

Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven  
And whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven"

This seems pretty much like a spiritual blank check at first hearing.

It could sound like Christ is saying to the apostles  
"Because you're my special buds  
I'm going to give you spiritual super powers."

Many spiritual leaders have tried to cash this check through the ages –  
but not always or often with sufficient funds to back it up

Misuse of this passage has enabled  
Cardinals bishops clergy  
and eventually even kings and rulers  
to call all the shots.

No need to go into this here  
But so called spiritual powers have been used  
To Define,  
To exclude,  
To punish,  
To drain the resources,  
Of others.  
both financial and spiritual.

But this is supposed to be an empowering passage.

The you is plural-  
The powers are given to the community,  
not individual members of it.

It's clear from the rest of Matthews gospel  
that leadership in Matthews Church  
Probably the church at Antioch,  
was communal rather than hierarchical.

It was only as the church is the church  
moved out into the larger Roman Empire  
that the church started to look like the empire  
with the bishops priests and deacons,  
full-time Christians  
who functioned a lot like Roman politicians

Their primary job was as enforcers,

Gatekeepers,  
Guardians of the gospel  
not facilitators of it.

Don't get me wrong –  
I'm an Anglican –  
not a Baptist  
or a member of the Plymouth brethren  
or a Quaker.

However, such loosely knit groups do have a lot to teach us both about  
how the followers of Jesus operated just after Jesus left this earth.

More importantly,  
Insights from the early church and its loosely knit structure  
I think can provide a clue  
For how we can successfully  
Follow Jesus Way  
Of leadership in our own time.

.In fact, I think this movement in to structure and political laddering  
was an in evitable development in the church-  
it had to happen as the church grew and in a sense grew up.

Don't get me started-  
Because this was my area of PhD study at Note Dame.

Suffice it to day  
f this sermon was a bumper sticker on my car it would read  
hierarchy happens.

But now we're in a new day,  
both in the larger church and here at St. John's also.

Author Phyllis Tickle of blessed memory  
called our time the great church rummage sale,

We are in the process of cleaning out the closets  
emptying the basements  
decluttering the junk drawers –  
and in the process  
The church of today  
while painfully smaller,  
is more nimble  
more ready to act,

and really closer to the spirit of Jesus way.

So why is this form of community leadership important?

Why does Jesus give it such power?

two words –

Forgiveness and Support

The community composed of the followers of Jesus way,

according to Matthew,

is empowered to offer, indeed

invoke and evoke

forgiveness.

I see this as less about confession of sins and absolution-

Although our confession and God's forgiveness

plant the seed and set the table.

Its more about whole life healing-

Seeking wholeness

Both in our own injured lives

And elsewhere.

The gathering of followers of Jesus way

Is first a place,

An occasion,

An opportunity for

Healing forgives

To spread out from God's heart to ours.

That's job one for all of us.

However, the real pay off is out in the world,

where you and I begin to take that forgiveness

to our families into our neighbors

and to our nation

and to the world.

We are called to bind up the wounds of our hearts

And then,

Once healed

We are called by God to loose that forgiveness in the world.

Indeed, forgiveness sets the stage for a new life.

Loosing support – throughout the world

as forgiven people,

For those who have been devastated by weather  
 Politics,  
 Abuse,  
 Injustice.

We are freed to find out what our mission is in this life –  
 because we are no longer so focused  
 on making sure everyone else,  
 including God  
 is happy –  
 because we are already forgiven people.

The final end of this binding and loosing,  
 is not establish the church's power over others-

The reason the church exists at all anyway,  
 it's for the great work.

The great work out of helping ourselves,  
 each other,  
 the whole creation reach its goal–

The beauty of it is that goal is unique to each of us –

We don't offer support for that goal  
 by telling other people what they should do –  
 but by helping them become who they want to and should become.

In so doing,  
 We all become more like the God in his image we are made.

For indeed,  
 Only a God of com[passion  
 Would give such great power for good  
 Or for ill to such frail humans as we are.

He gave us each other-  
 To minister that love and forgiveness-  
 Not the priest,  
 Not the Bible,  
 Not even just Jesus  
 Believed upon in our heart-  
 But so that each of us in turn,  
 Can speak the words

I am forgiven.

You are forgiven.  
We are forgiven,  
With such power

That lives,  
Ours and others,  
Are changed forever.

SAY IT AFTER ME

I AM FORGIVEN.

YOU ARE FORGIVEN.  
WEARE FORGIVEN.

Amen.

the Rev. Phil Boelter, Obl OSB  
St John's Episcopal Church