

Reading: Matthew 18:15-20

*Loving Jesus you have so much to teach me, teach me a little more today.
In your name I pray. Amen*

People respond differently in conflict.

A woman ran a red traffic light and crashed into a man's car. Both of their cars were demolished but amazingly neither of them was hurt.

After they crawled out of their cars the woman said “Wow, just look at our cars! There's nothing left, but fortunately we are unhurt. This must be a sign from God that we should meet and be friends and live together in peace for the rest of our days.”

The man replied, “I agree with you completely. This must be a sign from God!”

The woman continued, “And look at this, here's another miracle. My car is completely demolished, but my bottle of 25-year-old Scotch didn't break. Surely God meant for us to drink this vintage delicacy and celebrate our good fortune.” Then she handed the bottle to the man.

The man nodded his head in agreement, opened it, drank half the bottle, and then handed it back to the woman. The woman took the bottle, immediately put the cap back on, and handed it back to the man.

The man asks, “Aren't you having any?”

She replies, “Nah. I think I'll just wait for the police.”

Jesus wants us to have fulfilling, joy-filled lives. That is why so much of the Gospels are about forgiveness and reconciliation. When we forgive another, when we embrace them, we are set free into joy.

As we come to Father's Day, we are very aware of our relationships with our fathers. Sometimes we have wonderful relationships with our fathers, sometimes they are aloof and distant figures and some of us are like the orphan rice bubble - we have a snap and a crackle but no pop!

Most of us, especially kiwis, find conflict very difficult. Whether it's with a family member or a neighbour or someone at church. Of course, conflict isn't new. Jesus gives us an action plan, a 'Jesus' way, to help us deal with conflict.

The first thing to note is that we should expect disagreement. Often, we naively think that if we are just super nice then conflict won't happen. This is a big mistake. Disagreement and conflict are part of our human condition. The second thing to note is that avoiding it doesn't make it go away. It can even make it worse. So, what's the plan Jesus gives us today?

Firstly, he says to keep it private just between the two of you. Have a chat first. It's amazing how this can clear the air and a lot of conflict can be resolved in this way. It's also amazing the lengths people will go to avoid sitting down and talking things through. If this doesn't work, take someone else with you. The diocese has a person called a monitor. If your conflict is with another member of the church, you can ring the monitor and use him to help you.

As always with Jesus we are to treat others as we ourselves would like to be treated. We aren't to moan about others but to go to them ourselves. This takes courage. A good measure of whether we are gossiping or bad-mouthing someone is to ask ourselves "If they joined the conversation would I change what I am saying about them?" Usually, the answer is yes! This isn't showing Christian grace.

Remember that in Jesus' way of doing things everyone has the right to be listened too. They may have a new angle we hadn't thought of.

If all this fails then (and here is a very interesting twist), treat them as tax collectors Jesus says. But we need to remember that Jesus included tax collectors. Matthew the gospel writer was himself a tax collector. Always with Jesus it is grace upon grace upon grace.

Sometimes the other person is just not contrite. They just don't get it and have no intention of changing. Then we must walk away. "Spray it on and walk away." This is never the goal, but it does happen. Romans put it really well last week. **"In as much as it depends on you, be at peace with everyone."** In the Jesus way we are obliged to do our bit.

We begin life as a child of our parents, we begin dependent in every way, hopefully we grow up and our growth to maturity means we become not a child of our parents but a child of God. Our Fathers may have been wonderful or not, but it's only as we forgive them and begin to be more and more aware of the love of God that we can find wholeness. Only God's love is completely unconditional, wholly loving and only in God's love can we find our eternal home. We will not find it with our parents.

To become a child of God is to begin a journey to know what is the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of God which has no end.

It's into that love that we find grace upon grace upon grace. It's only in that love that we can have fulfilling, forgiving, reconciling human relationships, even beyond death.

On a cold winter evening a man suffered a heart attack and, after being admitted to the hospital, asked the nurse to call his daughter. He explained, "You see, I live alone, and she is the only family I have." The nurse went to phone the daughter. The daughter was quite upset and shouted, "You must not

let him die! You see, Dad and I had a terrible argument almost a year ago. I haven't seen him since. All these months I've wanted to go to him for forgiveness. The last thing I said to him was 'I hate you'" The daughter cried and then said, "I'm coming now. I'll be there in thirty minutes." The patient went into cardiac arrest. The nurse prayed, "O God, his daughter is coming. Don't let it end this way." The efforts of the medical team to revive the patient were fruitless. The nurse observed one of the doctors talking to the daughter outside the room. She could see the hurt in her face. The nurse took the daughter aside and said, "I'm sorry." The daughter responded, "I never hated him, you know. I loved him. And now I want to go see him." The nurse took her to the room and the daughter went to the bed and buried her face in the sheets as she said goodbye to her deceased father. The nurse, trying not to look at this sad goodbye, noticed a scrap of paper on the bedside table. She picked it up and read: "My dearest Janie, I forgive you. I pray you will also forgive me. I know that you love me. I love you, too. Daddy."