

I. Advanced Organizer.

A. **What kind of stories do you like to hear?** What kind do you like to tell? Romance?

Adventure? Suspense stories? The stories we tell matter. Stories communicate how we see the world, what we value. What we look to. What our hope is. We tell our kids stories of romance give them a picture of intimacy, belonging, love. We tell them stories of adventure to lift up their curiosity for life and encourage them to take risks in pursuing purpose and meaning.

B. **When it comes to our faith, sometimes we have a hard time telling the story**, even though it's pretty relevant to our faith. In Blue Ocean, some leaders have pitched that our mission could be summed up as **"making an experience of God's goodness accessible to all."**

That sounds good, right? But when we get to the part about what that looked like through the life, and particularly the death of Jesus, we might sometimes feel challenged to tell the stories. Maybe some of us who are church goers know the basics, and we've heard it enough times that it's kinda engrained in a way that make sense, validates itself. God loved the world so much that he sent his son Jesus to live among us, and die for our sins. **But there are plenty of folks who say, you know what, I don't buy it.** Your story doesn't make sense to me. Somebody like this woman on **youtube, Lee Lemon**. She's a young woman who describes herself as an atheist and ex-pentecostal Christian. (*Video of athiest*) So how would you answer Lee?

1. She asks some pointed questions, right? *A lot of Christians would try to talk about Substitutionary Atonement - Story is this. God made a perfect world, and included the first human beings in it. But they rebelled, eating the fruit they weren't supposed to eat and brought sin into the world. Sin separated human beings from God and required a blood sacrifice to be paid. The animal thing could only get you so far. God sent his son to pay the blood sacrifice once and for all. Someone had to die. Because Jesus was sinless, he had the ability to stand in the place of mankind and make a sacrifice that was sufficient for all of human sin.* But it still brings up questions. What does it say about God that he murdered his own innocent child? Like Lee asks, if God could come up with any approach, why this one? **And if we talk about experiencing God's goodness, how does the cross show us that goodness? God sounds more bloodthirsty and abusive than good in this story.**
2. *Christus Victor - Story starts the same. God made a perfect world, and included the first human beings in it. But they rebelled, eating the fruit they weren't supposed to eat and brought sin into the world. At this point humanity was kidnapped and captive to Satan, God's enemy. He had total power over humanity and so in order to win back human beings, God sent Jesus to be a blood ransom to the captor. God used his son's blood to pay Satan.*
3. Muslim view - Jesus didn't die on the cross. A good, just God would not have done such a thing.
4. How do we explain in a way that makes sense, particularly to folks who have no investment in our story?

C. A lot to us in Blue Ocean have recently found **help here with Girard's theory of violence**

1. Remember, Girard didn't come at this as a Biblical scholar or theologian. He was a literature professor and anthropologist, who came to Jesus centered faith because of how he understood the way human violence works, and the way the Christian story deals with it.
2. Let's **review his theory of violence from the last 2 weeks.**
 - a) All human desire is mimetic (imitative).
 - b) Mimetic desire creates rivalry.
 - c) The group identifies a single victim to receive the collective violence of the group: "single-victim mechanism" or "scapegoat mechanism".

3. **Here's a quick illustration of how that works.** *Mimetic desire means that person A sees something person B has and begins to want it for themselves. Person A may want to reach and take it from B and have it for him/herself. Person B may actually be not that attached, but when B sees A desires the object, it becomes more valuable and B clutches it more tightly, imitating A's desire for it. Now A perceives B as an obstacle to A possessing said object, and B sees A as an obstacle for retaining it. Soon A and B are no longer imitating desire for the object, they may forget what they were first provoked by altogether, because now they are imitating one another's envy, distrust, and aggression. This kind of rivalry quickly escalates.*
 - a) *Girard connects the obstacle each person finds in one another to the "stumbling block" of the Bible, "**skandalon**" in Greek, or "**scandal**" in English. **These mimetic scandals have the capacity to snow ball.** Larger scandals build on smaller ones as the mimetic contagion moves beyond A and B to the families, friends, peers, etc. of A and B and all the little moments of mimesis between C, D, E, and F. Eventually the scandals swell to such a size that all the little scandals become wrapped up in the biggest, and the crowd collectively releases it's violence on one single-victim. Who that victim is is often a matter of chance based on which scandal won out as the one that eventually triggered the act of collective violence.*
 - b) *person often accused with things they're not actually guilty of; may be true of mob itself.*
 - (1) *examples of scapegoating in history:*
 - (a) **Salem, Massachusetts, 1692.** A colony in New England under stress with the loss of their charter from England, riddled with internal conflicts over theology, and violent conflicts with Native Americans. And then couple of young girls started behaving strangely and the hysteria for of witchcraft descended on the town. In the span of about a year, they tried 200 people and executed 20, hanging most of them in the city square.
 - (b) **Mrs. O'Leary's cow.** - On the evening of October 8, 1871, a fire consumed the O'Leary family barn in Chicago and due to a high wind and dry conditions it spread to burn a large percentage of the city, an event known as the Great Chicago Fire. After the Great Fire, a Chicago Tribune reporter Michael Ahern published a report that the fire had started when a cow kicked over a lantern while it was being milked. The woman was not named, but Catherine O'Leary was soon identified, as the fire had begun in her barn. Illustrations and caricatures soon appeared depicting Mrs. O'Leary with the cow. The idea took the popular imagination and is still widely circulated. But in 1893, however, Ahern admitted he had made the story up. Anti-Irish sentiment had fueled it. And as a result, O'Leary died years later still filled with sorrow and grief and regret. Had never recovered.
4. **Only works because people don't see it.** The mob must be convinced the violence is justified. That they are the good guys and the others are the real bad guys.
5. **What Girard sees in Hebrew bible is different. Bible gives voice to scapegoat**
 - a) This is a huge change from **how history is usually reported**: usually the stories come from the winners, the oppressors. They tell stories that support their oppression.
 - b) **Jews have long been persecuted people** - Of course we know the horrific history that was just honored this week of the Holocaust, but the persecution of the Jews goes back to the people's origins. Their communities have been persecuted by Egyptians, by Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, but this continued into the Middle Ages. Jews

were blamed for the Black Death that swept Europe in the 14th Century; people accused them of poisoning the wells.

- c) **Bible doesn't agree with the oppressors.** It lifts up the story of the scapegoats; follows their perspectives.
- d) Hebrew Bible includes the voices of scapegoats, follow their perspectives.
- e) We saw what happened to Joseph; it follows his story, we see how things played out for him.
- f) David. is chased down by King Saul and his men, lives in a cave for years. We get his voice. In the Psalms, his account is included. He laments about how his enemies pursue him unjustly. He calls on God for protection and vindication.
- g) Prophets like Jeremiah and others who were persecuted but their people and yet their words, their accounts remain.

II. Jesus. Classic Scapegoating setup.

A. Powder keg of rivalries.

- 1. You've got the Romans in power, ruling with an iron fist, the Jews and their half-brothers the Samaritans
- 2. Within Judaism there are a number of sects - Pharisees, Zealots, Saducees, Essenes. All vying for power and prominence.
- 3. Could blow up at any point, and did. Civil war 40 years after Jesus, Romans came in and crushed Jerusalem.
- 4. Along the way, a number of scapegoats were killed, would be Messiahs. Including a rabbi from Nazareth.
- 5. Number of reasons why Jesus made a great scapegoat.
 - a) Jew in Roman occupied Israel.
 - b) He was a country boy. (from Galilee)
 - c) He was unmarried.
 - d) He was born to an unmarried woman, questionable legitimacy.
 - e) Different in lots of ways.
 - f) so we see him become a target for the collective aggression of the community in places like John 10.

B. John 10:

22 Then came the feast of the Dedication in Jerusalem. 23 It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple area in Solomon's Portico. 24 The Jewish leaders surrounded him and asked, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus replied, "I told you and you do not believe. The deeds I do in my Father's name testify about me. 26 But you refuse to believe because you are not my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; no one will snatch them from my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them from my Father's hand. 30 The Father and I are one."

31 The Jewish leaders picked up rocks again to stone him to death. 32 Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many good deeds from the Father. For which one of them are you going to stone me?" 33 The Jewish leaders replied, "We are not going to stone you for a good deed but for blasphemy, because you, a man, are claiming to be God."

- 1. **Here's the accusation: accused him of blasphemy.** Saying he was God when he wasn't. Accept they are wrong. Projecting their own blasphemy, thinking they can judge the work of God - on him.

2. **Jesus narrowly escapes the mob, as he often does.** This isn't the only story of him having to run from a mob. Remember the time he read from the scroll in his hometown at synagogue, and they couldn't accept his announcement that he was here to get about the redeeming work of God, they tried to throw him off a cliff.
3. **It's like Jesus totally got this mimetic snowballing thing.** Perhaps that's why he was often telling people every time he healed someone, to keep it on the down-low. Because he knew how this works. It was inevitable. When people saw what he can do, it's threatening, and those who are threatened will have team together to take him down. He knew that's where it was going but he also knew it wasn't his time yet. He was trying to teach as many people along the way, heal as many people along the way, bring his followers along, maximize his time with them.
4. **So that day in Solomon's Portico, Jesus escapes the mob.** Retreats from Jerusalem, and then one of his closest friends Lazarus gets sick and dies. And against his friends recommendation, who know, "you shouldn't go back to Jerusalem, they want to kill you there", he returns four days after his death and performs his most stunning miracle so far. Lazarus walks out of the tomb.
5. Well, as predicted, word gets out. We pick up the story in John 11:

C. John 11:

45 Then many of the people, who had come with Mary and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and reported to them what Jesus had done. 47 So the chief priests and the Pharisees called the council together and said, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many miraculous signs. 48 If we allow him to go on in this way, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away our sanctuary and our nation."

49 Then one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said, "You know nothing at all! 50 You do not realize that it is more to your advantage to have one man die for the people than for the whole nation to perish." ... 53 So from that day they planned together to kill him.

There it is, plain as day: Caiaphas says it's better for one to die, then everyone. We need to turn the aggression on him. And they did.

D. **They arrested him.**

1. They whipped crowd up into a frenzy. The same folks who were welcoming him a week ago, celebrating and waving palm branches as he rode into town on a donkey were now calling for his execution. The crowd is a fickle thing.
2. Even his closest followers become complicit. One of their own betrayed him. One of them denied him three times. The others all scattered.
3. The leaders of the mob humiliated him. Dehumanized him. Flog him to a place of disfigurement. They put a crown of thorns on his head, a silly robe on his body. They mocked him, taunting the "King of the Jews".
4. Nail him to a cross and kill him, ending his life with the most shameful of deaths.
5. And the **violence, accomplished what scapegoating always does.** It unifies all the groups. Everyone killed him: Jew and Gentile alike. Herod (the Jewish leader) and Pilate (the Roman leader) were working together: ***"12 That very day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other, for prior to this they had been enemies."***
6. And here is the big point of how the story plays out: **God didn't kill Jesus. Humans did.** All of them. It wasn't just the Jews: Jew and Gentile alike. Friend and foe. All in the end were complicit, representing all of humanity. Our collective sin was laid on him. He died for

the sin of the world, meaning he died surrendered to our projected anxiety. He died because our envy, our rivalry came crashing down on the scapegoat. **God didn't kill Jesus. We all did.**

III. So it's clear: what happened with Jesus was a Textbook scapegoating, but it was unique in two ways.

A. The story makes it clear: the victim was completely innocent.

1. Wasn't mostly innocent. Wasn't simply innocent of the arbitrary thing being accused of. Jesus was completely innocent. A man without sin. His death was completely unjustified and it was clear to all.

B. The scapegoat came back. He didn't stay dead.

1. This interpretation demands a literal understanding of the Resurrection. Jesus, the scapegoat did not remain a crucified scapegoat. He came back. God raised him from the dead.
 - a) In so doing, God reversed the verdict of humankind.
 - b) We said Jesus is guilty. But God said "no". He overturned our human verdict of guilty, and by overturning the verdict he declared the whole scapegoating system to be a farce. It's foolish. And from here on out, it's void.
 - c) God has been trying to wean humanity off this propensity to kill things, to need to sacrifice stuff. I told you to use a goat, not a human, but now I say, "we're done." Stop doing this to one another. It's over. It doesn't bring true peace. It doesn't bring true community. It never will.
2. By coming back, Jesus was ratifying the thing he'd been preaching all along. There is another way to live. What is it? Jesus said, "Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Stop hurting one another and saying you did it for me. I desire mercy, not sacrifice.
 - a) Isn't that what Jesus has been preaching the whole time? Rather than lash out in envy and rivalry, Jesus points them in another direction:
 - (1) When someone strikes you, don't strike back. Turn the other cheek.
 - (2) If someone wants to sue you for your shirt, give him your coat.
 - (3) If someone makes you walk a mile, walk two.
 - (4) Forgive your neighbor not seven times, but seven times seventy.
 - (5) Wash your neighbors feet.
 - (6) The last will be first, the first will be last.
 - (7) Whoever is without sin, cast the first stone.
 - (8) I desire mercy, not sacrifice.
 - (9) And if you are the persecuted, if you are the scapegoated: I am with you. You are blessed with my presence. He says it in the beatitudes:
 - (a) ***"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.***
 - 8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.***
 - 9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.***
 - 10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.***
 - 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil things about you falsely on account of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad because your reward is great in heaven, for they persecuted the prophets before you in the same way."*** (Matthew 5:7-11)

- (b) It's like Jesus is saying, **I've come for the scapegoats**. They are no longer alone and forgotten. They are vindicated. And there is another way to live. You don't have to keep doing this to each other.

IV. How do we respond to Jesus in the wake of his scapegoating and his resurrection?

A. We confess the ways we have been complicit in the scapegoating mechanism and turn from the mob to Jesus.

1. All of us have this envious, rivalrous thing in us. And when it has its way with us, we feel innocent. But, as my friend Ken has pointed out - what can break this feeling is **having an intimate encounter with Jesus that convicts us**. We see this in Paul and Peter. This is conversion.
 1. Peter - silence. Denial three times. Gentle rebuke - prophetic word and scene on the beach
 2. Saul - was one of ringleaders. - Road to Damascus.
 3. **Experience of Jesus can break this cycle.**

B. We participate in the humanization of scapegoats.

1. **Sometimes it means listening to others who are being scapegoated, and amplifying their voices.**
 - a) We don't allow their perspectives to be de-legitimized. We don't allow them to be less human than we are. This is part of what we'll be doing with our Muslim friends in a couple of weeks, hope all of you women might join us.
 - b) We work to lovingly but forcefully help open the eyes of the mob. **The more voices say "no" to the mob that would dehumanize, the weaker the mob becomes.**
 - c) This is **what the early church was doing**. This is what made Jesus' scapegoating story so different. For the first time, **a counter movement arose** that said, "This was wrong. We were wrong. He was innocent. He was God. And we can't do this anymore. We are called to be a community that reconciles, that unifies without creating second class citizens, a community that calls all to fully bring themselves into the work of reconciliation."
2. **Sometime this means telling our own story. Finding others to tell it with you.**
 - a) Also important point: **we are called to forgiveness, but necessarily reconciliation**. For reconciliation to happen, it is incumbent on the oppressor to name the sin and ask forgiveness. The one who has done the oppressing must own what they've done for reconciliation to take place. It's not on the oppressed to make peace, it's on the oppressor.

C. We tell the story of our faith.

1. The story is not, God is so blood thirsty he killed his own kid to show us how much he loves us. In the words of my friend Emily:
2. ***"It seems true that humanity is prone to scapegoating vulnerable innocent people to achieve group peace. And in my faith we're told that God became human in the form of Jesus to come down and become one of those long line of scapegoats in order to expose this injustice for what it is. Jesus is the God of the victims, and the gospel stories tell us that God overturned our human verdict with this innocent man in order to show us that this isn't the way to manage peace and conflict. He told us we are to stop killing innocent people, and harming them, and abusing them, and treating them as second class citizens to achieve a false peace. Come and join us. Join us in standing with the victims and the vulnerable."***

D. Pray as we end.