

A response I often hear is, "No problem." If someone gives me directions and I say, thank you- I'm likely to hear, "No problem." I ask at a supermarket, where's the bread? An attendant says, 3rd aisle. I say "thanks." "No problem," says the attendant, and goes back to shelving. "You're welcome" means you are invited to come into my space. Since much of our life is giving and receiving information, and more and more of that is done computers, recorded phone messages, and digital dial ups. "No problem" is often an appropriate response. It's a step up from "whatever;" and at least we know there'sno problem.

I'm glad when I asked Meg, my wife, to marry me, she didn't say, no problem, or whatever. Life is more than exchanging information, or seeking a technical fix. The loneliness of the modern world, even when we have all the news at our fingertips, reveals that we seek more than information. I want a home; and to be at home- and in more than the walls I live in or the roof that covers me. I need to love and be loved; to know when I look out at the night sky I'm more than a speck of dust. It would actually be engaging if my wife said "I do have a problem; or, I'm upset." If I said, "When can we talk?" I hope she'd say more than, "Whenever." A better response would be, "At a time that fits." We honor one another by saying, "I don't understand; I'm at a loss," or, "I feel violated; you have overstepped your bounds." The opposite of love is not being upset or angry. The opposite of love is indifference: "whatever... whenever" The presence of love is finding a union greater than ourselves. Our Christian understanding of God is different persons- Creator, Christ, and Spirit- in common purpose.

The gospel is a practical set of considerations for a community that cares for one another: a three step procedure for reconciliation. If someone alienates or violates you, go and speak to that person in private. If you get nowhere, bring one or two others along. If that goes nowhere, bring it to the wider community. We follow the same procedures today- leading possibly as far as a civil trial. Undergirding all, we hope, is a desire for just and merciful reconciliation.

Jesus' last comment in today's gospel "Whatever you bind on earth, will be bound in heaven....and whatever you let go, will be let go in heaven," shows God cares about our everyday lives. God has an investment in how we choose our engagements. Our calendars, our attitudes, what we choose to take on or let go, will bind or loose us-one way or another. We do well to prayerfully consider

whether we're seeking reconciliation, the good of the whole. Or, do we seek revenge and personal triumph?

After my wife began recovering from breast cancer, the surgeon told us that the mammogram a year before the diagnosis clearly showed a lump. She put the X-rays up on screen. Even I could see what looked like a suspicious cluster, a nebula of tissue that the person paid well to review those X-rays a year earlier had overlooked. Earlier treatment may have prevented surgery and chemotherapy. We were advised we could consider a lawsuit, and were given the name of a very competent attorney, who carefully laid out the options. Even though we had a relatively strong case, we decided to write a registered letter to the state board, and hospital review committee, rather than sue. To go through a lawsuit would have taken two years, and bound us almost weekly to court proceedings. We were plenty angry and wanted some reconciliation. We did not want to be bound to punching and counter punching for two years. Perhaps we lost some money. We gained two years of our lives.

What if..... after 9/11, 2001, we had focused our military units only to pursue the offenders in Afghanistan, where the offenders came from, and we had resisted our response to overthrow a regime that *seemed* to threaten us, and from whose oil we could profit if more in our control? What if, still staying alert to threats, we had sought reconciliation more than revenge? Where would we be today? I don't know. It's way beyond my understanding. I hope I am voting for gov't officials who are asking and responding to these questions. I do know the temptations to revenge and superiority can lead us away from the love of God.

Whatever we bind on earth will be bound in heaven; what we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. When we have problems- are in loss, upset, or angry- let us be those who. With Christ, seek reconciliation.