



Sermon, April 22, 2018
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

“The Myth of Redemptive Violence”

Scripture:

Leviticus 16:1-10, 20-22

The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the Lord and died. ² The Lord said to Moses:

Tell your brother Aaron not to come just at any time into the sanctuary inside the curtain before the mercy seat that is upon the ark, or he will die; for I appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat. ³ Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁴ He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and shall have the linen undergarments next to his body, fasten the linen sash, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy vestments. He shall bathe his body in water, and then put them on. ⁵ He shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

⁶ Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. ⁷ He shall take the two goats and set them before the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting; ⁸ and Aaron shall cast lots on the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. ⁹ Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer it as a sin offering; ¹⁰ but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

²⁰ When he has finished atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. ²¹ Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. ²² The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness.

Hebrews 9:11-15, 24-26; 10:11-14

When Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), ¹² he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

¹⁵ For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.

²⁴ For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. ²⁵ Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; ²⁶ for then

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he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.

10¹¹ And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God,” 13 and since then has been waiting “until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.” 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

How many of you remember the show from the late 60s, “**Get Smart?**” In that show, the ever-bumbling Maxwell Smart (played by Don Adams), Agent 86 for CONTROL, battles the evil forces of KAOS with the help of his competent partner Agent 99 (played by Barbara Feldon). In one episode, the show ends with the villain being blown off a cliff to his death on the rocks below, being tricked by a loaded cigarette. Agent 99 watches in horror, then comments, “You know Max, sometimes I think we’re no better than they are, the way we murder and kill and destroy people.” Maxwell Smart then replies, “Why, 99, you know we have to murder and kill and destroy in order to preserve everything that’s good in the world.”

Review of last week: In the myth of the Enumma Elish, creation is an act of violence. Violence is in the very makeup of the world. The world constantly teeters on the verge of being overcome by the forces of chaos (represented by Tiamat) and violence is necessary to keep order. Because of our origins in violence, human beings are naturally incapable of peaceful coexistence. Order must continually be imposed upon us from on high: men over women, masters over slaves, priests over laity, aristocrats over peasants, rulers over people. Humans exist to serve as slaves of the gods and their earthly regents, who, of course, are the kings and aristocracy. The king serves as the earthly representative of Marduk, and it is his task to subdue all those enemies who threaten the tranquility that he has established on behalf of the god.

A particular myth arises out of this creation story: The Myth of Redemptive Violence. Violence is the means by which order triumphs over chaos. The gods favor those who conquer. Life is combat. In order to remain in power, you have to wield power violently, and always for a

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“good cause,” of course, which is the preservation of the power system that exists.

Examples in movies, cartoons, and TV shows: *Dirty Harry*, *X-Men*, *Superman*, *Captain America*, *Transformers*, *James Bond*, *Popeye*, etc. What examples can you name?

Internalization of violence – so prevalent and commonplace that we do not even notice it or even question it. Externalization (includes projecting). Scapegoating as externalizing social violence upon individuals or powerless groups.

René Girard and scapegoating and religious violence: Human desire is essentially imitative. It copies the other in his desire; objects become desirable because somebody else *desires* them (not because somebody else possesses them (it’s not the same as coveting)). Eventually desire becomes competitive and loses sight of the object because of concentration on the rival. The rivalry becomes violent, one tries to kill the other, and such violence makes community impossible, until the group spontaneously discovers the scape-goat mechanism, which transforms random violence into unanimous violence by directing it against one victim. Violence then unites rather than divides the group, making community and culture possible.

“Scapegoat” takes its name from Biblical practice: (Summary of Leviticus 16.) Biblical story presents a critique of scapegoating (even though the term itself is derived from a sacrificial practice found in Leviticus):

During their captivity in Babylon, the Jewish people encountered this creation story, and they experienced its implications in the power and domination of the Babylonian empire. But they had a different story, a different understanding of what it meant to be human, and a different understanding of who God was.

(Girard) story of the scapegoat is retold in a way that decisively unmask and undermines the religious basis for persecution and scapegoating. The Bible tells the story of violence against the scapegoated victim for the first time *from the standpoint of the victim*.

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Letter to the Hebrews:

Christ acted as high priest but also as sacrificial victim, based on Day of Atonement, (even though occurred during Passover). Both sacrificial victims: the slaughtered animal and the scapegoat: “suffered outside the gate.” (Heb. 13:12)

Judgment upon sacrificial system and redemptive violence and scapegoating:

“Sacrifice and offerings..., burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire...”

“Once for all” (9:26)

Sacrifice to end all sacrifices – the final sacrifice that revealed sacrificing as a perversion of God’s will. As members of Christ’s body in the world, believers are to present themselves as living sacrifices (not to be slaughtered but to live lives based upon God’s will for a domination-free order of the world). It was, in essence, the Death of Death, the end to this myth of redemptive violence.

“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15:26)

“When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:54,55)

Myth of Redemptive Violence is bankrupt. It cannot save us. It cannot restore order. It cannot end violence. But Jesus came to show us a better way. He came to show us God’s way, a way that is based upon love. It is this love, this true redemption from fear, from terror, from hatred, from violence, from suffering that the world longs for. Now is the time for we who are the body of Christ to embody his true life and his true redemption. It is time for us to offer ourselves as gifts of love and life, and to stop the violence.