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## Reconciliation and Presence

*'Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly, I tell you, if two or three of you on earth agree about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three of you are gathered in my name, I am there among them,'* Matthew 18:19-20.

Words for our times!

In just three short verses, Jesus gives three solemn pledges. Let's look at them in reverse order.

*'Where two or three of you are gathered in my name, I am there.'* At the logical, or liturgical level, we of course know this, for the Liturgy of the Word begins with the words *'Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father be with you,'* - words which would be pretty meaningless unless God really is in our midst. Meanwhile, the Liturgy of the Sacrament begins with the offering of God's peace (yes, this really is part of the historic liturgy not some modern add-on), followed by the affirmations that *'The Lord is here,'* and *'His Spirit is with us.'* Now I miss, terribly, a full church. I miss the choir and the altar party. I miss gospel processions and what a friend refers to as the 'lesser-spotted thurible.' I miss them all and I long for the time when they will, once more, be a normal part of our worship. But, at the same time, I am reassured by Jesus's promise that even - perhaps especially - when two or three are gathered for prayer, praise and worship, whether online or in church, *'He really is with us.'*

Let's hang on to this solemn pledge even as we wait with anticipation for the restoration of church as we once knew it (and maybe even prefer it), and let's keep praising and praying, for when we do, our petitions will be heard (the second pledge) *'by my Father in heaven.'* Prayer, as I have often said, is the place which we should be rooted in and routed from. The efficacy of our prayer isn't conditioned by our preferences but simply in showing up and conversing with God.

The final pledge, *'whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven,'* is a stark reminder of the human potential to spread discord, animosity and hatred, or alternatively justice and love. Seeking reconciliation and building bridges may well, as with worship, involve letting go of some of the ideas and opinions we hold on to a tad too tightly. As Christians, part of our vocation is to make room for others - even others we don't really understand. Winning hearts and minds for Christ will seldom be achieved through insisting on our own sense of what it means to be right or correct, for this is how the Pharisees carried on.

This week, why not study Matthew 18:19-20 for yourself, or maybe even discuss it with a friend (*'where two or three are gathered'*) and have a think about presence, the divine presence, of God with us and God for us, alongside the ministry of reconciliation. Is there anyone you would like to be reconciled with?

In Christ,

Andrew, Mark and Didier