

6.61

Matthew 18:20—Where Two or Three Gather

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus tells his disciples, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matt. 18:20).

The poet John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–92) was an American Quaker who took these words to mean that Jesus's followers do not need the trappings of religion (buildings, rituals, creeds, clergy) to experience their Lord as among them.

In his poem "The Meeting," he does indicate the need for community (Pentecost was not a personal experience) but emphasizes the simplicity of abiding presence promised in Matthew 18:20.

One stanza from the lengthy poem reads:

God should be most where man is least;
So, where is neither church nor priest,
And never rag of form or creed
To clothe the nakedness of need,—
Where farmer-folk in silence meet,—
I turn my bell-unsummoned feet;
I lay the critic's glass aside,
I tread upon my lettered pride,
And, lowest-seated, testify
To the oneness of humanity;
Confess the universal want,
And share whatever Heaven may grant.

He findeth not who seeks his own,
The soul is lost that's saved alone.
Not on one favored forehead fell
Of old the fire-tongued miracle,
But flamed o'er all the thronging host
The baptism of the Holy Ghost;
Heart answers heart: in one desire
The blending lines of prayer aspire;
"Where, in my name, meet two or three,"
Our Lord hath said, "I there will be!"

("The Meeting," lines 173–94)