

Held together

Notes on the Bible readings

- Today's passage is part of a section of Matthew's Gospel focusing on life in the church. However, 'church' as we understand it did not exist at the time Matthew was writing. So 'church' means a gathering or an assembly of Christians.
- Jesus teaches about how to handle broken relationships within the community. He presents a plan for mending these relationships. If we feel someone has wronged us, we must tell them and deal with it face to face. If need be, take one or two others we trust along with us, and if that doesn't work, we should take our differences to the whole church community to sort out. But always remember that, whatever the size of the gathering, Jesus will be present.
- How might this passage speak to the communities we find ourselves in today? What tensions and difficulties arise? And how do we deal with them in a way that builds up the community?

Make a community tree

Bind together some small branches or twigs to make a bare tree, and prepare some paper leaves.

Take as many leaves as you like, and write on each leaf one quality that helps to build a healthy community. Hang the leaves on the tree, and use it as a prompt to prayer.

Questions for reflection

- ▶ How well does this ordered pattern represent your community?
- ▶ What holds your community together?
- ▶ If your community was a hive, who are the bees? The drones? Where do you go for nectar?



A prayer of approach

O Lord our God, we sometimes tremble as we think of who we are and who you are. Bring us now, in this moment, to know you. See us as we are, and see our yearning to be more like you. May we lay aside anything that hinders our journey with you, and with our friends and neighbours. Amen.

A prayer for others

Eternal God, we pray for those who this day need our prayers: those we see around us... family and friends near and far... strangers and communities we will never meet or know, but whose peril we see on our screens... those whose life is ebbing away... those who grieve deeply for lives and loves lost... those who are forgotten, unnoticed, unloved, unmissed... Lord God, in your abundance of mercy, hear these and all our prayers. Amen.

A personal prayer

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

Live your faith

Write a letter to your MP about an issue that stirs your feelings, or join a campaigning group for such an issue (e.g. Avaaz or 38 degrees).