

Aug 20, 2023

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all  
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

## BLAME

*Genesis 3:8-14*

*“Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord walking in the garden, in the evening breeze. They hid themselves among the garden trees, but the Lord called to them, ‘Where are you?’ Adam answered, ‘We were hiding from you because we were afraid of our nakedness.’ The Lord said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the forbidden tree?...Adam said, ‘The women gave me the fruit to eat and I ate.’ Then the woman said, ‘The serpent tricked me into eating it and I ate.’ Then the Lord said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you among all creatures. You will crawl upon your belly all your days and there will be fear between you and woman forever.’”*

*Romans 2:1*

*“Therefore, you have no excuse, O Mortal, every one of you judges. But in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you practice the same thing.”*

*John 3:17*

*“God did not send The Son (of Man) into the world to condemn the world, but to save it (from condemnation).”*

In 2001, a landmark study found  
that the human brain responds more strongly  
to bad experiences than good ones.  
Our memory retains them longer  
and we hold on to them more deeply.  
The gravity of BAD is stronger the power of GOOD.

In some ways, discovering this made me feel better.  
It always bothered me  
why, when a dozen folks can tell me in the greeting line  
after church, **“I liked your sermon”**.  
but one person can say,  
**“That sermon was a such disappointment.”**;  
it’s the one bad comment that haunts me  
and the dozen good ones I ignore.

So the good news, **“It’s not just me.”**  
But that’s also the bad news - it’s most of us,  
if not **ALL OF US!**  
Which explains why it is so incredibly difficult  
to make society a better place,  
and why it always feels like  
**“1 step forward & 2 steps back”**.  
The bad outweighs the good.

This also explains why Christianity will forever  
have it’s work cut out for it,

and why Jesus was crucified for being  
God's exquisite example of goodness and love.

John's Gospel enshrines his earthly mission thusly:

*"God did not send The Son into the world to condemn it,  
but to save it (from condemnation)."*

Condemnation, criticism, cynicism;  
they are all part of one big experience of bad,  
called BLAME.

And oh! what a toxic culture of blame in which we live.

You can't listen to a single political speech  
without hearing a litany of blame.

It's hard to find a single news report -  
be it on FOX, CNN or another media outlet -  
without a steady stream of blame.

Hardly a single natural disaster  
or tragic accident happens  
without a flash-flood of the "blame-game"  
quickly thereafter.

And most sadly of all, one of the worst contributors  
to this toxic culture of blame is CHRISTIANITY itself!

Many denominations in America

THRIVE on condemnation and COUNT ON guilt.

How many Christians are Christians

because they fear hell more than love Jesus?

This is a key why so many young people  
are abandoning the church;  
NOT because they don't believe in God,  
but because they are sick of being condemned.

Friends, count in a single day,  
the number of lawyer commercials you hear or see  
about assigning blame to every accident.  
Their catch-line is something like this:  
**“You don't pay a thing unless we win”**

But the real winner is our culture of blame.  
because it constantly breeds more of itself.  
Worse still, it sows the seeds of liability  
the keep good people from doing good things,  
for fear of being blamed.

As the author of that 2001 study concludes:  
**“It takes 5 times as much GOOD  
to outweigh one time of BAD.”**

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Let's face it -  
We see so much wrong with the world.  
We see such frustrating grid-lock in congress.  
We see so many problems begging for good solutions  
& the dire need for people taking good responsibility.

But identifying good solutions  
and finding realistic agents of change  
is drastically different than blaming.

In fact blaming HINDERS rather than helps all that.  
But we don't realize this,  
because our toxic culture of blame is so seductive.

Are you a blamer?

Can you hear yourself saying something like,  
**“If that barista had made my coffee quicker,  
I wouldn't have been late for work.”**

Are you an avid believer and follower of blamers -  
in your politics, in your religion, in your friendships?

Well, Jesus was not at all a fan of blame.

When he unveiled his beautiful “Beatitudes”,  
he advocated a whole new spiritual attitude.

His list of “*Bless-ed art thou*”s.

was meant to progress us past that list of  
“*Thou shalt not*”s in the 10 Commandments.

And as John said,

he came, not to condemn the world, but to save it.

Jesus knew all too well the spiritual heritage  
of the infamous story of “Adam & Eve”.

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When faced with disobedience & failure  
it is deeply rooted in the human psyche TO BLAME.  
Look at the actual focus of this story.  
It's not "total depravity"  
as much of Christianity would like us to believe.

The story of Adam and Eve is about "The Blame Game".  
"Passing the buck", the failure to confess,  
and the inability to admit the truth.  
Look at God's primary reaction.  
It's the serpent who gets a scolding.  
It's the blamers who must learn the causes & affects  
of Reality.

The sin of eating forbidden fruit is all put ignored!

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Friends, there are 3 good reasons  
why God nips blame in the bud.

1<sup>st</sup>, blame often finds false causes, instead of true ones.  
There are 2 main reasons for this:  
First, we blame before we think.  
Thinking, reasoning, investigating,  
are functions that take place in the prefrontal cortex.  
And these functions take time.

Blame, on the other hand,  
comes from the part of the brain called the “amygdala”.  
The amygdala operates lightening fast.  
It’s what our primitive ancestors relied on  
for “fight or flight”.

The knee-jerk work of the amygdala  
is what Jesus preached against in The Sermon on the Mt.  
**“You have heard it was said,  
an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,  
but I say unto you, ‘Love your enemy.  
and pray for those who hate you.’”**

But there’s a 2<sup>nd</sup> reason.  
Much blame is the result of what psychology calls  
“projection”.  
A simple way to understand projection is that adage:  
**“every time you point your finger at someone else,  
there are 3 others pointing back at YOU.”**

Projection speaks to the truth  
that what we worry about in ourselves,  
we go looking for in others.  
Thus, we put on blinders as to how we, ourselves,  
are partly the cause.

I remember a father who blamed his child’s death  
on governmental economic policy,

forcing him to work such long hours & travel abroad,  
in order to maintain their lavish life-style.

Really?

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There's a 2<sup>nd</sup> reason  
why blame is such an un-Christian strategy.

It poisons community.

It is well-researched by work-place experts  
that negativity is contagious.

When work-mates constantly indulge in critical gossip,  
productivity falls, loyalty diminishes,  
distrust grows deeper

Blaming takes this a step deeper.

Blaming is weak on inward reflection  
and strong on outward audience.

For many, blaming is a kind of social currency,  
which they love cashing in.

Little do they realize how it pollutes  
the atmosphere in which they live.

It erodes the warp and weft of togetherness,  
and it encourages conspiracies.

Blamers begin to think,



**“What are they saying behind my back?”**

And, like a serpent, fear rears their ugly heads,  
and finger-pointing results.

**“I’ll turn on them before they turn on me.”**

It has always impressed me  
how, what Jesus preached & taught 2000 yrs. ago  
so clearly resounds in modern psychology.

*“Judge not lest ye be judged”*

declares the truth of co-conspirators,  
and how shaming, blaming and condemning  
poisons those 3 great spiritual gifts of Christ:  
faith, hope and love.

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Lastly, a 3<sup>rd</sup> reason for why blame is so un-Christian:

It celebrates the past instead of the future.

Blaming is fueled mostly by the past.

If you are an avid blamer,

you probably came from a household of blame.

You weren’t perfect enough.

You didn’t succeed to your parent’s expectation.

You never thought you were pretty enough,  
athletic enough, smart enough.

And this was drilled into you by blame.

Blame is when cause-&-effect becomes so personalized  
by shame, guilt or belittlement  
that it colors your world forever.

Blame isn't constructive change for the future,  
it is a kind of therapy that traps you in your past.

And that kind of spiritual energy  
is the opposite of Christ.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus  
is a resounding message of future hope and healing.

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Yesterday I officiated at an outdoor wedding.  
You remember yesterday's roller-coaster weather?  
About 15 minutes before the ceremony,  
it was raining and the wind was blowing,  
and someone came up to me and said,  
**"Come on Rev. we count on you for good weather."**

But then the rain stopped, the clouds parted,  
and blue sky began poking through.  
And I said to myself,  
**"Oh great! Once again the myth gets fortified  
that God can be controlled."**

God gets blamed for many things in life.  
Especially things which we cannot control.  
I think it's pretty human to blame God,  
but I think to myself,

**“How sad. If they blame God  
then they are believing that God is against them.  
And if GOD is against you,  
who or what could ever be FOR you.  
If GOD is against you,  
what hope do you have?”**

Blaming God should never cloud us seeing  
the real causes of our earthy problems.

Sometimes we are complicit.

Sometimes it is the polluted and greedy world  
in which we live.

And sometimes

our problems are just plain fickle and mysterious  
and beyond our capacity to comprehend,  
and instead of blaming  
we need to deal with them  
as people of faith, hope and love,  
knowing that if God is for us,  
nothing can be against us.

Amen.

for fair elections in our own land.

Gracious God, **hear our prayer.**

Help us protect the goodness of your creation, that all may enjoy the blessings of this world as a foretaste of the next. We pray for victims and helpers following the wildfire in Maui, Hawaii, and for those facing wild fires in western Canada and elsewhere in the world. May we together help to heal earth's body, as faithful stewards of her resources. Gracious God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are sick, or suffer any need, that they may know your healing strength, and find comfort through our, and others' faithful care.

We lift before you those on this church's immediate concerns list.

Holy God, steadfast and true, on you our hope is founded. Receive the prayers of your people, spoken and unspoken, for our hearts are gladdened by our trust in you. Amen.

*HYMN # 86 Great is Thy Faithfulness*

OFFERING In obedience and trust in Christ, and with love for our neighbors, let us bring our offerings to God.

\*DOXOLOGY

\*PRAYER Generous God, you pour out blessing and cover us with gifts of love. Accept these offerings that your children may proclaim your mercy and embody your grace. In Jesus name. Amen.

*HYMN # 537 My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*

Prayer of Pastoral Care Sunday, August 20, 2023

Psalm 50 reminds us, *“The mighty one, God the LORD speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. [The earth declares God’s] beauty. [God’s word] shines forth [in glory.]”* Ps 50:1-2 [ad.].

Let us pray for the world, saying,

Gracious God, **hear our prayer.**

O God of promise, creator of the cosmos, you are the first light breaking through the void, and the final light we shall eternally enjoy. Keep our hearts ever vigilant as we wait and work for your kingdom’s coming, that you may find us clothed in love, dressed for action, and eager to receive you. Gracious God, **hear our prayer.**

O God, your blessings are as plentiful as the stars and galaxies above and as numerous as the grains of sand along the seashore, we come before you with grateful hearts as we pray for the church and the world.

Gracious God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for wisdom and guidance for all people and leaders of this world, that they may foster peace and justice and serve the common good. We pray for all refugees from their homelands, and for those who work with them. We pray for Ukraine and its people as a culture and nation. Sustain them and all who face violence from without and within. We pray for the people of Afghanistan, Sudan, and Yemen, and all who are facing hunger and famine throughout our world. We pray for the safety of all who work for justice and

