

Sermon delivered by
The Reverend Nicky Latham
16th Sunday after Pentecost
6th September 2026

May the Lord be in our hearts and on my lips, that I may proclaim the Gospel worthily and well, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

There are times when what we need most is simply to know that someone sees us—not to fix anything or offer an answer, but simply to notice that we are here.

Perhaps you know what it is to struggle quietly while everyone else carries on—to sit in a crowded room and still feel alone, or to wonder whether you truly belong. These experiences are deeply human, and Jesus speaks directly into them.

He begins:

“See that you do not despise any one of these little ones.”

Jesus calls his disciples to notice those who are easily overlooked: the vulnerable, the uncertain, those with little

influence or confidence, and anyone who feels they do not quite fit. At some point, that may describe each and every one of us.

We can all feel like the “little one”—uncertain, wounded, lost, or simply weary. Yet our worth does not diminish in those moments.

About two years ago, I experienced a deep sense of loneliness. I was attending my first clergy conference, sitting in a room full of people yet feeling utterly alone. I knew few of the clergy, had not yet found where I belonged, and was conscious of clear theological differences within my formation group.

I looked around as everyone chatted and wondered, “What am I doing here?” I felt small and insignificant, as though I could disappear and no one would ever notice.

Yet God’s love is not reserved for those who have everything together.

Jesus tells of a shepherd with a hundred sheep who discovers that one has wandered away. The ninety-nine remain, yet the shepherd does not say, “That is enough.” He searches for the one who is missing.

The shepherd goes looking. This is a deeply reassuring picture of God: we are not loved as a crowd or a statistic; each of our stories is known. The sheep does not first have to find its own way home. That is grace.

We often imagine faith mainly as our journey towards God, but Matthew offers another image: **God is already moving towards us.** When we are uncertain, God draws near. When we wander, God searches for us. When we are pushed to the edges, God does not forget us. If this is God's character, it must shape the Church as well.

So we might gently ask: **Who is missing—not only from the pews, but from our awareness?**

Who has grown quiet? Who is carrying grief? Who stopped coming because something happened? Who has never felt at home among us? People do not always leave because they have stopped caring about faith; sometimes they leave because they no longer feel there is a place for them.

At its best, the Church becomes a place where people do not have to hide their humanity—where someone can say, “I’m struggling,” without embarrassment; “I don’t know what I believe anymore,” and still be welcomed; or “I’ve been hurt,” and find people willing to listen before defending themselves. Such a community does not require perfection; it requires compassion.

That is what I experienced at the clergy conference. After lunch, still feeling isolated, I found a quiet nook during the break and tried to compose myself with my head in a book. Then someone said, “Hi, I don’t know you.” I looked up and saw Sue.

Sue does not remember this, but I do. In that moment, I felt seen. Her simple act of noticing me meant more than she knew. Yet even communities shaped by such care will also face conflict.

Jesus says, “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone.” He does not ask the wounded person to remain silent; he begins with honest conversation. Healthy community needs both **truth and tenderness**.

We cannot create peace by pretending harm does not matter. Restoration may require an apology, changed behaviour, accountability, or clear boundaries. Sometimes reconciliation is possible; sometimes a relationship cannot safely return to what it was. Christian forgiveness never means overlooking harm. **Grace does not erase responsibility.**

We can hold two truths together: you are more than the worst thing you have done, and what you have done still matters. This is difficult grace, but hopeful grace, because it leaves room for change.

It is in this context of relationships, conflict, and discernment that Jesus says:

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among you.”

Perhaps Jesus is showing us where God's presence is found: not only in beautiful worship or when everyone agrees, but in the vulnerable work of being human together.

We encounter the holy when we listen rather than interrupt; speak truth without cruelty; apologise; make room for another's story; protect those with less power; and welcome those made to feel like outsiders. **Christ is present in the work of love.**

Matthew 18 therefore offers more than guidance for handling conflict; it shows what Christian community can become: a place where vulnerability is not weakness, questions are not threats, disagreement does not mean rejection, forgiveness includes accountability, the wounded are heard, those who wander are sought rather than judged, and belonging is not earned by conforming to others' expectations.

Perhaps the Church's question is not simply, **"Who belongs here?"** but **"How can we become a place where people discover they already belong?"**

That question changes how we see one another. The person who seems difficult may carry a story we do not know. The person who seems distant may be protecting a wound. The person who has wandered may need companionship, not condemnation.

At different times, we may be among the ninety-nine, the one who has wandered, the one who has been hurt, or even the one who has caused harm. The good news is that **God's grace meets us in every place.**

Matthew 18 leaves us with a simple invitation: look around, listen carefully, make room, have the conversation that may bring healing, and be gentle with those whose stories you do not know.

And when you feel lost or uncertain, remember the shepherd. God does not wait for you to have everything worked out before coming to find you. You do not have to earn your way back into love; you are already held within it.

This is the quiet heart of the Gospel:

No one is forgotten.

No one is beyond grace.

No one must walk alone.

May we become a community that makes these words believable, not only by speaking them but by living them. Whenever we gather with courage, compassion, and love—even in our uncertainty and imperfection—**Christ is among us.**