

## ORDINARY SUNDAY 23 YEAR A 2008

In the name....

There was a church where the pastor and the minister of music were not getting along. As time went by, this began to spill over into the worship service.

The first week the pastor preached on commitment and how we all should dedicate ourselves to the service of God. The music director led the song, "I Shall Not Be Moved."

The second week the pastor preached on tithing and how we all should gladly give to the work of the Lord. The director led the song, "Jesus Paid it All."

The third week the pastor preached on gossiping and how we should all watch our tongues. The music director led the song, "I Love to Tell the Story."

With all this going on, the pastor became very disgusted over the situation and the following Sunday told the congregation that he was considering resigning. The musician led the song, "Oh Why Not Tonight?"

As it came to pass, the pastor did indeed resign. The next week he informed the church that it was Jesus who led him there and it was Jesus who was taking him away. The music leader led the song, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

Every community in the world has its problems, every organisation in the world has its problems and the church is no exception. Where you have people you also have differences of opinion, expectation, history etc etc.

Our gospel today is central to the functioning of a Christian community.

For me personally it is one of the most important pieces of scripture as it is about relationship, therefore it is central to our lives, both as individuals and as a community.

This passage establishes a pattern as to how disputes are to be settled within a Christian community.

If we are offended, we go and speak gently to the person concerned, and share what our problem is. If they do not listen, then we go again, with another person to help mediate the situation. If again they do not listen, go with several others and try to persuade them. If this still fails, we must treat them like a pagan or a tax collector.

But what does this mean?

Here we must look at the example of our Lord. How did he treat tax collectors and pagans.

St Matthew the writer of this very passage was himself a tax collector. We read of many stories in the bible where Jesus met pagans, those who were outside the bounds of traditional Judaism of the time of Jesus, such as the Samaritan woman by the well. How was she treated? Well both St Matthew and the woman at the well were loved, and forgiven. This must be our way as well.

Often as Christians we are called to do what the world thinks is foolish. Jesus has established a new way of love for his people, we must try to follow. Though all of us will at times fail.

We must set an example to our community, so that people will say, 'see how they love and care for one another.'

As a Church organization, we must be particularly careful as to how we treat people. 'How many people have turned away from the Church because it is too loving and forgiving? Not many.'

Many have abandoned it because they have found it unforgiving and sad to say uncaring.

All of us need the presence of Jesus in our lives to give us courage to love as we ought, which is why Jesus finishes today's passage with a reminder to pray, that when two or three are gathered in his name, He also is present.