

Fifteenth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/A): "Two or More"
Matthew 18:15-20
September 5-6, 2026
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Why are you here?? There are plenty of other places you could be, plenty of others things you could be doing, especially on a holiday weekend, "the last weekend of summer," with gorgeous weather. The beach calls! The boat calls! The golf course calls! The garden or the lawn, the laundry, the basement or the attic calls. But you are here. Why?

Most of this weekend's Gospel is about discipline in the church. But I'm most interested in the last 2 verses:

"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. For where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:19-20)

That's an extraordinary promise. We claim it whenever we gather in the Lord's name – in worship, for sure, but not just when we're "in a service" but also when we serve together. Any examples come to mind?

I'm picturing:

- Social Ministry crosschecking actual presents against the Giving Tree gift log before Christmas;
- food pantry volunteers sorting the Thanksgiving food collection;
- Furniture Bank movers noodling how to get a long couch around a tight corner;
- Confirmands putting candles in holders before Christmas Eve or Easter Vigil;

- Worship & Music decorators laying greens and flowers on the dais for Prayer Around the Cross in Fellowship Hall,
- Sunday School teachers and students diving shallow or deep into a Bible story,
- Finance friends tossing ideas and moving numbers from 1 column to another to propose a balanced budget to the congregation,
- Joyful Noise or the Holy Trinity Sunday morning choir or children's choir rehearsing;
- Wraps & Raps attendees putting together water filtration kits for the Third World and for U.S. disaster sites;
- Justice & Peace members hosting a table at the Asbury Park Pride Festival;
- Property gardeners, painters, cleaners sprucing up our building and grounds on workcrew days,
- Evangelism "welcomers" sending out invitations, setting out goodies and making introductions at the Meet & Greet for incoming members, sponsors and Council;
- Youth & Family Ministry team members purchasing and grilling food, lugging tables and chairs outside, helping with outdoor worship set-up, too, before Summer Soirees.

As I mentioned last week, work becomes a form of worship, any job becomes a holy vocation, when we're loving God above else and our neighbors as ourselves. As our front lawn sign says, "Work is love made visible." (Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*)

In the past few days I've officiated at a funeral, attended a wedding, and presided at the rehearsal for another wedding. I've been struck by the contrast of emotions. In a very short time I've witnessed the depths of sorrow and the heights of joy. A constant, though, has been **the power of prayer**, the blessing of the community of faith gathered

to launch fresh new beginnings and acknowledge devastating endings, gathering around to multiply joys and divide sorrows.

“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. For where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

That same community of faith upholds us when our prayers do not seem to be answered, not in the affirmative anyway, or not at all, as far as we can tell. How do we square our Lord’s promise with the fact that we have definitely prayed, alone and with others, for things that have not happened? We can probably recall times when either we ourselves or loved ones have suffered from “shaken faith syndrome” because of what we experience as unanswered prayer. And we really **don’t** think it was a “selfish” prayer we were praying. In those times in my life I’ve found it helpful to remember that God always answers prayer, but not always according to **my** specifications. I always hope God will say, “Sure!” But sometimes God says, “Not yet....” And on occasion God explains, “I have something better in mind.” (I usually recognize that in retrospect.)

May we pray, individually **and** in community, “in the name of Jesus”: not meaning we just tack the words “in the name of Jesus” to the end of a prayer, but that we pray with the same heart as Jesus, with the same Kingdom goals as Jesus, so that we are truly praying “in the Spirit of” Jesus. In this weekend’s passage from Romans (13:10b), St. Paul teaches:

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

When we worship in love, serve in love, pray and live in love, the Lord is ever in our midst, wherever we go and whatever we do. Count on it. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham