiveness and restoration of a broken relationship in my own life, has brought me and my friend great joy.

At this service today you and I can receive the laying on of hands for healing. This is a wonderful opportunity for you and me to receive the healing and grace to act to restore broken relationships in our lives. We need the courage and love of Jesus to help us, but we know that "Jesus is with us/me always" and so none of us needs to be afraid.

Amen.