

“A Scapegoat in Every Herd”

Isaiah 53:10-12
Mark 16:6-15

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The late rabbi and psychologist Edwin Friedman wrote that one of the effects of a chronically anxious society, family, or church is herding. The top value becomes sticking together at all costs. The herd is controlled by the most dysfunctional people in the group: the most fearful, the most angry, and the most anxious. The herd gives in to their demands for the sake of some peace and quiet. Anyone who would stand up and speak out against the dysfunction very quickly is made an outsider and is made the scapegoat of whatever problems the herd might have. A scapegoat in the ancient Hebrew community was when the people transferred all their sins to a goat or a lamb and sent it out to die to save the community. Cast all the blame on the goat and get rid of it. Problem solved. The problem is always outside, not inside. The evil is out there not in here. It's not us. It's them. Friedman calls this blame displacement. It's an utter lack of responsibility oneself.

Perhaps the most visible example of this in our society is found in our elections. When things are rough during the term of a president, governor, or really any office, the herd hardly ever re-elects the incumbent or the candidate of the same party of the incumbent. We look to the challenger to fix all the problems that the last person caused. Anything that is wrong with the country is the last guy's fault. He's the scapegoat. In the case of George Bush even his own party is making him the scapegoat. It's convenient, he's on the outside now.

And then we hail the next guy as the savior until we realize that the problems still exist or new problems arise, and then we have a new scapegoat.

The truth is as a society, nobody wants to stand up and take responsibility for any problems. We line up to take credit for anything good that happens, but when problems arise we are all, ALL pointing our fingers.

There's no doubt that the world Jesus was born into was chronically anxious. The power and authority of Rome loomed in the background everywhere. Respect had to be given. Taxes had to be paid. And “trouble makers” had to be sacrificed. Or else the mighty hand of Caesar would come crashing down. Jesus was a troublemaker. He was stirring things up. But not the right way. Barabbas at least at something right. Rome was the problem. He was part of a rebellion against Rome. They are the evil. They are what needs to be cast out. But Jesus was not interested in Rome. He was criticizing his own people. That's traitorous. He was questioning the Jewish authority. He was calling people to examine their own lives. He was saying the problem is within and not outside. And in a chronically anxious society people that do this are made scapegoats not leaders.

This kind of society produces the kind of leaders that listen and are led by the will of the herd not by their own judgment. And so Pilate fits in great. Oh, yes, Pilate seemed

like an outsider. He was Roman. He was the enemy. But when it came time to sacrifice a scapegoat, Pilate was the perfect leader. His fear of the herd was greater than his own integrity, his own since of justice. He only wished to satisfy the crowd. He wanted to just have some peace and quite.

Perhaps that was all American mayors and governors wanted in the 60's during the civil rights movement. They just wanted to keep the peace. Not rock the boat. They didn't want anyone stirring up trouble, creating discomfort for the folks that put them in office. And so a whole race of people became the scapegoat.

Another quality of a chronically anxious society is that they have a low threshold for pain. They will put up with chronic pain for years and years. They will carry it and live with it, be held back from any progress because of it. Rather than undergo the acute pain that happens temporarily with any kind of major change or reform. Like a patient in a doctor's office that does not want to receive a prick from a needle that contains the cure for what ails them.

Pilate didn't want change. The Jewish leaders didn't want change, not really. They would undergo the chronic pain of having Rome on top of them, rather than do change their own community. Because this way they have Rome to blame for their problems.

But Jesus was asking too much. He was asking people to give up wealth and to love enemies. He even called into question the family model. When his mother and brothers came out to speak to him Jesus said, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." This is just too much change. We must remove him. Crucify him! Crucify him!

And what's amazing is that nobody stands up to stop this. Pilate is in charge, with the power to stop this, but he does not. Where are Jesus' own disciples? Why weren't they in the crowd calling for their master's release? Couldn't they have gotten the crowd around Jesus? Nobody stands up for Jesus.

In a chronically anxious society, nobody stands up for what is right, because they don't want to become the next scapegoat. And so the herd rules.

Friedman suggests that the key to transforming a family, a corporation, a church, a government, starts with the right leadership. A leader that does is not led by the fear and anger of the group, but leads by integrity, that has clear vision and strong sense of right and wrong. A leader that loves the people more than fearing the people. And through that leader the whole group is changed.

The Apostle Paul tells us that Christ is the Head and the church is the body. Christ is that leader that we need. Only when we look to Christ as our leader rather than being led by the fear and anger of society will our chronic anxiety leave us. Then rather

than blaming everyone but ourselves for the problems of the world, we can look within ourselves. We can attend to our own faults. We have a word for this: repentance.

Repentance is the first step in making Jesus our leader. Without it, we will continue in our anxious ways. We will continue sacrificing the people who go against the herd. We will continue to snuff out the voice of God sent through the prophets in our society. We will never progress beyond our anxious ways and what's worse we will regress. We will drift back to a mob rule society carrying pitchforks and torches.

All that is needed is for someone to stand up for Jesus. Some of you may remember that old hymn: Stand up, Stand up for Jesus. It was written by a Presbyterian minister the decade before the Civil War who was greatly inspired by the dying words of The Reverend Dudley Atkins Tyng, Jr. Tyng spoke out strongly against slavery. He was constantly being ridiculed and attacked for his public stands. He died because of a strange accident involving a mule and the cogs of a wheel. As he was patting his mule his shirtsleeve got caught in some machinery. Before he died he wanted to deliver one last message to the slaves of the south and for whites that were too afraid to say anything, "Tell them to stand up for Jesus."

If you see someone is being treated wrongly, stand up. If you see whole groups of people in this society being maligned and misused, stand up. When the herd is running over the helpless of this world, stand up. Stand up for Jesus. Don't let fear and anger rule you. Do and say what you know in your heart is right. Look to Jesus alone as your leader. And before you start to blame someone else for anything, ask yourself this question: Where would you have been on the day that Jesus was sentenced to death? Would you be yelling crucify him? Or just as bad...would you simply have said nothing.

Here's the good news. It wasn't the power of the herd that crucified Jesus. It wasn't the power of Pilate that crucified Jesus. They had no power over Jesus. He allowed them to crucify him. He was not a victim, although he was a scapegoat. Jesus willingly became the scapegoat. He took all the sins, the very sins that killed him, and took them upon himself. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus took on the acute pain needed to free the world from the chronic sin that pulls us down.

When we repent we let go of the sin that keeps us from a loving, healthy community...one where Christ is the leader and each of us take responsibility for our own actions rather than blaming others for all our problems.

I believe with all my heart that when Jesus died on the cross he took away all the sins, all things that would be blamed when we stand before our God. He is the savior of every person that has lived or will live. But each of us has to ask ourselves: Is he my leader? Is he the Lord of my life? Is he the one that determines my words and my actions? Stand up for Jesus. Tell him you want no more scapegoats, you want him as your Lord.

