

## It's Your Move

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Matt 5

There is so much in this week's gospel to unpack. Because of what is going on all over the world, the part of the passage that jumps out at me are verses 23-25, the section about relationships. The concept of reconciliation is at the heart of this verse. In fact the whole passage is about relationships and how individuals and the church is expected to behave towards one another and the world and the focus is on reconciliation. By the way this is one way Jesus teaches where our righteousness can exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees which he mentions last week

Here is the Message version and once again this may help us understand what Jesus is talking about.

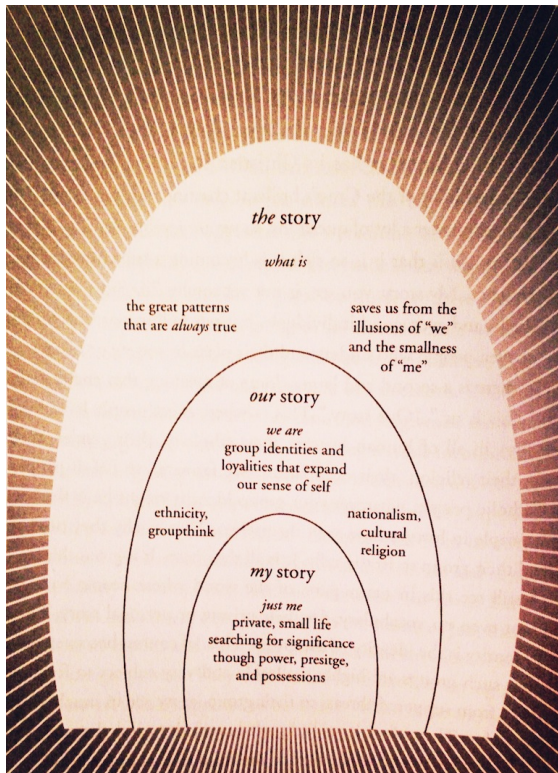
Matt. 5:23 "This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, 24 abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God. 25 "Or say you're out on the street and an old enemy accosts you. Don't lose a minute. Make the first move; make things right with him. After all, if you leave the first move to him, knowing his track record, you're likely to end up in court, maybe even jail.

The root of Jesus' concern and teaching is about broken relationships. When we are in a state of broken relationship with others, then we risk also being in a broken relationship with God and that once again is the very definition of sin. Notice in this statement where the focus of action is located. Jesus is telling us that it is our responsibility to begin the process of reconciliation. We are not allowed to sit back and wait for the other to realize they are a total fool, or uncaring or whatever we want to say about the other. Jesus is telling us to get going and start the process.

Sometimes we have to step away and be willing to say, maybe I was in the wrong, maybe I did make a mistake. It takes a lot of inner ego strength to say I'm sorry, that I am wrong. How many people do you know who even when they know in their heart they are wrong still will not admit it?

Forgiveness is also critical in all of this. This is at the heart of the instruction to make amends. We must first remember that first and foremost we are already forgiven by God. If we expect forgiveness from another we then need to be equally ready to forgive the other. Forgiveness is so important to healing and reconciling relationships. I remember the advice I was given a long time ago. Holding a grudge, being unwilling to forgive is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies. The danger is in what the damaged relationship does first to you and then to the other person. Sometimes people

are angry or upset with another and the other person does not even know it. The real issue is when the broken relationship spirals out of control and does serious damage.



The problem is nobody seems to realize we are all part of a bigger story. In *Things Hidden* by Richard Rohr, he speaks about his “cosmic egg<sup>1</sup>.”

At the center is “my” personal story and everything is me centered. The ego is very personal. internal and leads to an I am right and you are wrong type of mindset. My story is the most important.

The second is the “our” story part. This is where the group is the primary identification and it is all about us and what we believe, think or do. The group is the center of the ego and defends our “story” against all others. This is exactly what is happening in Corinth when Paul takes them to task for claiming they belong to Apollos or Paul rather than the greater whole of the church. Again this type of focus causes separation and division along with a breaking of

relationship with those outside of whatever group we are identifying with.

Finally there is the sphere of “The Story.” The story that is made up of all of our stories and is in fact the real story of the world. This is the great story, what is always true. People who think in this realm can step out of their ego-centered world and live in a healthy relationship with each other and with God no matter how they understand God or how the other understands God. This is the world of relationship that Jesus functioned in and truly represents the world of the Kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming in this passage.

Make no mistake Jesus is telling us what life in the kingdom is like. That is what his entire sermon is about and why the standards like in the divorce verse and other examples seem so impossibly high. They are above what we as humans can do until we enter into the kingdom. The good news is we can strive towards living and thinking this way.

So what can we do to bring that kingdom a little closer? The first thing to remember is that you can only control your actions and your thoughts. You cannot control another so

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<sup>1</sup> Rohr, Richard: *Things Hidden Scripture as Spirituality*. (St. Anthony Messenger Press, Cincinnati OH 2008. Pg 22

as Jesus says it is up to you to make the first step. We are fast approaching the season of Lent and there is a very special rite that can be done at any time, but is especially appropriate during Lent. Lent is time for reflection and in the early church time for repentance. As the words in the Ash Wednesday service say, a time when people who had been excluded from the church for notorious sins would seek reconciliation and return to the church.

In our prayer book is a service that is called the Rite of Reconciliation. Now it looks a great deal like a private confession and in fact it is an act of private confession, but it is also and primarily about reconciliation. There are two forms and I encourage people to use the second one because it not only asks forgiveness for what we have done but also asks us to forgive those who have hurt us. This can be a very hard thing, but I have found in my own experience and from doing this with many people that when they forgive one who has hurt them and do this consciously in the presence of God a weight, a huge unbelievable weight lifts from your shoulders. You might consider this as part of your Lenten discipline. It is a powerful and life giving rite.

There is an even simpler, but just as challenging thing you can do and that is to actually do what Jesus says. Go up to the person you are having a problem with and start the conversation! Nothing pains me more than to have someone come to me with an issue with another person and they will not make the first step. “Mark I want you to know about what so and so did. I don’t want you to do anything I just want you to know that I’m upset with and then fill in the blank.”

Our gospel and our letter to Corinth really are a first rate manual in how to make the church and the world look more like the kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount is all about how to bring the kingdom into reality if you can cut through the hyperbole and metaphor. It is really that simple, love one another, talk to one another, stay in relationship even when the other person is acting like a jerk! Acknowledge that all of us have a piece of the big story, the universal story, but none of us by ourselves knows the whole story. That’s why we need each other. That’s why we must, even though it is hard, stay in relationship with each other and with God. That’s the only way God’s kingdom will come.

Jesus is not skipping the law,  
nor reinterpreting it.  
He's getting at the heart of it:  
not a rule you can get around,  
but an invitation to love. He's drawing us deeper into it, into actually caring about the  
other person, not just making sure we're legal.  
Jesus help me. Guide me.  
When I'm embroiled or offended,  
help me love that person,  
not just contain my anger,  
but deeply respect and cherish them,  
even as I oppose them.  
When my own desires flare up,  
help me to see each person  
as a precious individual,  
not an object for either lust or scorn,  
not an object at all, but a soul,  
a pilgrim on this journey with me,  
blessed, imperfect, and worthy.  
Help me speak and act for their sake,  
for their sake, in love for them,  
as you love me.  
Jesus, take me deeper.  
(Steve Garnaas-Holmes)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://unfoldinglight.net>