

I. Advanced Organizer

A. Story of community -

1. I don't remember what the particular discussion was about. But **there was conflict**. I was a part of a church staff team and we were a part of tense conversations about how we wanted to move forward with something in the church. I felt at odds with the rest of the staff. I was the one advocating for a ministry that they weren't a part of. We had different concerns and I felt I had to argue and advocate for my group. After a particularly tense conversation, Adey, the senior pastor, called me up. Made clear "**we're all on the same team**". How do we get to a place where we can figure this out knowing we're all on the same team? **There are no winners or losers here. No us vs. them. We win or lose together, we're all on the same team.**
 2. I bring this up because I've long been struck by how hard living that way can be. It didn't come naturally to me. I think it's often **not what we're used to**, or even trained for. Our competitive capitalistic marketplace thrives on winners and losers. Our classrooms, our sports teams, and our politics all emphasize competition. **Rivalry is a regular part of our social framework.**
- B. For those of us who've studied **Rene Girard**, as we all have to some extent over the last five weeks, **this makes total sense**. We've talked about the theory of violence Girard lays out. How he finds that **desire is imitative. We desire things because we see others desire them, which leads to envy, rivalry, the need for violence, violence that's usually targeted at an innocent victim**. We've talked about how Jesus came to reveal this mechanism of scapegoating, taking it upon himself and making a new way.
- C. Last week, our **guest speaker Bianca Louie** spoke on some responses, particularly ways we can respond as individuals. Her teaching was especially relevant for those **individuals who have themselves been scapegoated**.
- D. Today's we end the series, I want to consider: **what are the implications for community?** How do we be communities that live implications of this framework, following Jesus's undoing of the scapegoating mechanism?

II. Communities of Conversion

- A. Some of us might have negative baggage around the word "conversion". It can draw up fire and brimstone imagery for some of aggressively trying to persuade people "to turn or burn" - can feel heavy handed, maybe even manipulative. Perhaps we feel squeamish as a reaction to that heavy handed-ness owning the term conversion as one of our aims as a community.
- B. "Conversion" an important term for Girard - conversion is ultimately about the transformation of your mimesis. Changing from negative mimesis to positive mimesis. From imitating other people in ways that produce rivalry, to imitating the Divine. Imitating Jesus and others who help us model God. Conversion of mimesis is the answer to the problem of violence and the scapegoating mechanism.
- C. Something Paul seems to understand and be focused on
1. **1 Corinthians 11:1** *"And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ."* (NLT)
 2. **Ephesians 5:1**, *"Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children."*
- D. In our church we talk about **the metaphor of Centered Set as a helpful way of thinking through the journey of faith**. We visualize ourselves as dots on the move, and we ask ourselves are we moving towards or away from some centering dot, like Jesus. Centered Set seems to complement Girard's framework well.

- E. If we're all in motion, mimetic theory would posit that we're always moving toward motives we see from others. **But we are called to reorient our mimesis arrows away from others and towards God.**
- F. **So what does Positive Mimesis look like?** Often when asked that question, Girard seems to point to **sections of John's gospel that show the non-rivalrous, positive relating that happens within God's very self.** He sees those as showing a different way of relating: the relating between the persons within God, what orthodox Christianity has come to call the Trinity.
- G. Demonstrated in a few different places throughout John. First the groundwork is laid in **John 1:**
***"In the beginning the Word already existed.
 The Word was with God,
 and the Word was God.
 2 He existed in the beginning with God.
 3 God created everything through him,
 and nothing was created except through him.
 4 The Word gave life to everything that was created,
 and his life brought light to everyone."***
1. First, why this term "the Word". **In Greek - *logos*.** Meant communication, message, revelation. Also a word for wisdom. This sense that **the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, is the revelation of God, the wisdom of the Divine communicated to humans.**
 2. "Word was with God and...was God". More precise translation - **"What the Word was, God was"**. They are of the same stuff. Later in his Gospel, John gives us a better sense of how the Father and the Son relate to one another.
- H. **John 5: "19 So Jesus explained, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished. 21 For just as the Father gives life to those he raises from the dead, so the Son gives life to anyone he wants. 22 In addition, the Father judges no one. Instead, he has given the Son absolute authority to judge, 23 so that everyone will honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son is certainly not honoring the Father who sent him....
 25 "And I assure you that the time is coming, indeed it's here now, when the dead will hear my voice—the voice of the Son of God. And those who listen will live. 26 The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son. 27 And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man.... 30 I can do nothing on my own. I judge as God tells me. Therefore, my judgment is just, because I carry out the will of the one who sent me, not my own will."**
1. **Father and Son are One**, even as they are different persons within God - **total unity of motive.**
 2. **Inspired by one another, imitating one another, but completely without rivalry.**
 - a) Son wants what the Father wants. Does what he sees him doing.
 - b) Father gives the right to judge to the Son. But the judgment the Son executes is inspired by the Father
 3. **Inspired by one another but not grasping after each other. Yielding to one another.** This is the model of non-rivalrous relationship. But that's not the whole picture.

- I. John 14 - *“15 ‘If you love me, obey my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. 17 He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. 18 No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you... ‘Jesus replied, ‘All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. 24 Anyone who doesn’t love me will not obey me. And remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me. 25 I am telling you these things now while I am still with you. 26 But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.’”*
 1. **Father will send Advocate.** The one who is the defense attorney against the accuser; the voice of negative mimesis.
 2. **Advocate will help you to imitate me.** And as you do, I am present.
- J. **Jesus is inviting us to redirect our mimetic impulses, and allow ourselves to imitate the relationship that is within God; the communion in the heart of the divine.**
 1. **Trinity can be a bit of a mind-bender, but it also makes the most sense.**
 - a) **We are wired for relationship.** The tradition of the Hebrew people through Christian thought is that human beings are made in God’s image. We reflect something about the essence of God in an important way. Makes sense that it’s in social relating. But not any social relating. The enemy, the accuser, uses our mimetic sensibility to stir up rivalrous relating. But the Trinity gives another model. Jesus and the Spirit are not after-the-fact creations. Not lesser than the Father. Also not different modes of the same God (like myself in mom mode vs. pastor mode). Three persons. Co-equal. Totally harmonious. One unitive God. This is what we are invited to convert our mimetic sensibilities too.
 2. I don’t know about you, but it’s **often the people I am closest to, that I have the hardest time loving well without rivalry.** The folks sharing life with me, my family, my closest coworkers, people I’m leading with in church contexts, that there is the most room for us to offend one another, to step on each others’s toes, to get on one another’s nerves, to experience mimetic contagion. **It’s an act of discipline to enter into that non-rivalrous, non-anxious space of lovingly yielding, sharing, relating, connecting, imitating.** But it seems to be at the heart of what God is, and how God can be experienced by us as humans. There’s a power when we’re able to lay down our defense mechanisms and recognize, “we’re all on the same team.”

III. Communities of Revelation

- A. Participate in the **unveiling of scapegoating in our time.** Stand against the mimetic contagion at work in scapegoating.
- B. Girard would say **this is what the Apocalyptic literature is about. “Apocalypse” means revealing.** He sees an important component of this era post Jesus as the revealing, the unveiling of the single-victim violence mechanism.
- C. But paradoxically, this **revelation may not always bring peace, at least not in the short run.** In Jesus’ words, **“Don’t imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword.”** What does this mean?
- D. **The act of revelation of the scapegoating mechanism means at times standing against the mob.** Resisting the mob is not peaceful act. The mob does not want to believe it’s in the wrong. If anything, **the mob is often convinced that the mob itself is being victimized.**
- E. If we are to be a community that participates in Jesus’ work in the world, it means to **participate in the thing he was about, standing with those who are victimized and**

refusing to participate in the silencing of their perspective in order to support the narrative of the oppressor.

- F. **Revelation has power. I don't think I ever understood the victimization and the suffering of Jesus** during his Passion as much as I did at a conference in Orange County three and a half years ago. I had been part of a church movement, that ultimately expelled me for taking a different view of LGBT inclusion in the church. There was a particular event where this came to a head for me. Conference with all the leaders from my denomination across the country. **Three significant moments with Jesus, moments of revelation, that moved me and changed me, and ultimately prepared me for what was coming, my rejection as a pastor and member of that community.** Three pictures or words from God that felt like Jesus piercing my soul.

1. **First on the plane as I was descending for my arrival to where this conference would be held.** Was praying and worshiping and heard a phrase ring out in the midst. "It was in my rejection that I had victory."
2. **Seeing the familiar faces (I healed your son, I ate with you...) yelling "crucify him, crucify him."**
3. **Praying in his last breaths, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing."** - They are blind to the work of the Accuser in their midst.

IV. Communities of Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

- A. Like Jesus spoke on the cross, **all of us are called to forgiveness.**
- B. Not the same as reconciliation.
- C. Reconciliation is uncomfortable. It means naming the ways we've wronged one another and taking responsibility for it. Goes hand in hand with the revelation.
- D. **One of the most dramatic conversion stories in the New Testament we have is Paul.** He has an encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. He's blinded for days as he encounters Jesus, who says to him **"Why are you persecuting me"?** After the scales fall from his eyes and he regains his sight and is filled with the Advocate, the Holy Spirit he goes to the people who he has been persecuting to join them. We don't get the ins and outs of their conversation; we just know that **they were wary, if not terrified.** I have to think some of what Paul was doing was not only telling his conversation story, but **naming how Jesus called him out as a persecutor to the people he was persecuting. Paul must have confessed his role in leading the mob against them if they were ever to trust him.**
- E. As my friend Emily Swan has pointed out - **reconciliation can only take place if oppressor can confess their sin and ask forgiveness.**
 1. **Always up to oppressors not to the oppressed to do the naming and the repenting.**
 - a) White people acknowledging ways we've benefited from white supremacy. Confessing complicity. Seeking forgiveness and change.
 2. **If victim names it and oppressor doesn't recognize, reinjures the victim.**
 3. **To not name the sin, to just make peace, serves to make scapegoating easier.** We have to be a part of the revelation and the reconciliation.
 4. **True reconciliation exposes abuses and harms but can bring real healing.**
 5. May not be healthy for victim to be reconciled to someone who abused them.
- F. Where does our capacity to give and receive forgiveness and reconciliation come from? It comes from the one we're seeking to imitate. **Jesus is the one who has forgiven us. But we need to confess our own complicity in the mob to receive reconciliation with God.** Jesus' scapegoating affected Jesus. We need to repent. He will forgive us and renew our relationship.

V. As we end, three questions to ponder with Jesus:

- A. Where and how are you inviting me to convert to imitating you?

- B. Where and how are you inviting me to participate in the revealing of scapegoating in my time?**
- C. Where and how are you inviting me into the work of forgiveness and reconciliation?**