

*Rev. J. Allan Taylor*

Dear Friends

If I was asked to give a title to last Sunday's gospel reading from Matthew 18:15-20 it would be 'We need to talk'. Now, it perhaps seems odd that we should need this because Methodist people are pretty good at talking! In fact, as Methodists we have a reputation amongst other churches that we do too much talking! There is nothing that Methodists seem to like more than meetings. We even have meetings about meetings! Nevertheless, in the gospel passage mentioned earlier Jesus is saying...we need to talk...not to chat about the weather or the highlights of yesterday's football or the latest celebrity gossip, but about the way in which we conduct relationships within the Christian community to which we belong.

Interestingly, Jesus takes it for granted that we will disagree and hurt each other. He starts with the baseline assumption that conflict within the Christian 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. In a sense, what Jesus lays out in this Gospel are rules of engagement, and the principles of love and respect that should undergird them.

The first thing that Jesus says is this: "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault..." This principle seems so obvious, but it needs to be named because we Christians are so often appallingly bad at following it. Jesus begins by teaching us that when we experience conflict, we should go deep and name it. We should not allow a broken relationship to wither in the shallows. We should engage. We should risk honest conversation. We should strive for genuine healing — not simply the illusion of harmony. How often do we fall at this first hurdle? Because no one really enjoys conflict, we so often brush difficult issues under the carpet and hope they will go away. And ministers can be as reluctant as anyone else to risk conflict. But later, sometimes much later, the same issues make their way out from under the carpet...only now they are far more virulent and toxic than ever they were before.

Of course, the fact is that in Methodism we are always talking to each other, we are always conferring with each other...so that although the Methodist Church meets face to face at Conference for only a few days once a year, at the end of those few days the Conference is simply adjourned until it meets again the following year. The Conference never really closes, never ends. And in between Conferences the Church continues to confer, continues to talk, in District synods and circuit meetings and church councils, and sometimes in the difficult conversations Jesus was talking about.

And of course, in all our talking, where two or three are gathered in his name, Christ is there.

Blessings,

Allan

Circuit letter 13.9.23

## **Resources/Good News**

### **Hidden Treasures**

To welcome in the new Connexional Year, the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference talk about hidden treasures and what they are looking forward to during the year ahead. Click on the image below to view the video.

