

TOO Messy – Monster Christians
Sermon #1: Monsters or Whosoever
Nov. 8, 2015

It's a verse those of us who have grown up in church memorized as little kids. Even if you didn't grow up in church you have probably heard this verse recited or seen it on signs at professional sporting events all around the country. It's the key verse or the big idea that I would like for us to keep in mind throughout this morning.

Would you read it with me?

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whosoever believes in him will not die but will have everlasting life.

When you think of Monsters what comes to mind for you?

Older Folk

Is it Dracula & Frankenstein---these were the first monster movies produced by American studios in the early 30's

How about Godzilla & King Kong---I remember having nightmares after watching King Kong. Even though he was this huge monster he couldn't get into my house but I remember his arm coming thru my bedroom window reaching across and around the room as he tried to grab me.

How about The Legend of Boggy Creek---I remember this as one of the first scary/monster movies that I went to see at the drive in. And the best part---my mom took us.

For the boomers and Gen xers

You remember Michael Myers from Halloween ---- probably one of my all time favorite monster movies.

There was Jason from Friday the 13th and there was Freddy Krueger from A Nightmare on Elm Street.

Monsters that scared us but ones that we often dressed up like on Halloween.

For you Millennials your mind goes to paranormal, ghosts, Scream and Zombies.

Unfortunately they are not solely found on movie screens. We see them now on our TV's or computer screens as the news reports of monsters that are living amongst us.

I wonder if we realize that sometimes we turn innocent people into "monsters"?

According to Martha Nussbaum, a professor of Law & Ethics at the Univ of Chicago, we start at an early age. She says that it starts around the age of 7 or 8 when children somehow learn to play with those ubiquitous paper devices known as cootie-catchers, pretending to catch foul bugs from the skin of children who are disliked or viewed as an out-group. She says that children practice a form of disgust based social subordination known to all societies, creating groups of humans who allegedly bear the disgust-properties of foulness, smelliness, and contamination.

In his book , Unclean, which has been the driving force behind our series Too Messy, Richard Beck writes....this dynamic---attributing disgust properties to people---emerges early in human development and is used to identify the weak and subordinate, producing prejudice, persecution, ostracization and exclusion. Even the best of us, he writes, struggle with sociomoral disgust.

Even though it may emerge in early development with games that seem to be harmless like "cooties" oftentimes it becomes the foundation for the disgust that we see played out in adult life with the decisions that we make and how we choose to treat people.

Now most of us would like to think that this is not a problem that we have. There may be some people that we think are disgusting but this idea of sociomoral disgust isn't a regular part of our everyday lives or is it?

From the beginning of our existence as a country we see this dynamic played out at the writing of the First US Constitution. In article 1, Section 2, slaves, most of whom would have been black, were considered for the purposes of the census, to be 3/5 of a person. The writers even went so far as to assign disgust properties to them like bad smell, filthiness, animal like features and imbecility.

Unfortunately that thought process continued to be handed down from generation to generation and we continue to see the effects of it being played out in our country today.

In the late 30's the Nazi's, at the direction of Adolf Hitler, produced a proganda film titled The Eternal Jew. An early shot in the film shows rats emerging from a sewer alongside a crowd of Jewish people in a polish city. In his book, Less Than Human, David Livingstone Smith writes: "Where rats appear, they bring ruin by destroying mankind's goods and foodstuffs. In this way, they spread disease, plague, leprosy, typhoid fever, cholera, dysentery, and so on. They are cunning, cowardly and cruel and are found mostly in large packs. Among the animals, they represent the rudiment of an insidious, underground destruction - just like the Jews among human beings."

And not that long ago in our country, proponents of anti-gay legislation circulated pamphlets claiming that gay men ate human feces and drank blood. All of this being done as a way to demonize and make monsters out of innocent people who some believe threatened society.

And it seems we see it every month on our news now as "Christians" connected to Westoboro Baptist show up at the funerals of innocent people calling them monsters and spewing hatred and filth which I'm sure breaks the heart of our God.

But did you know this is not something new to us or our country. This sociomoral disgust and turning innocent people into monsters has been going on from the very beginning of time.

Let me remind you of some stories that we have looked at over the past few months.

Luke 7

Jesus has been invited to the home of a Pharisee by the name of Simon. Simon is venturing way out on a limb with this invitation but he chooses to do so anyway. I'm guessing he had everything laid out just right. The house had been cleaned. The furniture was neatly arranged. The kids are bathed and sitting quietly on the couch. He had put on his best outfit and the food was perfectly prepared. He and Jesus are enjoying a wonderful meal, chatting about the upcoming festival, when all of a sudden a woman comes in to the dining room and falls at Jesus' feet and begins to weep. Weeping and crying so hard that her tears are beginning to wet the feet of Jesus. She begins to recognize the mess her tears are making but with no towel around she begins to use her hair to try and wipe and dry the feet of Jesus. And as she begins to get them dry she then leans down and kisses them and pours perfume that she had brought with her on his feet.

We don't know what Jesus does at this moment. My guess is that he places his hand on her shoulder, maybe he strokes her hair or maybe he even pulls her to his side to allow her to sit by him for the remainder of the meal.

We do know what Simon does or at least what he is thinking. "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of a woman she is---that she is a sinner." Or even worse a monster.

We know nothing about this woman. She is nameless. She says nothing. Her sin is not identified. She may be a prostitute. She may be an adulteress. She may be carrying a physical deformity or a disease.

To Simon—because of his sociomoral disgust---she’s a monster! To Jesus---she’s a whosoever!

A few weeks ago Todd shared the story from Matthew 8 about the man with leprosy who came to Jesus looking for healing. Leprosy was a nasty disease. It is an infectious disease that causes severe, disfiguring skin sores and nerve damage in the arms and legs. Leprosy has been around since ancient times and it was often surrounded by terrifying, negative stigmas and tales of patients being shunned as outcasts.

In Bible times those who were afflicted with Leprosy were forced to live outside the town with those who were also affected in hopes that the spreading of the disease would be contained. Todd shared with us that Lepers were seen as cursed by God. The Jewish people abhorred anyone with leprosy, because it rendered, not only the person with leprosy unclean, but anyone who came in contact with him unclean. They had even made laws for how to deal with people with leprosy. “Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’

There are multiple stories of Jesus’ interaction with Lepers found in the Bible. The majority of whom remain nameless. They were a son or daughter to someone. Maybe they were a big brother or little sister to someone. Possibly even a father or mother. What is truly sad about these stories is that those who were afflicted with this disease were seen as cursed by God. They were seen as horrible sinners. They were viewed as Monsters all because those who didn’t understand the disease were disgusted by the appearance of those who were afflicted.

To those in the town---because of their sociomoral disgust—they were monsters. To Jesus---they were whosoever!

Turn to Matt 9:20. My guess is she was lonely. She had searched for answers for a long time but none had been found. Again there is no name

given by which she was called. All we are told is that she had been subject to bleeding for 12 years. The medical term given for her condition is menorrhagia. A disease in which the menstrual flow is abnormally prolonged which usually produces anemia as well. Because of this condition she would be considered ritually unclean and excluded from normal social and religious relations since others making contact with her would also become unclean.

She had done nothing wrong. Her sins are not at the forefront of her life as they were with the woman in Simon's home or the one brought before Jesus who was caught in the act. She struggled with a medical condition at that time that no one understood and because of that she had to approach Jesus from behind. To have done so from the front could have led to her being called out by those in the town who knew her. Get away. Get away. She's unclean!

To those in the town---because of their sociomoral disgust---she was a monster. To Jesus---she was a whosoever!

Why is it that we turn innocent people into Monsters? I don't have the stats or the research to support it but here is why I believe we do it.

- 1) Because they don't look like us
- 2) Because they don't think like us
- 3) Because they don't act like us
- 4) Because they don't smell like us
- 5) Because they don't behave like us
- 6) Because they are not a part of us

And if they don't look like us, don't think like us, don't act like us, don't smell like us, don't behave like us and aren't a part of us---they must be bad---matter of fact they may even be montsers.

Peter Singer in his book The Expanding Circle has described the human moral factory as a simple two stage process. Process #1 is a classification mechanism that differentiates "kin" or "family" from non-kin. He writes that

we see this played out in young babies who show no anxiety around strangers. We could pass a baby all around this room and they could care less who is holding them except for that moment when they land in Doc's lap, and for those of you who are new around here he's our grumpy old senior minister who thinks they are all barbarians and even infants can pick up on stuff like that. But toddlers, after the onset of stranger anxiety, are more reticent at being left with or held by strangers. Don't believe---walk down the hall at 9:25 or 10:55 and watch the difference or just listen for the difference between the nursery and the 3 year old classroom. At a young age we begin to carve the world into two groups: family vs strangers.

And once we identify family Process #2 emerges which follows a simple rule: extend "kindness" toward our kin. Simply put affection is instinctively extended to members of our "tribe".

These processes help us create what Singer calls our Moral Circle. We draw a circle around a group of people whom we identify as "my kind", "my tribe", "my clan" and "my family". People who look like us, think like us, act like us and behave like us.

And as we grow so does our circle as we include more and more people who are not biologically related to us. Friends become like family and once they are admitted into that circle affection and warmth flow freely and instinctively.

Beck writes in his book that we treat those inside the moral circle with love, affection, and mercy, and those outside the moral circle with indifference, hostility or pragmatism. Those outside the circle are viewed simply as a means to our ends.

Let me illustrate the nature of this moral circle:

Your best friend just got a job waiting tables at a restaurant. To celebrate with them you arrange for a group of friends to go to dinner on their first night of working at the restaurant. You ask to be seated at one of their tables and look forward to surprising them and then leaving a big tip.

Soon your friend arrives at the table, sweating and stressed out. They are having a horrible night. Things are going bad and they are getting behind on getting food and drinks out to you and your friends.

So what do you do? The majority of us would say don't worry about it—it's no big deal---take care of your other customers first. Our response is easy because it is natural to extend grace and mercy to a friend. Why? Because they are inside our moral circle.

But imagine you go out to eat after church this morning with family and friends. The server, whom you have never met, is stressed out. Their performance is poor. It takes forever to get a refill. They keep forgetting things that you've asked for. You've been waiting on your ticket for 10 minutes. What do you do in that situation?

Since this server—this stranger--- is not in our moral circle we get frustrated and angry. The server is a tool—a means to our ends---and since they have performed poorly we ask for a manager and we refuse to tip. In the end we fail to treat another human being with mercy and dignity.

We treat them like Simon did the prostitute, like the Jews did the Lepers, like the community did the woman who had been bleeding, like our founding fathers did those they enslaved, like the Nazis did the Jews, like the Anti-Gay movement did those who were gay, like the Westboro Baptist members do those who are not like them---we treat them like Monsters.

But here's the thing----do you realize that Jesus came for them as well? He didn't just come for you and me. He came for "whosoever". He came for anyone in our neighborhoods, our community, our state, our country, our world, that would believe in Him. Those that don't look like us, act like us, behave like us and think like us.

As Paul told the churches in Colosse & Galatia....Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, male or female, but Christ is all and in all.

To Jesus they weren't Monsters---they were Who-So-Evers!

One of the first songs I remember singing as a child in church went something like this:

Jesus loves the little children---all the children of the world.

Do you remember that song? Sing it with me.

Jesus loves the little children---all the children of the world.
Red and Yellow, Black and White. They are precious in His sight.
Jesus loves the little children of the world!

I wonder if we could still sing that song if we were to replace the words Red and Yellow, Black and White with words like Gay and Addicts and Molesters and Mass Murderers, or what about liar, thief, homeless and adulterer.

Sing it this way:

Jesus loves the whosoever, all whoseovers of the world.
Gay & Addicts, Liars and Thiefs, they are precious in His sight
Jesus loves the whosoever of the world.

In his book "Eats with Sinners", Arron Chambers writes: It is reported that while in prison for murdering, dismembering and cannibalizing his victims, Jeffrey Dahmer gave his life to Christ and was baptized for the forgiveness of his sins. Does this make you happy, Chambers wrote, or do you share the sentiments of a college professor who stated upon hearing the news of Dahmer's conversion:

"If Dahmer's in heaven, I don't want to be there"!

Now who is the monster?

Does it scare you to think that we may be allowing our wants, our desires, our feelings, our prejudices to decide if and when we will go to the messy or how far we will lean into the messy?

Jesus' willingness to associate with prostitutes, and lepers, and sick people, as well as conspiring religious bigots didn't make him like them and our willingness to reach out to those in our community who are messy won't make us like them---it will make us more like Him.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that who-so-ever would believe in him, would not perish but have everlasting life.

Are you a who-so-ever? Yes you are. And so are all the people who sit around you this morning. Some would consider us monsters but to Jesus we are who-so-evers and because of that today we get to share with Him and with them around his table.

It's not a table just for people who look like me, think like me, act like me or behave like me. And it's not a table just for people who look like you, think like you, act like you or behave like you. It's a table for who-so-ever.

Young and Old, Male and Female, Rich and Poor, Well to do and those who have nothing. It's for the sick and the healthy. It's for those who have it all together and for those who don't know how they will make it until tomorrow. It's for all of those who know that without Him and without these emblems their life would be a mess.