

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Year A: 15th Sunday after Pentecost

Love is Action during Change

September 5-6, 2026

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

Matthew 18:15-20

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁵ “If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If you are listened to, you have regained that one. ¹⁶ But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If that person refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Romans 12:9-21

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰ Instead, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

My dear Aunt Bett said something which I’ve never forgotten. “Ruthi, there is nothing constant but change.” Amen?! Amen.

Our world is changing so fast these days. It seems before we can even blink, there is something new. Take AI, artificial intelligence. I asked Google to tell me when AI began to take off.ⁱ It started around 2012 when discoveries were made that computers built like the human brain could process massive amounts of information accurately. OpenAI launched ChatGPT in November 2022, bringing advanced artificial intelligence directly to the general public for free. Within months, millions of people began using AI for writing, coding, and creating images. We know that 1 in 5 young people report having a ‘relationship’ of either companionship or romance with AI. Where did I learn this? From artificial intelligence!ⁱⁱ

The world is moving so very fast! AI changes how people relate to one another and how we get information. We are talking to machines like Alexa to change the volume on our music or simply for company! Our grandparents are absolutely rolling over in their graves. Amazing!

If we think about how fast the world is changing from cars to food to institutions to education to climate to policies to wars and weapons...it can feel like the world is literally shifting under our feet. There is no safe place to stand.

No wonder people are anxious, angry and having races in their cars down I-25! Conflict is a response to feeling anxious and angry! Our brains are wired for habits, repetition and black and white, on-off. Its no wonder we might be missing the needed skills to navigate the change.

And yet...and yet, we come here to hear God's Word. A word from centuries ago that we believe, is a living and active word which still speaks to us. Furthermore, when we come here, we bring our whole selves into the space. The anxiety we hold for our children and grandchildren's futures, the anger at institutions like hospitals and medicine which seem increasingly inadequate to meet our needs...the list continues.

All of that can cause conflict in the church. We remember the arguments over whether divorced men could continue their work as pastors. We remember the arguments about whether women could be preachers. We searched scriptures and argued them back and forth. Here at King of Glory, remember our personal journey with becoming a house of worship that welcomed people regardless of their sexuality.

Jesus' words in Matthew tells us how to live together in the Church. Step by step. If one has wronged you, go to them privately. If they won't listen, take a few other trusted individuals. If that one still won't listen and repent, bring it before the whole church.

If finally, that individual who has wronged you continues to be un-repentant, well then, excommunicate them from the assembly. This instruction reflects Mosaic law in the book of Deuteronomy, in the Old Testament. Initially, they were to execute the unrepentant one. Then it gradually changed to excluding the person from the assembly; albeit only for a time in hopes they would repent and return.

Obviously, an idealized process, this helps us to know that congregations need a process by which to handle conflict. Plus, it is personal.

So I ask you, does this process of asking for forgiveness include saying, "Well, I don't need to be in relationship with Fred or Hildegard anymore." No.

Does this process involve pouting in the corner and spreading rumors about another? No.

Now to dispel the rumors right now, wink, wink, there is no big conflict going on that you are not in on. No need to ask your friend over your glazed donut, what was Pastor talking about today?!

We are the Body of Christ. Remember that scripture which says, “The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ...those members of the body we think are less honorable, we clothe with greater honor and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect. (1 Cor 12:21-23)

Which brings us to the lesson from Romans 12; a lesson in how we Christians act in public conflict. It's very counter cultural. Say this with me! Love is action! Love is an action! Love is action! Yes! Within the church and outside the church, love is an action.

Jennifer Thompson was a victim of crime and unknowingly identified the wrong perpetrator. Ronald Thompson was then wrongly convicted of the crime, but then exonerated ten years later. She says, “The minute he forgave me, I started to heal.”ⁱⁱⁱ Jennifer and Ron became friends and thus was born the beginning of Healing Justice.

Jennifer says, “I was driven to start [Healing Justice](#) based on my own experience with a failed justice process and the extensive residual harm done not only to those who are wrongfully convicted, but also to the original crime victims, both sets of families and everyone else affected. These harms have ripple effects that expand across generations and far into the community.”^{iv}

Now Jennifer offers four weekend retreats a year, bringing together victims of crimes and wrongfully convicted individuals. Together, they listen, create art, play and learn from one another. Perhaps for the first time, they reflect upon what a victim felt and what a wrongfully convicted person felt. These restorative justice retreats have been life-changing.

St Paul writes, “Let love be genuine (literally un-hypocritical), hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good.” These verses are easy to understand and practical. They say that anything that destroys or hurts God's good creation is evil. That means hurting any part of God's creation, human, animal, or creation. We don't

brush off evil like we might an obnoxious fly on our sleeve. No. As Luther would say, 'we call a thing a thing.' We name it.

But, instead of taking Revenge in conflict, we act with Love. What is Love? An action. What is love? An action. This is Biblical. As easy as these words might be to read, they are harder to wrap our wills around. Like for victims and wrongfully convicted people sitting together in a circle...it's an action.

Before I go any further, I'm well aware that what I say next might trigger some of us. I'm offering thoughts about one piece of scripture in a short sermon. This doesn't take the place of working through how you've been harmed in pastoral counseling or excellent therapy with a trusted individual. You may have been deeply harmed. Nothing condones evil actions. Personally, forgiveness can't always happen overnight. It can be a process. If I'm speaking to you, listen, but hold my words softly.

Who wants to bless our persecutors? Isn't there some small part of all of us that desire - even secretly - to 'get back' at the one who hurt us? You planted your apple tree too close to my fence, so why can't I throw all the apples on my side of the fence at your house? Right? Wouldn't that be fun? Doesn't Paul get this? Can't we simply take our scissors and cut out the words of Jesus and the Bible which are too challenging to live?

In the modern world, love is primarily a feeling. In the ancient Hebrew and Greek world, love is an action. It was the place in your spirit you decided to rise above the anger. Thus, even if we don't feel like praying for or feeding our enemies, we do it in Jesus' name with God's power. That's the difference. When we cannot forgive, when our anger is justified, when the enemy has simply done one to many things, we act because Jesus has a relationship with us. Conflict looks different with God at the center. Feeding our enemies might move them to repent. Acting like with love someone, with God's help, we might find ourselves beginning to feel a little kindness towards them.

As author Rob Bell says, "Forgiveness is about setting someone free and then realizing that person was you." When we people of Jesus' way practice the ways of Romans 12, we will practice Love in Action during these times of Great Change. Amen.

ⁱhttps://www.google.com/search?q=when+did+ai+start+to+take+off&rlz=1C1HKFL_enUS1209US1209&oq=When+did+AI+&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBwgBEAAyGAQyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQABiABDIHCAIQABiABDIHCAMQABiABDIHCAQQABiABDIHCAUQABiABDIHCAYQABiABDIHCACQABiABDIHCAgQABiABDIHCAkQABiABNIBCDYzNzlqMGo3qAIAAsAIA&sourceid=chrome&source=chrome.ob&ie=UTF-8

ⁱⁱhttps://www.google.com/search?q=are+youth+having+relationships+with+AI&rlz=1C1HKFL_enUS1209US1209&oq=are+youth+having+relationships+with+AI&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQABgWGB4yDQgCEAAyhgMYGAQYigUyCggDEAAyGAQYogQyBwgEEAAy7wUyCggFEAAyogQYiQYyCggGEAAyGAQYogQyBwgHEAAy7wXSAQg1NTgyajBqN6gCALACAA&sourceid=chrome&source=chrome.ob&ie=UTF-8

ⁱⁱⁱhttps://www.google.com/search?q=documentary+about+woman+who+runs+weekend+with+victims+and+their+offenders&rlz=1C1HKFL_enUS1209US1209&oq=documentary+about+woman+who+runs+weekend+with+victims+and+their+offenders&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBCTIxMTgwajBqN6gCALACAA&sourceid=chrome&source=chrome.ob&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:62bb2e1e-eb1d-4393-a035-4fd745ad6265_29cb0865,vid:nTqD8hOv-al,st:0

^{iv}<https://innocenceproject.org/news/healing-as-a-crime-survivor-of-a-wrongful-conviction/>