The Rev. Suzanne M. Coles
CCR Homily
Proper 18A
September 6, 2026

+ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

Generational shifts are inevitable – both in families and institutions. In his later years, my Dad struggled with getting used to the idea of his waning influence, and learning to sit back and enjoy as he watched his daughters implement all that he had taught us over the years. It wasn't always easy, and he had to accept that we weren't always going to do things exactly as he would. But rather, we would take the concepts and skills that he had passed on, and apply them to our own time and needs. We had a major triumph a few years ago, when we laid a new kitchen floor. Dad didn't like the color we chose, but in the end he had he had to admit that we did a good job. And of course, we used his original plumb line.

The Church world is also undergoing a major generational shift right now. We are in the throes of the elder generation of leadership shifting, as something like 40% of clergy and leaders are aging out, giving way to more gender balance and diversity. The Covid pandemic forced more shift where the Church has been technologically resistant, with online meetings, worship, and giving now becoming the norm. We have had to get used to services and preaching online, with some kicking and screaming. Generational shifts come, like it or not, and the more resistant we are, the more the change can seem radical or forced.

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It is somewhat of a comfort then to see St. Matthew's affirmation of this inherent difficulty. And the reminder to take stock of our values and community norms.

Here in today's scripture passage, Jesus is speaking to his disciples and instructing them on how to organize themselves and govern the community **once he's gone.** We know that at the time of this writing, some of the audience may have been thrown out of the synagogue, no longer considered in good-standing as Jews, because of their relationship with Christianity. These expelled members were then likely rigid in their own understanding and admittance of new members to the Church.

But on the contrary, Jesus' words make it clear that the mind must always be after inviting and reaching out to those who need discreet assistance. With the idea of enfolding them, for the benefit of all. That famous line, ***"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them"*** is really about accepting the importance of our fellowship as Christians. And how we have learned that in the last few years. The buildings matter less. Rituals matter less. Agendas and quorums matter less. What matters is our unity with God and one another. Our collective health. Our ability to come together in prayer and praise wherever and whatever form.

The pandemic was also useful in that it has caused us to question our

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assumptions and traditions. What we should bind and what we should loose. We have had the blessed opportunity to examine our intentions and principles rather than blindly relying on past generations and personal preferences.

In her Revelations of Divine Love, Julian of Norwich wrote, ***"It lives on and will live on forever because God loves it. Everything owes its existence to the love of God."*** The love of God is what binds us!

As you may recall, my family and I moved here in late December so that I could begin as your Rector on Christmas! And we are just finally digging ourselves out. We are just now getting around to the unpacking of some artwork, and talking about design details. We live right here on the Church campus, in the beautiful Rectory, with our kitchen back door just a few steps away from the sacristy. This is an idyllic place. And it is a Rectory we live in – Church provided housing. A peculiarity of clergy life. We don't own our house or control it. Eventually, we will need to move out – hopefully at retirement! And so, at times we experience the vulnerability of settling into this space truly as our "home." And my husband and I have been having some great reflections about what "home" really means. It's not about ownership, or location, or décor. But rather, it's about love. Being with and sharing with those you love. "Spiritual home" is no different. It is where we experience and share in the love of God. Wherever that may be. That is Church.

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It is the **gathered community** that is the church. The Church is the people. The church is not the building, no matter how grand or established it may be. And I am so pleased that we are making efforts here to welcome the littlest generation – now with our children's corner. Take a look on your way out – the signage even reinforces today's epistle with a simple articulation of today's Epistle reading – the ten commandments in children's format.

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

Today's Gospel also reminds us, ***"whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."***

Some call these the "keys" to the kingdom of heaven, because these words were originally spoken to St. Peter, when Jesus gave him authority to build the Church. They mean that what we place value on, here on earth, will have eternal consequence. And we know that the material has no lasting value. Building God's Kingdom has nothing to do with amassing possessions or properties. But rather, in cultivating an abundance of mercy and compassion. In living with the acceptance that the material has no lasting value, and will only crumble in the end, including our looks and our bodies. In the end, our relationships with God and one another are the only thing that matter. And that **IS** Church. Our task is to cultivate the quality of relationships with one another.

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Today's scripture began by talking about how we treat one another, encouraging us to act with **mercy and respect**. By practicing forgiveness and letting go of resentment. So important to community, when we recognize the impact of individual actions on the group. This is the "home" environment we must create. ***"whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."***

The Christian life is an ongoing practice of letting go. And there is power in this letting go. Because we acknowledge that the physical, and even death, have no power over us. The only power to whom we bow is our **Lord Jesus Christ.** And the only requirement for Church is a desire for God and community. These are the things that truly matter.

As we prepare to observe Labor Day tomorrow, as the collect says, may we remember how closely our lives are linked, that our behavior impacts all our lives, and may we work for the common good rather than self alone.

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