

**CONVERT-ABLE!** - If you have ever paid attention to commercials about automobiles, one of the visual images that is sometimes used is the scene of a driver cruising through a scenic stretch of road by the shore in a convertible --- with the top down, wind blowing through air. To see a car that is a convertible captures a sense of openness, freedom, possibilities, and exhilaration!

And so, you may be thinking, with all of this “car-talk” has the pastor turned into a car salesman? Good news – NO! But the “convertible” image did come to mind as I was looking at the Gospel readings for the next few weeks --- because these passages from Matthew’s Gospel challenge us as disciples of Jesus to honestly consider to what extent am I really “convert- able” and what does it take for real conversion to happen in my life?

Today’s passage challenges disciples to recognize that to really be “convertible” involves a PROCESS to look for the lost/bring folks back to healthy community relationship.

To what extent is the spiritual community willing to engage in a process of conversation from the “usual” way of attacking, disowning, writing-off when there is conflict/hurt and adopt an approach that strives for reconciliation and reconstruction of relationships!

The focus here is on situations where there is a serious violation against accepted community behaviors & practices – and the goal, importantly, is *not* about “proving who is right/wrong” or “getting even” with a hurt-back punishment/vengeance - but repairing, restoring a relationship at risk; and by doing so “one step at a time”. Even the last/most serious step is not intended to be a “cut off forever” penalty, but a strong message that hopefully will “get through” and wake the offender aware so as to want to be reconnected with the community.

Basically, what Jesus is saying here is: “when someone offends you, do everything in your power to help him/her”! There is a real interest in the well-being of the person-offender and his best interests – not the offense (which is never mentioned)! We do have a responsibility to help the wayward find their way back!

Reflecting on all of this reminded me of when I was a kid and, in our house, we had what was called the “punishment chair” – parents’ idea was not shame me/hurt me – but “wake me up” to realize the impact of my actions on others and on me (not want me to turn into a mean, selfish, self-centered person) and inspire me to become the better person they knew that I could be and wanted for me to be! The same is true with God and us!

For many of us, when we hear the word “conversion” one of the first things we might think of is the season of Lent! But really, “conversion” is a way of life/lifestyle for the Christian disciple --- the question is: to what extent are we “convert-able”?!

Today’s Gospel reminds us that being “convertible” involves a Process. Next week, we will hear that being ‘convertible’ also requires Patience so that we can claim the freedom that God offers and to start fresh in the power of his reconciling love – to do all that you can to be instruments of restoration and re-connection and reconciliation that help relationships grow and become stronger as God knows they can be! All that God asks is that we do our best be “convert-able”!