

**TOØ MESSY / “A Messy Christmas”**  
**Sermon 1: “Even they rejected him”**  
**November 29, 2015**

Our theme this Fall has been “TOØ MESSY.” Are we willing to lean in to the messy, or do we tend to lean away, because we consider some people too messy. Well, we want to lean in, like Jesus.

But it can be really hard. Sometimes we don’t know how to lean in, and we don’t do it well. Sometimes when we try we get hurt. Sometimes messy people don’t want our help, or they want the kind of help we can’t give. Bottom line, we are all a mess, and when messy people lean in to messy people sometimes the messes get bigger. But we can’t quit trying. We are people of God; we are Jesus followers. And we are determined to try to do life his way.

So we’re starting a new series this morning. We’re going to call it “Messy Christmas.” Sound like fun? So, if I start talking about a messy Christmas, what comes to your mind?

- How many of you guys are still recovering from Black Friday? Biggest shopping day of the year. Rudest shopping day of the year. Traffic jams, rude people, long lines, empty checkbooks. Seems an appropriate kickoff to a messy Christmas.
- Now, for some of you, this is what a messy Christmas looks like. The gifts have been unwrapped, the family has scattered, the house has been trashed, and there’s not any bacon left. Any of you guys looking forward to that?
- For some folks a messy Christmas is all about the PC wars, you know, like the red cups at Starbucks. I found some cards for the Christmas challenged in your life.
- For others, a messy Christmas stirs these anxieties about the time you are about spend with family. That can be stressful. Whose houses do we have to go to, and how long do we have to stay. We did Christmas with your family last year, and it was awful... It’s amazing, isn’t it, how often this peace on earth and good will to men stuff just doesn’t work with family?

But our Messy Christmas here at Capital City isn't going to focus on those messes. We're going to talk about how the very first Christmas was all about God leaning into our mess. That's really what Christmas is all about. It's powerful stuff. We have an amazing God! So are you ready?

Now, I kind of skimmed through the Gospel of Matthew last week, looking for messy stuff in Jesus' life. These are just from the Gospel of Matthew. I could find more if I dug into the other Gospels. But this is a pretty good list. I'm going to kind of walk through it, and I'd like you to see how many of these you identify with. How many of these would describe you? Here goes.

Jesus was considered an illegitimate child in a day when that was a real scandal. You see, there just weren't enough months between their marriage and his birth. And no one was going to buy that virgin birth stuff, yet. So they figured, either Joseph and Mary had jumped the gun, or Mary had cheated on him ... one of the two. In any case, Jesus would go through life branded "illegitimate," "born out-of-wedlock," Mary and Joseph's "mistake." And in that day, that would stick with a man. Some of you can identify with that one, can't you? You've either been one, or you've had one.

And then Jesus grew up in a "blended family," when you stop to think about it. He had brothers and sisters, but not from the same dad. So Joseph was kind of Jesus' step-dad. How many of you guys can identify with that? You either grew up in a blended family, or you've got one now?

Here's one that's kind of in the news right now. For a while Jesus and his parents were political refugees. Herod the king wanted to kill him; Joseph and Mary wanted to protect him. So the family fled south to Egypt and lived there as political refugees until Herod died. They would have learned how important hospitality was – welcoming a stranger. And they probably would have learned how hard it can be when folks lean away from strangers. Anybody here been a refugee? There are a lot of them around right now. In fact, one of our life groups wants to figure out some way to sponsor a refugee family right here, in Frankfort.

And then at some point – it looks like Joseph (Jesus' step-dad) died. We don't know when, we don't know how. He just kind of disappears from the

story, and Jesus comes to be called ‘the son of Mary.’ Not ‘the son of Joseph,’ or ‘the son of Joseph and Mary,’ just ‘the son of Mary – which was kind of weird back then. So he grew up, at least for a while, with just a mom, no dad around ... which can be hard, can’t it? Quite a few of you guys have been there.

Here’s another one. After Jesus left home to start his “ministry,” he was kind of “homeless.” To our knowledge Jesus never owned a home of his own, he never had an apartment. One time this guy comes up to Jesus and he says, “I’ll follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said, “Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man (that’s what he called himself; the Son of Man) has no place even to lay his head.” (Matthew 8.20) That’s what you call, ‘homeless.’ Have you ever been there, felt that? That can be scary!

And to go with homeless, Jesus knew what it felt like to have no money. He was flat-out poor. He got by, it seems, because some people who respected him supported him when he needed it. One time, it says, they wanted Jesus to pay this ‘temple tax.’ (Matthew 17.24) It was probably equivalent to around \$50, we’re not sure. He didn’t have the money. So he sent Peter fishing. Peter caught a fish, it says, and there was a coin in the fish’s mouth they used to pay the tax. Ever been so poor you were tempted to give something like that a try?

And then as time went by, Jesus started hanging out with the wrong kind of people (they thought). And he let the wrong kind of people get way too close to him. He invited a tax collector to be one of his disciples. He let a woman with a reputation fondle his feet, in a way most people thought was completely inappropriate. He was willing to go to parties at the house of tax collectors and sinners. So Jesus became the butt of a whole lot of gossip. He saw a lot of heads wag, a lot of eyes roll. He heard the whispers, and the barbs of the “righteous people.” They called him “a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and other sinners!” (Matthew 11,19) Have you ever been the target of gossip? Have you ever been featured on Topix, or some hateful Facebook thread?

Here’s another one. They kept charging Jesus with breaking the law – not the civil law, but religious laws ... which were really big back then. Especially Sabbath laws. Their law codes had boatloads of rules about how to keep the Sabbath: How far you could walk, how many letters you

could write, how much weight you could lift on Sabbath, what kind of cooking you could do. They had rules for practically anything you might think of doing on the Sabbath. And Jesus just kind of blew off the rules. Have you ever faced the contempt of some religious people because you blew off their rules?

This one is kind of weird: (*Matthew 12.24*) Some people thought Jesus was demon-possessed. He had all this amazing power, but they figured it couldn't be from God. So if not God, then maybe Satan. Anybody ever think you were possessed by a demon? I have had my suspicions about a few of you.

I don't think his mom and his brothers went that far, but they thought he had flipped. When they heard that people were calling him possessed, they tried to go bring him home. They wanted to protect him from himself, I think. Has your family ever thought you were crazy? That you needed their protection, from yourself?

And his friends and his neighbors thought he was crazy too. It says, "Jesus returned to Nazareth, his hometown... And the people he grew up with scoffed, 'He's just a carpenter's son, and we know his mom, and his brothers and sisters. Where did come up with all this stuff?' When did he get so full of himself?" And (it says) they were deeply offended (by Jesus) and they refused to believe in him." (*Matthew 13.54-56*) Have you ever been rejected by your neighbors?

And when it gets to the end of his life here on earth, there was all kinds of messy. Have you ever experienced any of these?

- Jesus was betrayed by one friend, denied by a second friend, and abandoned by nearly all his friends. Betrayed, denied, abandoned. Ever been there, felt that? Have you ever found yourself in a spot and it feels like none of your friends had the courage to stand by your side?
- How about this one: Have you ever felt betrayed or abandoned by God? Now I'm not sure how far to go down this path, but there are two pieces to Jesus' story that make you wonder. He's in the garden, and he knows what's coming: a trial, a beating, a cross. And he begs his Father to find some other way. And then on the cross he

says those haunting words: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Ever been there, felt that? Like God doesn’t hear your prayers? Or like he doesn’t care?

- And the way he was treated by men... they were absolutely pitiless, absolutely ruthless. Jesus was slandered, so they could find an excuse to execute him. Ever been slandered?
- He was convicted by corrupt men with power, and sentenced to death. Have you ever been wrongly convicted?
- Then they beat him so mercilessly that if they had not crucified him, he likely would have died anyway. Have you ever been badly beaten, without cause?
- Then they murdered him using the most painful and the most humiliating form of execution they had at their disposal. That’s one none of us have experienced ... yet.

Now, that’s a rather impressive list, wouldn’t you say? How many of you guys have experienced at least some of these? ... Yeah, I suspect all of us could raise our hands. How many of you guys have experienced half of them, or more? ... I suspect a lot of you could keep your hands up. In fact, you might have some on your list that aren’t on Jesus’ list; and there are some on his that you haven’t experienced. But this isn’t about comparing lists. The point is not that his list is bigger than yours. The point is that he’s been here, and he’s felt that. When Jesus came into our world, when God came into our world, this is how far he was willing to go! This is how far into our mess he was willing to go. Let that sink in for a moment...

Now let’s step back and look at John’s version of the Christmas story. John is one of Jesus’ disciples, and he wrote one of the four stories of Jesus that are in our Bible. But John doesn’t talk about Mary and Joseph. He doesn’t mention the angels, or the shepherds, or the wise men. In his Christmas story he talks about a God who loved us so much, and who was so horrified by the mess we had made of things, that he did the unimaginable. Literally unimaginable.

John says, “In the beginning” ... He’s not talking about our beginning, the beginning of Genesis; he’s talking about way before that, in the time

before time. ‘In the beginning the Word already existed.’ Because this Word was both with God, he says, and this Word was God. The Word he is talking about is Jesus. He was both with God, and he was God in the time before time. Now if that doesn’t fit into your brain, get over it. We’re talking about God, and God is way bigger than our puny little brains.

It says, “God created everything through him (through this Word), and nothing was created except through him.” This universe, this world, everything you see, everything in it – he did it! All this didn’t just pop into existence on it’s own ... he did it! Does that make sense? It makes a whole lot more sense than the stupid idea that there is no Creator.

And here’s where the story gets weird. It says, “He came into the very world he created.” Why would he do that? And then it says, “But the world didn’t recognize him.” Of course they didn’t recognize him. (*Creation images*) Look at this place. Look at these pictures. Would you honestly believe that the one responsible for all this would have a story like this?

This universe blows my mind. It’s scale, it’s beauty, it’s intricacy – it staggers the imagination. Does it fit in your brain that the one responsible for this would have a story like this? Seriously! “He came into the very world he created,” it says, “but the world didn’t recognize him... yet” Well, no kidding!

And then it says, “He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.” The Creator Word, came to his own people, a people he had had been working with, a people he had been preparing for millennia. They were waiting for the Messiah. They were praying for the Messiah. God had told them, through one of their greatest prophets: “The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7.14) You know what that means: They will call him ‘the with us God.’ They prayed: “O come, O come, Emmanuel.” They were looking for him. And yet ... when Emmanuel comes, it says – even they rejected him.

And in one sense, that’s just weird. There were so many prophecies of Jesus in their Bible. Their Scriptures told them that their Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, to a virgin. That he would be from the tribe of Judas, from the line of David. Their prophecies predicted that whoever was King would try to kill him, but that he would escape to Egypt.

They predicted a prophet, like John the Baptist, preparing the way for him. They predicted he would be called a Nazarene, and so much of what he was going to say, and do. They tell us he would be slandered, and betrayed, and mocked, and beaten, and crucified. And so much more. They are waiting for him, they are praying for him, they have all these clues that pointed to him ... and then when he shows up – “even they rejected him.”

You walk through the stories of Jesus and you just wonder, why didn't they see it? Why didn't they recognize him? Why wouldn't they embrace him? When he is baptized, the Holy Spirit comes on Jesus in the form of a dove, and they hear the voice of God. God says, “This is my Son, listen to him.” But they don't. He works all these amazing miracles: he heals all these diseases, he tells storms to ‘shhh’ and they do it, those who are demon possessed cower in fear before him and when he tells the demons to get out, they run. He raises the dead. That should have cinched it, guys! But it doesn't. His miracles just make them madder. His words were more profound than any that had ever been spoken. No one could trip him up – their smartest kept trying. And yet: “When he came to his own people, even his own people rejected him.”

Do you know why? They just didn't expect their Emmanuel to have that kind of resume. They just couldn't process the idea that their Emmanuel would be willing to get that messy.

- “Yeah, we want a messiah, but we don't want one that looks like that!”
- “Yeah, we've been praying for a messiah, but we didn't expect him to go to them, to hang out with them!”
- “Yeah, we've been expecting a messiah, but this isn't the way we expected him to do his messiah-ing.

And the coup de grace for the rejectors – was the cross. Because messiahs don't die, you know. That was pretty much definitive proof for them that Jesus could not have been the one, right? I don't care how smart he was, what kind of power he had, how many prophecies he seems to have fulfilled, messiahs don't die! So after murdering him, they went

home soothing their troubled consciences, refining their excuses, and their rationalizations, and their justifications.

As God the Father waited ... 3 days ... to remove all doubt. And then, some of them got it. It's hard to say 'yes' to God when you've become so practiced at saying 'no,' but some of them got it. Some of them recognized that God won't play by our rules. They recognized that we don't get to dictate when he'll show up, or what he'll do when he gets here. They recognized that we don't get to tell him how to 'messiah.' If God wants to save us by taking our place, the appropriate response is – thank you ...

The apostle John says: “He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But ... to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1.10-12) Have you been there? Experienced that?

You see, still struggle to embrace him. We say it's because of that stuff, but it's not. You see, we've got some things they didn't have when Jesus leaned into our messes 2000 years ago. Up until the end, they didn't have the resurrection. I actually can understand a man turning his back on Jesus if he is blissfully unaware of the resurrection. Even with all the prophecies, even with all the miracles Jesus did, even if he is the greatest religious teacher ever – that is just too weird. But guys, if Jesus walked out of his tomb three days after a cross, you'd better listen to him, no matter how weird that is. In fact, if he walked out of his tomb, his becomes the greatest story ever told. We have an amazing God!

But it's not really about the resurrection, for most of us. We don't push Jesus away because we don't believe in the resurrection. You see, God pretty much takes that excuse away from every man. You see, there is another part of God we call the Holy Spirit. He's the part of God you have felt nudging you, sometimes pretty hard. He's the part of God that is all around us, every day, challenging us, convicting us, encouraging us. John tells us that “when the Holy Spirit comes (and he has), he will convict the world of its sin (and he does), and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.” (John 16.8) You see, we don't push Jesus away because we don't believe in him, we push him away because we don't want to believe in him.

We say we want an Emmanuel, but then we push back when he doesn't permit us to define the terms of the relationship. We push back when we discover that he doesn't affirm our biases, and support our priorities. We push back when we discover that he names our sin for what it is ... Guys, he didn't just come to be our Savior, but that came to be our Lord.

You see, Jesus didn't lean into a nice world so that he can make it nicer. He came into a broken world, an extraordinarily messy world to offer life – real life – to the dying. “He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. (We get that.) He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. (We even get that.) But to all who believe him and accept him (it still goes!), he gives the right to become children of God. That's the greatest gift God can give. Don't you love a God like that?