

When Two or Three Gather

Matthew 18:15–20

Rev. Cheryl Farr

September 6, 2026

Sermon Theme

Christian community requires honesty, humility, accountability, and the healing presence of Christ.

Big Idea

Jesus knows that life together will sometimes be difficult. People misunderstand one another, sin against one another, and damage relationships. In Matthew 18:15–20, Jesus gives His followers a way to face those moments with truth and grace. The goal is not to win an argument or punish another person. The goal is restoration. Through honest conversation, humble listening, wise accountability, forgiveness, and prayer, Christ meets His people in the places where relationships are strained and begins the work of healing.

Go to the Person

Jesus begins with a simple but difficult instruction: go directly to the person involved. He does not begin with public accusation, gossip, or gathering people who will agree with us.

Direct conversation requires both courage and humility.

- Speaking privately protects the other person's dignity.
- Listening may reveal something we did not know.
- We may discover that we misunderstood part of the situation.
- We may realize that we also contributed to the problem.
- Truth has a better chance to emerge when people speak to one another rather than about one another.

Christian honesty is not about proving we are right. It is about bringing what is broken into the light so that healing can begin.

“You Have Won Them Over”

Jesus describes successful reconciliation by saying that we have “won” our brother or sister.

The person is the prize.

- The goal is restoration, not victory.
- Grace tells the truth without treating anyone as disposable.
- Christian correction should seek repentance and healing.
- We should examine whether we want reconciliation or simply vindication.

When someone has hurt us, we may want them to admit that we were right. Jesus asks us to want something greater: the possibility that a broken relationship might be restored.

When Others Join the Conversation

If the first conversation does not bring resolution, Jesus says to involve one or two others. These people are not reinforcements for our side.

They are there to help everyone seek the truth.

- Wise witnesses listen to both sides.
- They may clarify misunderstandings.
- They help protect against unfair accusations.
- They may correct either person when necessary.
- Their goal should be reconciliation rather than winning.

The best people to bring into conflict are those who love everyone involved enough to tell everyone the truth.

Grace and Boundaries

Jesus allows for the possibility that someone may continue to refuse accountability. Grace reaches toward people, but grace does not force repentance.

Sometimes love requires boundaries.

- Forgiveness does not mean harmful behavior should continue.
- Trust may need time to be rebuilt.
- A person may be forgiven without immediately returning to the same responsibility.
- One person can forgive, but reconciliation requires willingness from both sides.
- Boundaries can protect people without turning into bitterness or hatred.

Jesus' reference to Gentiles and tax collectors reminds us that changed fellowship does not mean a person stops mattering. Jesus Himself continued reaching toward people others had pushed away.

“When Two or Three Gather”

Jesus' promise that He is present where two or three gather is often quoted when only a few people attend worship or Bible study. In Matthew 18, however, the setting is much harder.

The people gathered are dealing with conflict, hurt, accountability, and difficult decisions.

Christ is present there too.

Jesus is present when someone finally speaks the truth. He is present when someone admits they were wrong. He is present when forgiveness is offered and when trust must be rebuilt slowly. He is present when the Church has to make a difficult decision.

His presence does not make the conversation easy. His presence changes the way we have it.

At the Communion Table

On Communion Sunday, Jesus' promise of His presence leads us naturally to the table. We do not come because all our relationships are perfect or because we have handled every conflict well. We come because we need grace.

At the table, every one of us comes needing Christ.

- The person who has been hurt needs grace.
- The person who caused hurt needs grace.
- The one who is angry needs grace.
- The one who is ashamed needs grace.
- The one ready to forgive and the one still struggling to forgive both need grace.

Communion does not require us to pretend that every broken relationship has already been repaired. It asks us to remain open to the work of Christ. We come willing to let Him show us where we need to listen, apologize, forgive, speak honestly, or take a faithful step toward healing.

Key Truths

- Christian community requires both truth and grace.
- Jesus tells us to speak directly rather than gossip.
- The goal of correction is restoration.
- Humility requires us to listen as well as speak.
- Christian accountability should seek truth rather than build sides.
- Grace does not eliminate healthy boundaries.
- Forgiveness and restored trust are not always the same thing.
- Reconciliation requires willingness from both people.
- Christ is present in difficult conversations.
- Communion reminds us that every one of us stands in need of grace.

Questions for Reflection

Where am I tempted to talk about someone instead of talking with them?

Do I enter difficult conversations wanting restoration, or simply wanting to be proven right?

Is there something I need to hear from another person without becoming defensive?

Is there an apology I need to offer or forgiveness I need to begin?

Where might a healthy boundary be necessary without allowing bitterness to take root?

How would a difficult conversation change if I consciously remembered that Jesus is present?

What do I need to bring with me to Christ's table today and place into His grace?

Takeaway

Christian community is not strong because Christians never hurt one another. It is strong when Christ teaches us what to do when we do.

Jesus calls us to speak honestly, listen humbly, accept accountability, forgive freely, and seek restoration wherever it is possible. Sometimes healing comes quickly. Sometimes it takes time. Sometimes boundaries remain necessary. Through all of it, Christ promises to be present.

At the Communion table, we remember that none of us comes because we have gotten everything right. We come because Jesus invites us, meets us with grace, and continues forming us into people who can love one another more faithfully.

When two or three gather in His name, Christ is there. And when we gather at His table, Christ is here.

Key Verse

"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

Matthew 18:20