

6 Epiphany Celtic
Christ and Grace
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Matthew 5:21-37
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Sometimes I like to imagine God as a preschool teacher, or a parent of a house full of children all under age 5 – and then I imagine that we are all God’s children. Children are all about their emotions – good ones and harmful ones, and when they are having an emotion, you know about it. The thing about children though, is that they are learning how to manage their emotions, and no matter how ugly things get (and if one child takes away another child’s favorite toy, I assure you things get ugly!), children are resilient and they resolve things with the help of kind and loving adults. With practice, they learn that they are loved and safe and that reconciliation is possible.

When is the last time you had a harmful emotion? Be honest – maybe it was even in the car on the way to church tonight! Perhaps it was earlier today with your own children – or maybe with an aging parent. Harmful emotions can start out innocently enough, can’t they? And we might think our emotions only affect us. But in truth, little emotions can become large ones and our emotions always have an effect on our relationships with others.

Jesus understood this and as he preached his Sermon on the Mount he was clear that our unhealthy emotions are indeed harmful to us and to our relationships with one another. They can all too easily move into actions that are irreversible. And so Jesus says, “If you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”

First be reconciled. Isn’t this what parents and teachers do for children; teach them about consequences and encourage them to do what is right? Because there is no moving forward as long as there is anger or envy or any of those other harmful emotions, is there?

I think we see this in our political deliberations, in road rage, and in family members cut off from one another because they cannot get past the harmful emotions. We are anxious about the corona virus or any number of things, and there is an epidemic of contempt for anyone who disagrees with us about anything. Think about where you see these emotions happening in your own life. Jesus gives us some strong examples of ways our emotions can override our better natures.

Reconciliation is hard. Life is an ongoing process of learning how to manage our emotions, so that they do not consume us and destroy our relationships with one another. So how do we manage our emotions and establish mutual respect for one another? Jesus tells us to love our neighbors, love our enemies, care for those on the margins, forgive one another, and be reconciled.

Reconciliation is hard, and only with God’s help and a lot of practice will we learn that we are loved and safe and that reconciliation is possible. We are all children of the King of Love, of the Shepherd who supplies all that we need. It is this amazing love of God that makes reconciliation a reality. Amen.