

## **The web of God's love** (Matthew 18:15-20)

This is the time of year when I am in demand in my house. "Dad", the cry will go up and I will appear with a glass in one hand and a piece of card in the other. My task is to remove the spider from the room, before it causes even more anxiety and alarm.

Mind you, when the offending spider is fat and juicy, I sometimes have to take a deep breath. I love spiders outside, and the webs they weave, especially when they catch the dew or raindrops.

But, what's that got to do with the Bible passage this week? Well, read on.

When read by themselves, those verses from Matthew's Gospel read a bit like an instruction manual on how to deal with someone's sin. But in context, it is more about relationships with one another and being part of a community. If you look at the start of the chapter Jesus has placed a child in the middle of the disciples, and says that someone who has the humility of a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And then in the verses just before today's passage Jesus tells the story of the shepherd who discovers that one of his sheep is missing and goes out to hunt for them. This is all about community, about its inclusivity and Jesus' passionate concern for all.

This community isn't just a club, it is the kingdom of God (as best as we can manage it). But we are human and we will make mistakes and fall out, which I think is why Jesus addresses it at this point.

I don't want to go through what our Lord says - the guidelines seem easy to follow (even if we may find them hard to put into practice). But what is important to note is that the disagreement is dealt with by the community, in community. When the initial disagreement (or sin) can't be resolved by two people, then Jesus advises that a small group met together. And if that doesn't work, then the church community is involved. The conflict affects the whole of the community and the whole of the community responds in loving kindness.

Jesus talks about whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. These were words originally addressed to Peter (Matthew 16:19), but now they are for the whole church community. And our passage finished with these words - "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." There's community again.

For me, the church has the opportunity to be a community of care, or a network of love. It's a bit like a spider's web. The web needs to be anchored at different points if it is to exist - one place is not enough. It needs to be anchored in the lives of Jesus' followers - people like you and me. And it is from there that the web of God's love is formed. There is no hierarchy - no web-

anchor or no person is more important than another. All have a crucial part to play. And if any falter, then the web falters.

The web is there for the kingdom of God – you could even go as far as to say that it is the kingdom of God. It is a thing of beauty, and a thing of purpose. For the spider, it is there to trap food. But for the church community, it is there to hold people in God's love and God's care.

It is a framework to hold and support those with whom we disagree. It is there to support those who are struggling or having a difficult time. Through the web of prayer, we can hold each other up to God.

It is a web of prayer and it is a web of action. It is greater than a single spider's thread. With churches reopening and having to think about what we do and how we do things together, it is a reminder that we work better, we witness stronger, we are a more visible presence when we do things together.

When two or three are gathering together in Jesus' name, then Jesus is there among them. And the web of God's love proclaims the presence of the kingdom of God to all and for all.

## **Prayer for the Week**

Sometimes, O God, I wish I was on my own,  
not troubled and disturbed by those around me,  
not jostled and tussled this way and that,  
but just left to my own devices.

But I am not just me.

I am part of the community in which I live.

Give me patience with those around me,

give me love and compassion for those in need,

give me an understanding of people who are so different from me and give me,  
and above all else, a yearning to do your will.

Amen.

*(from Roots)*

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