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“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt 18:20).

What is extraordinary about today’s Gospel is that it repeats Jesus’ designation of Peter as holder of the power to bind and loose on earth as it heaven (Matt 13:16), but applies this authority to the larger community as well. While Peter is the rock on which the church is built, the church is wherever forgiveness occurs, often requiring the help of the whole community, and wherever two or three gather together in prayer.

This less hierarchical and more community-centered church mirrors the Trinity, the indwelling presence of God as community. It takes a lot of love to keep a community going, and this is precisely the point. The essence of the church is love forming an expanding circle of reconciliation and prayer.

What joy we find in exercising mercy. How many people feel bound up by past mistakes, failure and hurt inflicted and received? If they must wait for high authority to restore them or some difficult protocol to shame them and exact punishment, they despair. But Jesus gives all his followers the power to loose such bonds and set people free again.

The secret of successful prayer is to get three people to agree on anything. But when they do, when pride falls away and love forgets the fault, everyone is healed. What greater prayer do we have then to invite peace to flow freely in our families and communities? If we believe we have the power, we will have it, and all our little churches of three together could set the whole world free.

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