

I. Advanced Organizer

A. Pixar's **Inside Out (2015)** - **psychology animated**

1. explored how human mind processes emotions in a young girl named Riley who moved from the midwest to the SF Bay Area
2. Each of **5 major emotions is personified in Riley's head**
3. This was perfect for my family, came out the year after we made that move from the midwest to the Bay Area
4. **Family Halloween Costume** (show pic). I was joy. Jason was fear. Elliott was anger (and to be honest, he was maybe a bit angry about having to do this at all, so it was probably fitting). Junia was disgust. Little Gwen was sadness.
5. In the film, the two lead emotions that seem to be most present for Riley are **joy and sadness**. The other three have their moments but primarily she moves between feelings of joy and real grief about the move.
6. Today I'm actually interested in a couple of other emotions, ones that play less of a role in Riley's young mind, but **perhaps more of a role in many of ours**, especially in the last year. I'm particularly interested in the emotions of **anger and disgust**.

B. Research on couples who are in conflict. Can it be predicted who will fight and make up, who will move from anger to joy, and who will fight and break up, ultimately divorcing? Could a savvy psychologist watch a couple and know how it was going to go? Research by Dr. Jonathan Gottman, one of the premier marriage researchers says yes, and it has to do with this two emotions.

1. Couples that have heated arguments but they are simply fueled by **anger do fine**. They get out their anger through the fight, and as long as they don't do it in violent ways, they are able to then move through the conflict. If anything they are healthier and more joyful for it because nothing is stewing beneath the surface. They deal with the conflict and move on. (My mentor couple is like this.)
2. **Couples that express not ultimately anger but disgust** for one another, that is another story. When disgust becomes the primary emotion - contempt - devaluing - looking down upon - there's little that can be done to save that marriage. (examples from the research)

C. Why do I bring all this up? **Because marriage isn't the only kind of relationship in which these dynamics are at play**. All of us are wired for relationship. We're wired to be with other people. We come from tribal ancestors who found safety, security, identity, and developed a plethora of amazing cultures that span the globe by associating in groups.

1. But there are **dark sides to group identity too**. Particularly the fear that comes when our **group identity seems threatened**. We often feel the need to define our group as set against other groups. And this fuels the **anger and even disgust that groups tend to oppose one another with**. Social psychologists have done research that seems to demonstrate that **people are much more willing to be hostile in a group environment to people they perceive to be in a competitive group than they ever would be in a one on one** interaction.
2. Now when this is focused in the realm of something like **sports fan-dome, the stakes may be important for some, but they generally don't like end relationships**. You might not want to talk to your (rival competitive team name) fan coworker the day after they've trounced your team, but in a few days you probably will go have a beer with them and move on.
3. **But there are some arenas of group division and conflict that hit us much deeper**. Where the stakes have become crazy-high. Where the losses feel immeasurably deep.

Where the anger is raw and comes out in lots of obscenities. And where our real pain leads not just to anger at the other, but disgust.

- D. **Jonathan Haidt is a moral psychologist.** Wrote a book a few years back that many have found particularly helpful and relevant to the political conflict we have seen in our country called “the Righteous Mind”, exploring the **different ways that folks on the left and the right of the political divide think, and trying to get out why each is so convinced that they are right and others are wrong.** In the wake of the election, he did a tedtalk conversation, in which he was reflecting on this moment we are in as a country of extreme division and polarization. The moderator of the conversation asked Haidt **what he thought was unique about this moment.** Haidt pointed out how, while there’s always been partisanship and different views in American politics, **what’s unique about this moment is the level of disgust each side seems to be tapping into.** It’s beyond sadness you lost, joy you won, anger at the other guys. We have come to a place where **disgust of those who disagree with us politically has become kinda normal.**
- E. Research suggests that **political prejudice has surpassed racial prejudice as the most prevalent prejudice in our culture.** And for the most part, we live in such homogeneous political communities, surrounding ourselves with others who think relatively like we do, or so we assume, that many of us can get away with having contempt for the other side, because we’re not in real relationships with folks who disagree with us. However, those family connections we have that transcend physical boundaries, our old buddies from college who see things differently - those relationships are in real danger.
- F. All of this anger and disgust and negative energy can leave a lot of us feeling tired from all this social angst and cynical. Are we really served by doing life in groups? **Can life together actually work?** Or are we better to just hunker down and focus on our selves, or those small collectives immediately around us.
- II. But for those of us who are trying to live **lives of Jesus-centered faith, hunkering down and taking care of our own,** not getting drawn into too many potentially sticky relationships, that **doesn’t really seem to be an option.** Jesus himself seemed really invested in not breaking people apart into little groups that fight each other, but bringing people together, often in radical, counter cultural ways that offended many people’s sensibilities that he encountered.
 - A. Jesus came from a time with group tension dynamics, too.
 - 1. Political tensions. (Jews, occupied people, Romans.) Neighbors like Samaritans. Internal tensions, various sects and religious, political alliances within their culture. Jesus navigates these dynamics by regularly challenging them. Much group on group anger and disgust and Jesus gets in the fray.
 - B. Jesus practiced radically inclusive table fellowship - a subversive move in which the table had real implications for social hierarchy.
 - 1. who you ate with reflected social status; Jesus defied those norms
 - 2. broke all the taboos
 - C. Then Jesus followers have to **look at the story of the early church:** a story of people taking risks to follow this radical call to inclusion and unity in the face of prejudice, hostility, disgust. **To become family with folks that they had been raised from birth to be suspicious of.** How all this plays out and the implications of it are something we’re gonna explore in the weeks to come, alongside other insights from psychology, and sociology, group dynamics. As we do, we’ll be trying to understand better: how might following Jesus lead us into a different way of relating to those who differ from us beyond fear, beyond anger, beyond disgust? How might we all be enriched by growing in faith in diverse communities?

- D. Today we're gonna look primarily at the story we mark with this holiday, the story that's at the heart of the Jesus Centered faith, that this unique person was killed by the forces of group anxiety and violence, and yet he rose again. This story of the resurrection won't answer all the questions I've brought up, but I think it does give us some clues for what Jesus was up to, and lays the groundwork for the project I believe was initiating on Easter morning. A project we will delve more into and consider the implications of in the weeks to come.

III. Easter Story, Matthew 28

A. After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

1. Jesus lifts up the socially disadvantaged

- a) view of women in patriarchal society
- b) their voice is **not trusted to give testimony in court**
- c) This was a culture that thought so poorly of women that religious Jewish men prayed the same three things several times a day, *"God, thank you that I am a Jew and not a Gentile. God, thank you that I am free and not a slave. God thank you that I am a man and not a woman."*
- d) **yet Jesus trusts their voice.** He personally appears to them before anyone else. And he commissions them personally to speak as witnesses on his behalf.
- e) **My story of gathering with another seminary couple from my church.** I was at one seminary, he was at another. His seminary had a reputation for being pretty conservative, certainly on issues of women in leadership, but we were in a church that promoted gender equality. After sharing our stories, connecting, having lots of points of resonance, talking about my winding journey to sensing a call to ministry, he shared his, I asked him about his experience at his conservative seminary. Was it hard to be there as someone who believed women should be free to lead in the church. That's when he made it clear.
 - (1) *"I don't actually believe women should lead."* He was trying to be polite about it. Clearly he didn't want to be the bad guy. But he was also being honest. *Hard not to feel wounded. Scared. Insecure. Was this church so safe after all?* Did my peers really have my back, or were they just quietly disapproving, but when the going got tough, they weren't behind me?
 - (2) Real questions I have to wrestle with today, as do **many other persons with far more social marginalization than I experience.** White folks new to the racial justice fight, there's a reason many of our brothers and sisters of color feel a bit wary.

- f) Yet this story is a reminder to me, in the face of my uncertainty and fear. Jesus appearing in the flesh to the women reminds me that ultimately, **I do not look to other group members to understand my identity**. I don't ultimately need the permission of the group. **I need the permission of the leader**. Jesus then and now is organizing a new kind of movement, a movement that's not about creating a new ingroup. **It's about leading me and many others forward on a journey of healing, restoration, and redemption for all**. He is the one I am following, alongside any one else who is drawn to him. There are many others I am uniting with in this endeavor, but **he is the head**, and the **way he leads is radically inclusive and oriented towards justice and equity for all**.

(1) **Christina Cleveland**, scholar, social psychologist, follower of Jesus, and a black woman often serving in predominantly white spaces. Talks about the importance of self-affirmation in the group, centering ourselves in Jesus's truth for us before subjecting ourselves to the biases of the groups we find ourselves in, even our churches.

- (a) This is helpful for me to remember. When I find myself confronted with views that I find not just incorrect, but personally harmful, how can I connect with Jesus in a way that speaks truth, and allows me to stand confident and hear the other view without simply responding in hate and disgust. I look at stories like this, **Jesus commissioning the women**, and I am confident that in the same way he encouraged those women to share their life-altering experience of him, he is encouraging and blessing me when I do the same.

B. 11 While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. 12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, 13 telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' 14 If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15 So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. (Matthew was likely written about 50 or so years after these events, so apparently this rumor was still in circulation at that point.)

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

1. The community of Jesus is in contrast to the communities of intrigue and group rivalry.

- a) we see the other groups who are participating in **pretty normal intergroup anger dynamics**. Campaigns of deception, disinformation, suppressing of truth that reflects badly on their own groups power. Multiple groups of power: the elders, the chief priests, the guards are colluding together. **Politicians and religious people, working with the militarized police to suppress the dissenters. It's a familiar scenario.**
- b) but this story of intrigue appears book-ended by a different kind of dynamic. The gatherings that we're seeing with the women and then with the others on the mountains

afterwards are not filled with political intrigue or are obsessed with disproving the dissenters.

- c) If Jesus cared about that, then he would have appeared to all those who were plotting against him. If he cared about political power, about showing the other groups whose boss and promoting his group to dominance, he wouldn't have appeared to the most marginalized, he would have done an "IN YO FACE" appearance to all the enemies who had just conspired together to scapegoat him and nail him to a cross. But he didn't do that.
- d) Instead, his appearances were to **the humble who longed for hope in the face of despair, who longed for justice in the face of oppression, who longed for belonging in the face rejection**. And to them he brought welcome, freedom from fear, and the joy of connection with a loving God who sees each of them and includes them fully. No qualifiers. It makes clear. Some worshiped, some doubted, but all were included in what was happening.

2. **Jesus commissions his followers to build a movement that reflects the global diversity of God's family.**

- a) These are the final words in Matthew's gospel - this is the note he believes the story needs to end on: a vision of expansion from this one minor ethnic group and religion, to a faith experience the would touch people across the planet, bringing them into one family.
- b) Most scholars believe **Matthew was writing for a primarily Jewish audience**. He addresses things other Gospel writers don't that are particularly relevant to those of the Jewish faith. But Matthew makes it clear that what Jesus was started, **while centered in from the beginning, and vitally connected to what God had been doing in the Jewish people for centuries, was never meant to end there**. It was always intended to move far beyond the cultural boundaries of Judaism. God wasn't doing away with culture, not inviting us into vanilla "colorblindness", **but he was creating a new movement of humanity; a new way of relating in which a diversity of cultures would work together to reflect the mosaic of humanity created by one God of all. No particular culture would have the corner or dominant view over any other**.
- c) *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"*.
 - (1) **Jesus was not saying, "go assimilate everyone into our majority culture and obliterate their own"**. This is the sin of colonialism that too often the church has fallen into. The church as a whole, and much of Western culture as well needs to repent of this, to confess and change direction.
 - (2) But **Jesus believed we could do better**. Jesus is giving his followers **all the authority he had to create a diverse, multi-national movement centered in him**. Baptism as an entry point into the community of Jesus, a symbol of new life, new birth into a new kind of community. A community that is both multicultural and united in the redemptive work of spreading connection, inclusion, and justice to the world.
 - (3) **Rene Girard was an atheist Stanford anthropologist and literary professor who became a follower of Jesus** because he saw how compellingly the Jesus story countered the universal group dynamics we've been discussing: rivalry that always erupts in violence. As Girard understood it, Jesus' death was the inevitable outcome of groups banding together to gain power and deal with their collective anxiety by targeting it on an innocent other, a process that Girard notes in every human culture

he observes: scapegoating. As Girard sees it, the rivalry of groups always leads to violence, and destruction, ultimately they bring death.

- (4) But Jesus was different than any other victim. Because he didn't stay dead. Rather, in the resurrection of Jesus, **God overturned the human verdict that death by scapegoating the other was just or necessary or valid.** Jesus returned, the ultimate innocent victim vindicated, to initiate a new way of being together, not riddled by rivalry, but centered in a common identity as the family of God: humanity welcomed by a loving creator who longs to be connected with his creation. A community not marked by rivalry, anger, disgust, but by inclusive love.

C. Jonathan Haidt was asked in that Ted Conversation I referenced earlier, **what was the antidote psychologically to disgust?** What was the way forward if folks on the right and the left had progressed to such a state that they look only at those they perceive to be in the other group to be worthy of contempt?

1. He said **he believed love was the only thing that could counter disgust. To begin to love the other.** This from a man who is not religious, considers himself an atheist, but all the work he has done to understand our minds, our emotions, and our moral consciences, has led him to believe that the only way forward is to pursue love. To get to know actual people with whom you disagree and find the pieces of them that are actually lovely and loveable, discovered the shared humanity between them, even as there are real sharp disagreements. **Only when we begin to love one another, can we disagree and advocate and argue, but in ways that move toward wholeness and hope, and joy.** Sounds awfully like someone who invited folks to share a glass of wine and a loaf of bread with folks they'd previously never consider hanging out with. Like someone who said the most important commandments were **"Love the Lord Your God" and "Love Your Neighbor, as you love yourself."**
2. On our own, I think we often get pretty drawn into the group dynamics around us: suspicion of others, rivalry, disgust. But I've experienced first hand the surprising things that Jesus can do to create family where family doesn't naturally form. And, if you're like me, you could use some of that now. You could use some safe, connected space where agreement isn't needed, just a connection to a God who cares about us and wants us to experience that together.
3. This is what we'll be exploring in the weeks to come. How does this work, looking at different area of relating. How does this alternative way of connecting that Jesus seems to call and empower his followers to **help our marriages, how does it help our parenting, how does it our connections in friendship, or work, how does it help our ability to have conflict that doesn't end in disgust and divorce, how does it help our struggle for justice?**

IV. As we end, give you a moment of reflection, that can continue as we go into responsive worship.

- A. Where is God/Jesus revealing himself to you today?
- B. What forces or group dynamics are tempting you...?
- C. What opportunities may God be inviting you into to give and receive love, particularly with those who you wouldn't normally perceive to be in your group?