

We hear a lot about greatness these days. Are we great? Will we be great? Were we once great and are now striving for greatness again? And perhaps you will find some comfort in knowing that these kinds of conversations are nothing new, because even the disciples were concerned with greatness and who was the greatest among themselves. Our gospel reading comes in the midst of Jesus' response to this very question of greatness and among many other things Jesus has to say about true greatness, including those with the humility of a child, those who seek to confront sin in themselves, and those sheep who were once lost and now are found, Jesus tacks on reconciliation as a hallmark of true greatness.

Now the word reconciliation can bring up a lot of images and feelings these days, to the point where simply saying it can sound venomous to many ears. But Jesus insists to the disciples and to us, that reconciliation is a central part of Christian community. Because not only is reconciliation about confession and forgiveness, it's also about the restoration of relationships, the healing of what was broken. Simply put, as Christians we have a God of reconciliation who expects the people of God to be reconcilers as well.

Now lest we feel too overwhelmed at the task of reconciliation, Jesus seemingly lays out a path towards reconciliation. But before we begin taking Jesus' words as step 1, step 2, and step 3, it's important to remember that what Jesus is putting before us is not so much instructions, as it is encouragement – encouragement to continue the conversation. Jesus is telling the disciples to keep coming back to the table. And I hate to break it to you, but even as Jesus says, "Let one be to you as a Gentile or tax collector," we would do well to remember who Jesus spent much of his time with. Gentiles and tax collectors. It's not an out to quit seeking reconciliation, it's an invitation to never stop.

So Church, let's dig into this a bit. Because a lot is happening in the world right now and I think much of it is an attempt to move towards reconciliation, believe it or not. And we as people called to the ministry of reconciliation, should be attentive to these things happening in our society. It's become a common term lately to talk about "call out culture" or "cancel culture." And essentially what is

meant by these terms is the trend of calling out individuals or practices that are deemed wrong, immoral, or not in line with the standards we have set for today. It's what happens when someone's dirty laundry is made public. Cancel culture tries to remove these individuals or practices from the public eye. For myself, one of the clearest examples of this was and is the ongoing debate about the removal of a Christopher Columbus statue in Minneapolis. And this has drawn praise from some and sharp criticism from others, leading many to denounce call out or cancel culture as toxic.

But what I see happening here is a desire for reconciliation. We are grappling with a history that isn't always pretty or perfect, a history that has often strayed from what Christ identifies as greatness and we don't know how to reconcile with it. And while we must speak the truth about ourselves and our history to bring them to light, call out culture will never actually lead us to reconciliation. Because ultimately reconciliation involves confession AND forgiveness. It isn't just about calling to light the hurt; it's about moving to a place of healing in order that life and love may thrive. Jesus is showing the disciples that the church, as a communal body committed to the ministry of reconciliation is not about calling out; it's about calling in.

Because what makes the church great, what truly makes any community great, is not in its ability to determine who doesn't fit. The church Christ has built and is building is one created to be a reconciling community – a community that calls us back to a place of mercy and grace, a place where love is the rule, not because we will always love perfectly, but because we continue to believe in its transformative power. We call in, not out, because we are committed to the healing of each person, of every relationship, and indeed the whole world.

Make no mistake – this is no easy ministry. The work of reconciliation is constant and it is hard because it means speaking truthfully and listening honestly. It means confronting the powers of sin and death in the world and in ourselves, so that the healing power of love and forgiveness can do their thing. It is a cross that the church is called to bear for the sake of the world, calling in all who are seeking new life. And yet, we are not alone in this task. For wherever

two or three are gathered, with a spirit of reconciliation and with hearts for renewing relationship, Christ is there. For it is the heart of Christ, himself. Amen.