

Sermon: "The Help"

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Matthew 18:15-35

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During a visit to a mental asylum, a visitor asked the director how to determine whether or not a patient should be institutionalised. "Well," said the director, "we fill up a bathtub, then we offer a teaspoon, a teacup and a bucket to the patient, and ask him to empty the bathtub."

"Oh, I see," said the visitor. "A normal person would use the bucket because it is bigger than the spoon or the teacup."

"No," said the director, "a normal person would pull out the plug. Do you want the bed near the window?"

It is summertime in 1950 Jackson, Mississippi. The air is heavy with humidity and tacky with the lack of civil rights.



Minnie is a hot headed maid and one of who lives in Jackson, Mississippi. She almost always states her mind and isn't hesitant to sass-mouth anyone that crosses her. She has five children, "Leroy Junior, Sugar, Felicia, Kindra, and Benny"(Stockett

228), and is married to a man named Leroy. Her marriage with Leroy is complicated since he often gets drunk and beats on Minny, and it is hard for Minny to look past this awful characteristic of Leroy because she loves him so much.

In the beginning of the novel Minny worked for Miss Hilly's mother, Miss Walter. They wanted Minny for a maid because she is "bout the best cook in Hinds County, maybe even all a Mississippi" (Stockett 8). But when Miss Hilly sends her mother off to the old folks home and tells Minny that she needs to work for her, Minny refuses. Miss Hilly then tells all her friends how Minny is a thief so she'll have no choice but to work for her. But Minny doesn't take to it, instead Minny gives Miss Hilly the Terrible Awful pie.(Vanna, Blogger)

This scene is an example of the opposite of conflict resolution.

Clip

Revenge is crappy for everyone concerned. This scene begins with Minny's palpable shame and pain around a choice she made that she hoped would make her feel better but what she gained from her choice was personal brokenness. What brought healing to Minny and the help, the maids, was telling the stories in truth and love with hope that their oppressors would see the human similarities rather than individual differences that all women have in common. When Minny's intention became about connection she created space in her

life for healing and empowerment. Connection, healing and empowerment will never come from disempowering another. Connection, healing and empowerment begin with integrity and authenticity with a focus on win – win solutions.

Let's go to the Bible and see how this works. (Read Matthew 18:15-22 key verses, The Message).

Theologians continue to debate the textual variant in verse 15. A textual variant occurs when there is some degree of disagreement among the six thousand existing manuscripts. For a variant to be worth discussion it must be viable and significant. To be viable it must have a shot of being the correct rendering of the original text – intent. If the text is viable the meaningful consequence of the interpretation is not significant enough to change the text.

ESV “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”

NET “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault when the two of you are alone. If he listens to you, you have regained your brother.”

Do you see the difference in these two translations?

It is important to understand what the text really means so we do not live into it incorrectly. What we believe this text is saying is key to connecting and disconnecting, repairing and doing irreparable damage, to strengthening trust or destroying trust.

If you and I prefer the shorter version of this verse then we are instructed to confront, with love, anyone we see hurting themselves, another person or a group of people. What this means is that if you and I see someone cheating on their taxes or committing adultery, and although this is not a sin against you or me, we are NOT admonished to speak to them. However, if we prefer the longer version of this text, that is if the person's behaviour is hurting you or me or a group of people, we are instructed to speak to them one on one and if the person hears us, owns and changes their harmful behaviour, we have strengthened a relationship. If the one on one is not successful, we are instructed to ask one or two discerning people to come with us to engage the issue again. If this conversation does not result in ownership and a willingness to change and do the work of accountability and change, then we are to go to our wise elders, our Council, and ask them to help us address the person and issue once more. If this proves to bring reconciliation with the truth of what is happening and its negative effects, we are to ask the person to leave our midst with the understanding that if they are willing to

own their behaviour and do their healing work, we would be happy to walk with them and offer encouragement for their journey.

I prefer the longer version as this frees me to address issues that are having a negative impact on my life. As a spiritual leader in paid accountable ministry, I have the extra burden and responsibility to my Congregation, Presbytery, Conference and God to speak to a person or a group, faction of people who are hurting the energy of my congregation, the spiritual growth of my congregation and the vision and mission that you, my congregation, created and have chosen to live into by offering your time, talent and treasures. I do not like confrontation. It makes me sick to my stomach. However what I do not like even more is being hurt or watching others being hurt. And what I dislike even more is being manipulated to look like I relish confrontation and controlling. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, like many of you, I will speak to what is true whether observers understand me or agree with me for to be silent when hurting people are hurting themselves and others would be mean I am sinning against myself, God and others. If I ever lack the courage to be the leader and pastor you have called me to be I would hope that someone will have the love and courage to speak to me in private and encourage me to do the right and healing thing. Folks, this way of living into conflict

resolution is called the Biblical Model. If you have an issue with me, let's say you find the colour of my lipstick offensive and distracting while I preach, you are instructed to come to me in private. You are not instructed to talk about it at coffee to see if others agree with you or to bypass the first step and go to M&P or bypass the first two steps and go to Council. This way of living in community is destructive. Triangles are strangling entities that polarize relationships and communities.

Whole relationships are not perfect because human beings are involved. Whole relationships are possible when the humans involved are persons of integrity who will not settle for anything less than authenticity, mutual accountability because of love and reciprocity. Our intention for speaking the truth in love to another must always have these qualities: we desire to speak to another person to gain understanding, connection, healing, growth and transformation. Living into this model of forgiveness and love takes courage. Why is it necessary to live into this model? It is necessary because we cannot expect God to forgive us and empower us to own, change and transform if we are not willing to love one another and do the work of encouraging others to heal. To remain silent is to choose to serve crappy pie to those who need healing.

Verses 21 – 35 give us an example what this looks like.

(Read in The Message). When someone owns their behaviour and asks for mercy we are to be like Christ to them, like God is to us, and forgive them and walk with them, teaching them and encouraging them as they do life changing work. Exposing harmful behaviour should always have healing as its intention. We should never approach someone to “put the screws” to them, how does that heal anything? Our toolkit for healing is not full of screwdrivers. Our toolkit for healing is full of the fruits of the Spirit and if we put any ulterior motive in with the fruit then all we will create is fruit flies as we complain to God and gossip with proving our lack of showing character, inner peace and joy.

Folks, we are a community of faith taking wing to new places and new beginnings. There is zero space in our toolkit for assumptions, gossip and negativity. Our flight to healing what is broken, creating new dreams and having fun living into them together requires that we check our personal toolkits. We need to unpack our personal luggage and take out anything that could bring down our plane, our community of faith, our ability to connect, grow and serve with abandonment, trust and joy. I am abandoned into my love for God, my family, friends and each and every one of you. I am for my highest and your highest learning, healing and becoming full of abundant joy and strength for our journeys. Abandon yourself with

me and let us commit to live into the biblical model. Let's talk one on one because we love. If that doesn't bring resolution let's go to step two and invite another to join us. If this doesn't bring healing, let's go to step three and if that doesn't work let's go to step four. Let's live into this loving model so we make offer pies that are full of the fruits of the spirit instead of the fruits of the potty.

I would like to end with a video of a little girl confronting her father about something that is very upsetting for her.

Video Clip

She shared her heart. He heard her. He thanked her and he changed his behaviour and strengthened his relationship with his daughter. It's as easy as taking the plug out of the drain. May we dare to love and live greatly. Amen.