

Sermon and readings 15th Sunday After Pentecost 6th September 2026

Exodus 12.1–14

¹ The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ² This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. ³ Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. ⁴ If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbour in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. ⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶ You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷ They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸ They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. ¹⁰ You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹ This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the Passover of the LORD. ¹² For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements: I am the LORD. ¹³ The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴ This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

Psalm 149

¹ O praise the Lord, and sing to the Lord a new song:
O praise him in the assembly of the faithful.
² Let Israel rejoice in him that made him:
let the children of Zion be joyful in their king.
³ Let them praise him in the dance:
let them sing his praise with timbrel and with harp.
⁴ For the Lord takes delight in his people:

he adorns the meek with his salvation.

⁵ Let his faithful ones exult in his glory:
let them sing for joy upon their beds.

⁶ Let the high praises of God be in their mouths:
and a two-edged sword in their hands,

⁷ To execute vengeance on the nations:
and chastisement upon the peoples,

⁸ To bind their kings in chains:
and their nobles with fetters of iron,

⁹ To visit upon them the judgement that is decreed:
such honour belongs to all his faithful servants. Praise the Lord.

Romans 13.1-10

¹ Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; ⁴ for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. ⁶ For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is due to them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due. ⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Matthew 18.10–20

¹⁰ 'Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. ¹² What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray,

does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴ So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost. ¹⁵ 'If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ If the member 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

Sermon

If we remember the words of Jesus, especially in times of conflict, we can change the world. Loving our neighbour fulfils God's command, for genuine love does no harm but reflects the love of Christ.

A priest and his music director were not getting along, and soon their conflict began spilling into Sunday worship. The priest preached on commitment. The musician chose, "I Shall Not Be Moved." The priest preached on giving. The musician chose, "Jesus Paid It All." The priest preached on gossip. The musician chose, "I Love to Tell the Story." Finally, the frustrated priest announced that he was considering resigning. The musician responded with, "Oh, Why Not Tonight?" When the priest eventually resigned, he told the congregation, "Jesus brought me here, and Jesus is now leading me away." The musician's final hymn? "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

Matthew 18:15–20 gives the Church practical guidance for dealing with conflict and broken relationships. Jesus begins with something simple but often difficult: go and speak directly to the person.

Reconciliation begins with listening. Too often, instead of speaking to the person involved, we speak about them to someone else. That is how gossip begins,

sides are formed, and a small disagreement can become a much larger conflict. Jesus says: take the first step. Go, listen, speak honestly, and seek reconciliation.

If that does not work, Jesus tells us to involve one or two others—not to gather supporters or choose sides, but to help bring understanding and healing. Only when these efforts fail should the matter be brought before the wider Church.

Even then, the purpose is not punishment but restoration. Jesus was a friend of tax collectors and sinners. He reached out to those on the outside and invited them back into relationship with God. The Church is called to do the same.

At the heart of this passage is reconciliation. Jesus promises, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” When Christians come together seeking forgiveness, healing and peace, Christ is present among us.

Conflict will happen—even in churches. But conflict does not have to have the final word. Pride does not have to win. Gossip does not have to win. Anger does not have to win.

Jesus shows us another way: **go to one another, listen to one another, forgive one another, and above all, love one another.**

Reconciliation is a beautiful goal, but it is not always possible. There are wounds so deep and acts so evil that forgiveness does not remove the need for justice or accountability. Jesus never asks us to ignore evil or enable abuse.

In Matthew 18:15–20, Jesus is less concerned with proving who is right than with restoring relationships wherever restoration is possible. His way is not retaliation but courageous conversation, honest listening, prayer, and accountability.

This passage is not a licence for those in authority to control or harm others. It is a call to use power with humility, to protect the vulnerable, and to seek the healing of God’s people. Christian love is more than being nice—it requires wisdom, truth, and the courage to pursue peace without abandoning justice.

Reconciliation and forgiveness are made possible through prayer. Corrie ten Boom, who suffered terribly in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, discovered this when she later met one of her former guards.

The man had become a Christian and asked Corrie to forgive him. Everything within her resisted, so she prayed simply, “Jesus, help me.” She reached out and took his hand, and in that moment she found the strength to say, “I forgive you.”

Corrie later said it was the power of the Holy Spirit that enabled her to forgive.

Sometimes forgiveness is beyond our own strength. We cannot manufacture it or pretend the hurt does not matter. Instead, we bring our pain to God and pray, **“Jesus, help me.”** Then, by God’s grace, we may find the strength to take the first step.

Jesus promises to be with us in a special way when we gather in his name. He is with us in worship, in service, and especially when we seek forgiveness and reconciliation. When a Christian community is characterised by love, justice and forgiveness, others can see Christ alive and at work among us.

There is a simple principle worth remembering: people may disappoint us—love them anyway. Doing good may cost us—do good anyway. Forgiveness may be difficult—forgive anyway. Not because these things are easy, but because Christ is with us.

When conflict comes, we have a choice between anger and love, bitterness and forgiveness, division and reconciliation.

Jesus calls us to choose love.

For when we genuinely love our neighbour, we fulfil the heart of God’s commandments. And perhaps changing the world begins right there—with two people choosing reconciliation because Christ is in their midst. Amen.