

“Toø Messy” Series / 1.3: A Drop of Urine / 10-4-15

We live in a messy world. There was another tragic shooting at a college in Roseburg, Oregon. Apparently the 41st school shooting this year. CNN reports Anastasia Boylan, who was wounded in the attack, said the gunman singled out Christians. While reloading his handgun, the man ordered the students to stand up and asked whether they were Christians. And they would stand up, and he said, 'Good, because you're a Christian, you're going to see God in just about one second,' " Stacy Boylan told CNN, relaying his daughter's account. "And then he shot and killed them." Now ... aren't you proud of the students who kept saying, "Yes!" It makes you wonder, "How would I have answered?" The follow up investigation uncovers that the shooter despised organized religion, especially Christians. Why is it that, so often people can love Jesus and hate us?

Now, what do you think about that ... twisted young man? If you had had the chance to rub shoulders with him the day before the shooting, what would you have wanted him to see in you, to hear from you? Do you think there could have been anything one of us could have done to change his perceptions of a Christian? Or maybe, what would Jesus have done to this kid? Do you think his heart might have softened had he encountered Jesus? There are a lot of messy people who are attracted to Jesus, but repulsed by us. We'll get back to him later.

Let's change directions ... Here it is! (Dixie cup) I suppose this is kind of the logo for this series we are in called "Toø Messy." So let's use it one more time. Can I have a volunteer? Now, after last week, some of you are probably skittish... I have another bottle of grape juice this morning. (*Pour*) Brand new bottle, perfectly clean pitcher. (*to volunteer*)... Do you like grape juice? How's it taste? (*taste test*) Now, what if I drop into this pitcher of grape juice just one drop of urine. (*dropper*) I'm not going to tell you whether this is real urine, or not. But think about it: a whole pitcher of grape juice, and just one tiny little drop of urine: (*refill the Dixie cup*) would you drink it? ... You guys think he should go ahead and drink? It's just one drop of urine? If you watch Bear Grylls on TV they drink this stuff all the time! Thanks ...

Now, this little experiment is going to help us be better Jesus followers. You buy that? Hang on, we'll get there. Some of you guys may never

look at one of these cups the same again. It may stir a rather disgusting memory. Do you remember when we did our first mind experiment? I asked you to imagine working up a big mouthful of saliva and kind of dribbling it into your Dixie cup. Then I asked you a question: Would you be willing to put your cup back to your lips, and drink it? Remember, just a moment ago, it would have been no problem – to swallow a mouthful of saliva. You do it all the time. But once it becomes spit, once it is outside the body, we treat it like it's disgusting. Isn't that weird?! Aren't we kind of irrational?

And last week we kind of took our experiment a step further. What if you had one of these "lifestraws"? They filter out virtually anything that can hurt you. You could drink someone else's spit, or someone else's urine and be perfectly safe. And if you remember, I took some perfectly good grape juice, and dropped some crickets in it, and a worm, and then I asked whether you'd be willing to take a drink – through this lifestraw. You know it's safe, but it's still kind of disgusting, isn't it? We act like once something is contaminated, it is always contaminated, even if it has been purified... Isn't that weird? We are remarkably irrational creatures when it comes to things we deem ... disgusting.

And now this week I drop a drop of urine into a pitcher of grape juice. It's just a little drop. You'll be okay! But it's ... disgusting, isn't it? Now we have been unpacking the emotion of disgust. You know what disgust feels like: that feeling of revulsion, of profound disapproval, even of nausea sometimes. So much of our life is controlled by the emotion of disgust. I showered this morning, brushed my teeth, used deodorant because I didn't want to disgust you. I eat with my mouth closed, I turn the fan on in the bathroom if there are people around, I tell kids not to burp or pass gas in front of people, because it's disgusting. I kiss my wife on the mouth, but I refrain from doing the same to other women, because that would be disgusting. This emotion of disgust drives how we behave every day.

But here's where it bites us in church. It's not just about food, and clothes, and manners. It's about people, too. We think some people are ... "disgusting." Maybe they are creepy, or scary, or vulgar. Maybe they are just annoying – that can evoke disgust. Some people are just different – a different color, a different shape, and that disgusts some of us. And some

people sin these particularly disgusting sins: gossips, addicts, rapists, philanderers, adulterers, betrayers, blasphemers. You've got your list.

And here's the big idea. When we consider people disgusting, we lean away from them. And yet, when Jesus encountered people we consider disgusting, he leaned in. There are people we consider "too messy." But there was no one – no one – too messy for Jesus. You buy that? And until we can learn to lean in like Jesus did, we will never be good at sharing the truth and the grace we have received from God. We say we want people to find Jesus; we say that burns in our heart. But until we learn to lean in to the messy like Jesus did, those are just words. You see, this study is about learning to do life God's way. It's about rooting out those attitudes that keep us from being what God calls us to be, and doing what God calls us to do.

But it is hard, isn't it? It's hard to lean in to the messy. Because there are some things about disgust that keep us from leaning in.

- We learned that disgust sets boundaries. When we are disgusted we build walls, in fact, with people, we build walls that God does not honor. And the walls we build undermine the grace and the truth we say we want to share with them.
- And we learned that disgust is expulsive. If something is disgusting, we want to expel it, we want to spit it out. Same with people. If someone who is disgusting slips through our walls, we want to expel them, spit them out, so we aren't contaminated or infected by them.
- And we learned that disgust is learned. Babies don't have a developed sense of disgust, so they put nearly anything into their mouths. Neither are they repelled by someone's color, or their shape, or how pretty, or how smart, or how rich they are. We teach our children disgust, and what they learn young is incredibly difficult to unlearn.

And then last week we began to explore how we think -- often irrationally -- how we think disgust is contagious. Do you remember when we studied the two stories of Jesus? First he is at the house of tax collectors and sinners. And the religious people thought Jesus would be contaminated just by hanging out with those folk. It's like their messiness was contagious. And then last week we studied the story of a sinful woman who wetted Jesus' feet with her tears, and wiped them off with her hair.

And the people who were watching were scandalized. Because they thought her messiness was contagious – she was contaminating Jesus by just by her touch. But Jesus didn't treat messy people the way we do. Instead he reminds us of what God values most. God said, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Mercy, not sacrifice. Now sacrifice is important to God. Sacrifice is about our holiness, it's about our purity, and that is important to God. But our mercy is more important to God. Our compassion, our grace, leaning in to the messy – is more important to God.

Well this morning I want to take this path just a couple steps further. Just a little more teaching to lay the foundation. I want to teach you a couple more things about disgust that we need to understand if we are going to treat people in a God-honoring way. You see if it was just about food, and clothes, and manners, this stuff would be interesting, but it really wouldn't be sermon material. But this stuff drives how we treat people. And if we don't get this right, we will not, we cannot, live God honoring lives in this world. This stuff is immernsely important, and we need to get it right.

So, here's the next big idea. We've already kind of touched on it. Guys who study disgust say that we get hung up on the idea of permanence. Once disgusting, always disgusting. Remember the bugs and the worms I put in the grape juice? Even if we use a lifestraw, and we filter out all the contaminants, we are still squeamish about drinking the juice; because sometimes we treat contamination as permanent – which is frankly irrational. Now, it's okay to be irrational about your food. If you think peas are disgusting, if you think they are always disgusting, no matter how you fix them. That's fine; I don't care. But when we attach the idea of permanently disgusting with people, that's awful! But we do it. Sometimes with people we act like "once disgusting, always disgusting." Even if they have been purified, sometimes we act like their impurity is permanent. God may see them as forgiven and pure, but we never will. I've heard Christians say that! And that's evil.

And then they talk about "dose sensitivity," – dose sensitivity. I took you through one of their classic experiments just a few minutes ago. Can a single drop of urine contaminate a whole pitcher of grape juice? I mean, how much of a contaminant is required to make something impure? Can a single drop of urine defile a whole bottle of wine, even though the alcohol

would purify it? Rationally, probably not. But because we attach this “dose sensitivity” to our feelings of disgust – absolutely it can. In our minds, minimal, even micro, amounts of a pollutant make it disgusting. The amount doesn’t really matter. Which is amusing when it comes to a drop of urine in grape juice, or wine ... but not so amusing when we apply it to people. There are some sins we just can’t crawl over – even if that sin is a small part of who they are. We don’t look for the image of God in people; we get hung up over some sin that has fogged it up. Sometimes we take one sin, or maybe one season of sin, and we hold it over a person for a lifetime. Even what God has forgiven, we let define a man or a woman. And guys, that’s wrong!

And there is one more idea that attaches to disgust that messes us up. The guys who study this stuff call it “negativity dominance.” Here it is: when a pollutant and something pure touch each other, we think the pollutant is stronger, and whatever was pure is ruined. So a drop of urine can ruin a jug of grape juice, but it doesn’t work the other way around: a drop of grape juice cannot purify a jug of urine. We think the impure always pollutes the pure; never the other way around. Which is fine, until we start applying the idea to people. “One bad apple,” right? One bad apple spoils the whole barrel. In fact preachers used to preach it like this. They’d say, “Just as one bad apple spoils the others, so you must show no quarter to sin or sinners.” Root them out! Throw them away! That’s actually what they preached! That’s evil! What if I swapped out just one word: “Just as one bad apple spoils the others, so you must show no ... grace ... to sin or sinners.” Would that make you Jesus followers wince? I hope so. I think it makes God wince.

Guys, this disgust stuff is as powerful as it is irrational. We act like we can be contaminated just by getting physically close to a sinner. (by contact) Really?! And so often we treat the contamination as permanent. We act like the mess sin makes can never be cleaned up. They may be pure in the eyes of God, but not in our eyes. Really?! And dose sensitivity ... We let one sin, or one season of sin define a man for a lifetime. And this negativity dominance: we act like the impure always pollute the pure; we never consider the possibility that those who have been purified might actually purify the impure.

Now ... you can see these “disgust” ideas all over the Bible. They drive the thinking of the people who attacked Jesus. But they are also in the Old Testament. These ideas show up in some of the scenes in the Old Testament story that are so hard for us to understand. Now I don’t believe God is driven by any of these disgust ideas. He has other motives. But you can see how the perversions of disgust get rooted in God’s people, sometimes.

God rescues the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt. We call it the Exodus. It’s a great story; we make movies about it. Charlton Heston for you old guys; the Prince of Egypt for you millennials. And then Moses leads the Israelites through the desert to their promised land. Great stories! But then here’s what they are supposed to do. This is so hard! Moses says, (Deut 20.16-18) “In those towns that the Lord your God is giving you as a special possession, you are to destroy every living thing. Every living thing?! You must completely destroy the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, just as the Lord your God has commanded you.” Huh?! That’s hard stuff.

Then Moses tells them why. We don’t get this part – we need to, but we don’t. He says, “This will prevent the people of the land from teaching you to imitate their detestable customs in the worship of their gods, which would cause you to sin deeply against the Lord your God.” Contact with these pagans will contaminate you, God says. So you have to eliminate them all ... because of dose sensitivity. Even a micro pocket of sin left in the land will corrupt you. And you can see the negativity dominance. You are not going to make the pagans more pure, God says, they are going to contaminate you. So lean away. Now guys, this is a special time in Israel’s history, and God has some special reasons for his commands. Because if he cannot get Israel on the right path, the whole world will be in trouble. It’s not just going to be bad for Israel, it’s going to be terrible for all the people God wants to reach through them. But some of us still kind of think this way.

Of course we don’t advocate anything so brutal. Some Muslims do. This is exactly the kind of disgust logic you hear from Isis, or Al Queda, or the Taliban, or Al-Shabaab, or Boko Haram. You either submit to their rule willingly, you convert, or you die. And they seem to enjoy the making you

die part. But there aren't many Christians who would support that kind of nonsense anymore.

Instead we withdraw from the world. We just lean away from the messy – don't let them touch you, don't let them contaminate you. Build churches with thick walls where we can be protected from a messy world. And be careful not to let in anything that looks worldly. And be careful not to let anyone in who looks, or thinks, or acts worldly. Sometimes we send our kids to different schools – to protect them. Sometimes we even build communities where we can almost withdraw from the world entirely – convents, monasteries, Shaker Villages. Isolation, quarantine, walls – because we understand that contact can be contaminating, and that contamination is so difficult – if not impossible – to clean up (that idea of permanence). And we believe that it doesn't take much pollution to corrupt our whole family (that dose sensitivity). And we fear that the impure will always corrupt the pure, almost never the other way around (because of negativity dominance). And so instead of leaning in to the messy, we act like they are too messy – so we lean away. And outsiders - - who are loved by God, and desperate for God's truth and grace – go without, and go to hell... Well, not here!

And you can see it in the Old Testament not just in the way they treated outsiders, you could see it in the way they treated insiders too. We God followers can be so hard on each other, so cruel to each other. In the Old Testament there all kinds of things that could make you "unclean." Touch anything dead and you would be "unclean." Get a skin disease, or a rash, and you are "unclean." And a woman can be unclean ... if she is on her period, she is unclean. If she gives birth, she is unclean. And so many sinners, for so many sins, were considered unclean. Good people just didn't hang out with the unclean, with the sinners ... they thought.

So those who were unclean in the Old Testament world were separated, they were excluded, they were contagious. Mere contact would contaminate you. And it didn't matter how little their impurity might be – because of our dose sensitivity. A little skin disease, a little bleeding corrupted the whole person. And negativity dominance. You couldn't purify someone who was unclean by touching them. But anybody who was unclean would contaminate you... That was the world Jesus stepped into. That's still our world, in so many different ways. Jesus stepped into

a world where people bought into all this disgust poppycock. He stepped into a world where these ideas were crushing people. And Jesus said, “I want you to ponder what God meant when he said to you, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’” “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” “Mercy, not sacrifice.” You see, God doesn’t want his people to lean away from the messy, he wants us to lean in, even if some of the mess gets on us. He wants us pure, but if you think your purity is more important than your mercy, you are messed up!

And then Jesus began to show us what he meant by how he lived, by how he treated people. Instead of leaning away from outsiders, instead of building walls, and pushing away any messy people who slipped through, Jesus tore down the walls, and he leaned in. Religious people in his world (our world) would keep their distance from the sinners and the unclean. Not Jesus! Jesus would hang out with them. Do you think ... Do you think ... that has anything to do with the fact that the sinners and the unclean were attracted to Jesus, and yet so often they flee from us? Do you think it might have anything to do with the fact that Jesus rejected, categorically, the disgust logic that too often drives us?

Think about it, guys.

- This idea of contamination by physical contact. “Don’t let them get too close; don’t let them touch you!” We act like their sin is contagious! Do you think Jesus thinks that way? Guys, if Jesus was worried about contamination by physical contact – he would have never left heaven. He couldn’t take a single step in our world without brushing up against sin and sinners. He couldn’t take a single step in this room without brushing up against sin and sinners. Aren’t you glad that Jesus doesn’t believe that touching you would contaminate him?
- And this idea of dose sensitivity. One drop of urine will ruin a whole bottle of wine, right? Do you think Jesus buys into the idea of dose sensitivity when it comes to you? Do you think there is some sin in you ruins you in his eyes, forever? Guys, he sees your sin. He sees all your sin. He sees all those sins that you hope no one ever discovers. And he still loves you!
- And then this idea of negativity dominance... Do you think Jesus buys into that when it comes to people? That the impure will always corrupt the pure, never the other way around. Jesus said,

“Poppycock!” And he went out of his way to rub shoulders with tax collectors and sinners, to let a sinful woman fondle his feet, to touch the blind, and the lepers. And guys, when Jesus touched the unclean, he didn’t get unclean, they got purified. The touch of Jesus is infinitely more powerful than the touch of anything unclean. Come back next week and Todd is going to dig deeper into that idea.

- And this stupid idea that once disgusting, always disgusting; once impure, always impure... The permanence of contamination. Do you think Jesus buys into that? Guys, you have not sinned a sin that cannot be forgiven and cleansed ... if you accept it. You have never been anywhere, you have never done anything that disqualifies you from grace. The only thing that keeps God’s grace at bay, is our unwillingness to accept it, to accept him. Because he won’t force himself on us.

Now... That was Jesus. How about us – Jesus followers? What does God want from us? How does he want us to deal with “the messy”? Well, his instructions are crystal clear. Two verses from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says, to us – to us Jesus followers. He says, “You are the salt of the earth.” You, and you, and you, and me – we are the salt of the earth. And then he says, “You are the light of the world.” You are, and you are.

Do you know what they used salt for in that world. It was more than just a seasoning. It was used to preserve food, to keep it from rotting. We are the ones God uses to give messy people a shot. And this idea of light. We don’t give it much thought, except at night, when the power goes out, and you can’t find a flashlight, or a candle. Do you know what Jesus is saying? He says, You are the ones he is counting on to show them the way.

Guys, unless we live differently, we will not be salt, and we will not be light. Unless we engage, unless we lean in, we will not be salt, we will not be light. That’s our call, that’s our mission, that’s our assignment from God. Do you realize how cool that is, to be honored by God with an assignment like ours? Do you realize how special it is when God uses us to introduce one of his messy kids to Jesus? When we get to be a part of the incredible transformative work of our God when we dunk them in this water and invite them one this path (XD 24-7) with us?

If you truly believe you have found forgiveness, if you truly believe we go from this place to a better place...because we have placed Jesus front and center in our lives, if you truly believe living by His principles makes life better here, how selfish, how rude, how insensitive, how disgusting is it to keep it to ourselves?

I wonder how different today would be in Roseburg, Oregon, if, say a month ago, one of those believers had befriended a messed up millennial. What if someone had gone out of their way to get to know him, to love him in real, tangible ways—eat lunch with him, play video games with him, invite him over to hang out. Maybe it would have been too late; maybe he was too far over the edge...we will never know. But, no matter, that was all the way in Oregon. Surely there are no messy people like that around here ...