

Good Friday 2015 Three Hour Service – Sermons on Scapegoating

001 Introduction Scapegoat

We have heard three lessons read from the scriptures during the Office of the Word; one from Isaiah, one from the Letter to the Hebrews and one the lengthy Passion from St John's Gospel which I broke up into bite-size pieces, separating them with hymns, anthems and prayers.

On this Good Friday one can understand why the Church Liturgist chose the Passion according to John. The Isaiah reading is one of the Servant Songs. I will be sharing with you more information about this passage in my next short address. Being read on this day I suspect the church wants us to understand that Isaiah is prophesying Jesus being the Suffering Servant. As you will hear just now this was not how the original readers understood it and it is easy for us with perfect hindsight to place this interpretation on the passage. When it comes to the passage from the Letter to the Hebrews, reason for its inclusion in this service is even more complicated but once again we will explore what the writer was trying to say and what it means for us today in the subsequent address. To whet your appetite it speaks of Jesus as our "great high priest" whose task it is to carry the sins of the people into the Holy of Holies.

So with these three readings in mind I starting thinking there must be a linking theme that makes it appropriate that all three appear in our Good Friday Service. What message was the ancient Church Liturgists trying to get across? After some thought I came to realise that one possible theme was that of a scapegoat.

The word *Scapegoat* derives from the common English translation of the Hebrew term *azazel* that occurs in Leviticus 16:8 - *And Aaron shall place lots upon the two he goats: one lot "For the Lord," and the other lot, "For Azazel."* I'm sure we all know what a scapegoat is. If used to day it means someone or something we blame for making things go wrong although they rarely have very little to do with those thing. We blame them in order not to blame ourselves.

The Bible describes how, on the Day of Atonement once a year, two goats are chosen. One goat was sacrificed for the sins of the people, the other goat was for Azazel. No one is sure of the meaning of the word *Azazel* but it has been translated as the "Goat sent out" or the "(e)scape goat" because this goat was designated to be outcast in the desert after the High Priest had laid hands on it as a sign of the sins of the nations being placed upon it. In other words the sins of the nation are carried away, into the Desert, East of Eden.

To understand where this idea comes from we need to go back to other ancient societies. In Syria, a she-goat with a silver bracelet around its neck was drive out into the desert on the occasion of the King's wedding. In Ancient Greece a cripple or beggar or criminal called the *pharmakos* was cast out of the community, either in response to a natural disaster (such as a plague, famine or an invasion) or in response to a events link to the calendar (such as the end of the year or the coming of spring).

In Christianity this idea prefigures the sacrifice of Christ on the cross through which God's anger has been lessened toward us; and ours sins can be atoned. What is interesting is that Jesus can be seen to have fulfilled all of the roles – he is the High Priest who officiates at the ceremony, the Lord's goat that deals with the pollution of sin and the scapegoat that removes the "burden of sin". This is what the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews was referring to and we will come to that concept shortly.

Just now I referred to us understanding of the word in our modern society where a person is singled out to carry the blame for something many had done. A modern French philosopher, Rene Girard studied this idea and developed his Mimetic Theory.

Rene Girard's Mimetic Theory is based on the principle that human beings are mimetic creatures, that is to say we mimic or imitate what we see in others. In fact, our desires are not actually our own, but desires we have copied from others. The more we imitate each other, the more alike we become. Increasingly, we vie for the same desires and we become rivals. Distinctions between individuals are blurred as they mirror each other. The boundaries between individuals which kept order begin to disintegrate. Increased rivalry creates increased violence and the blurred boundaries threaten to destabilize the social fabric.

In Girard's theory, primitive man stumbled upon the solution to this threat: the scapegoat. By placing the blame for all the hatred and distress on one individual or group of individuals, the community's violence becomes polarized toward the ones being blamed. These responsible individuals become the scapegoats for all the bad feeling in the

community. By expelling or killing the scapegoat, order is restored and the community becomes peaceful again. The single act of sanctioned violence becomes like a vaccination against the disease of chaotic, out of control violence.

It is critical that the members of the community be completely convinced that the scapegoat is guilty for this mechanism to restore order. That is why the scapegoats must be accused and slandered before they are killed, but after the killing, everyone attributes the restored order to the scapegoats' sacrifice. In this way, the sacrificial victims become responsible for both the violence and the peace in the community. They become "the sacred". Can you see where this is going? I can see similarities in our contemporary SA society as well as in society of Jesus' time.

As Rene Girard continued to examine the mythologies of primitive peoples, he noted a difference in one particular set of stories relating to scapegoats. The stories from the Hebrew and Christian texts seemed to have a slightly different perspective than those of other mythologies. In these stories, the scapegoat was not always guilty. In fact, these stories were told from completely the opposite perspective of the other world mythologies. They were told from the perspective that the sacrificial victim was innocent. From the stories of Abraham and Isaac, Job, Joseph and many others, we can see that these victims were falsely accused. Girard explains that the New Testament culminates in a story about the most innocent victim of all: Jesus Christ. There is no question of His innocence and it is **this** unquestioned innocence that unveils the scapegoat mechanism for what it truly is. Used from the foundation of the world to restore order, it is a lie and an injustice.

Because order had been established through an unjust murder, Jesus' death reveals that the foundation of culture was based on a murder and a lie. His resurrection reveals that God didn't want sacrificial victims to atone for another's sin, but rather that God expects each of us to take responsibility for our own feelings of shame and envy. Jesus knows that we are mimetic creatures and he asks us to imitate Him, not as rivals but as a model to aspire to.

I said just now that perhaps you could see where this is going in our contemporary setting. In fact, psychologists even call the problem of blaming others for the faults in ourselves scapegoating'. But perhaps you can't see this in yourselves because perhaps you are unconsciously practicing scapegoating on others.

It seems as if we humans as a species need someone to vent our anger on and make wrong. Scapegoating is a projected defence mechanism. It is the ego saying "If I can put the blame on you, I don't have to recognize and take responsibility for the negative qualities in myself. What I can't stand about myself, I really hate in you and have to attack you for it in order to deny that I have the same quality."

Scapegoating is a huge social problem contributing to the hate that exists in the world. There is scapegoating of whole groups of people when there is prejudice or stereotyping. Think for a moment about xenophobia in this country over the past few years... in WW2 Jewish people and other ethnic groups and minorities were scapegoated by the Nazis.

And you see this is what makes the Passion of St John I read just now so interesting with the idea of Scapegoats and scapegoating. Besides Jesus, it is filled with characters. Each of them carries on his or her shoulders, the image of the scapegoat. The classic being Judas Iscariot of course, the scapegoat *par excellence*, I will talk about redeeming Judas. Then there is Peter, we can blame him for his denial of Jesus but also as a scapegoat for all spontaneous people who leap in where Angels fear to tread. Mary, she carries the hopes and fears of all the women through all the ages. I will share with you in short addresses my thoughts on all these and help you to identify yourself in them. In my final address, I will look at ourselves – are we using ourselves as scapegoats? Are we not obeying Jesus' command to love our neighbour **as we love ourselves?** Do we love ourselves or are we scapegoats for all the faults we think we have?

002 Jesus – Our Great High Priest

The reading from the Letter to the Hebrews is given the subtitle "Jesus our High Priest", but what the lesson is telling us is actually about what the High Priest does on the Day of Atonement, the day when as you heard in the last sermon, two goats are chosen; the one is sacrificed as worship to God, and the other has the High Priest's hands laid upon it, taking upon it the sin of the nation. This God is then driven out of the city into the wilderness. The goat is driven in an Easterly direction symbolising, just like Adam and Eve being driven out of the Garden, East of Eden.

So the writer to the Hebrews is saying that Jesus is just like the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. But our high Priest is even better, he writes: " ...we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of

God. So by the title *Son of God* he is saying that Jesus is better than an ordinary human High Priest, he is *a great high priest* and he is great because he has passed through the heavens. But this great high priest is not so great as to be unsympathetic to our human condition. In the opening lines of his letter the writer stressed Jesus divinity, as he does here by calling him the Son of God but he continues now stressing his humanity. He asserts that Jesus' mercy is based on his humanity: *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -- yet was without sin.*" (4:15)

Why can Jesus be sympathetic? Because he has shared the weaknesses of human nature. He knows what it's like to be tempted. The point is that Jesus' experience was both like ours and unlike ours: yes, he was tempted "just as we are" yet without sin. He understands temptation because he has experienced it himself, and so he is sympathetic to our situation.

The writer goes on to describe the qualifications of the high priest. He must represent humankind in matters relating to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He must deal gently with those who are ignorant and going astray and because he is human himself must offer sacrifices for his own sins and those of the people. So the writer sees Jesus as this human high priest. But there is a difficulty. Priests came exclusively from the tribe of Levi, from among the descendants of Aaron, not the tribe of Judah as was Jesus' lineage. So our writer begins to lay out his scriptural basis for Christ's high priesthood. Jesus fulfills the high priesthood of Melchizedek, not that of Aaron. He quotes from the Psalms to prove this

The final section of the passage is surprising, shocking and difficult to understand. Here our author is amplifying and underscoring his insistence that Jesus in his humanity fulfilled the qualification of high priest that he be able to identify with those he represents before God, by fervent prayers with tears; but in Gethsemane Jesus' tearful prayer weren't answered. He was not delivered from death. The cup was not removed from him. However, his prayer that the Father's will be done was answered. His humanity is also visible in his piety and reverent submission to God; his learning obedience, suffering and being made perfect in death. Made perfect - remember Jesus told his disciples to be perfect like your heavenly father is perfect. So his obedience, suffering and death make him perfect - like his heavenly father, making him divine as well as human.

Jesus' being made perfect resulted in him being appointed by God as high priest on our behalf, a topic the writer develops later in his letter. These verses emphasise more of his humanity merely touching on his divinity but we must not see Jesus as living out his destiny among us as a kind of superman dressed as Clark Kent, the village carpenter. Jesus, the divine Son of God, was also fully human. He lived out his destiny here on earth exactly as we must -- by the power of the Holy Spirit -- through suffering and obedience.

He sets us an example to imitate, but through this he becomes the victim, the scapegoat, his sacrifice makes him sacred. But in the eyes of the writer to the Hebrews there is one huge difference from other High Priests. They do their priestly thing and sacrifice the two male goats. Jesus our great high priest is both the high priest who does the sacrifice but he is also the victim who is sacrifice and so for us to imitate him we too have to be obedient and face suffering.

003Suffering Servant

The Songs of the Suffering Servant of which we read the fourth as our first reading this afternoon contain wonderful poetry. Isaiah dramatically draws images of someone who suffers unjustly. Because it is a lesson on Good Friday we naturally want to see in this passage the atoning work of Christ. The images of the rejected man of sorrows, suffering in isolation as he endures the blows for **our** iniquities seem ready-made for Christian reading.

However... this is hotly contested in the scholarly world. Interpretive battles abound over the identity of the servant, what the original intention of the text was, its form-critical setting in Judah's exilic and post-exilic period, how it was interpreted in the inter-testamental period, and all these without mentioning the numerous textual-critical difficulties in the Hebrew text. But on Good Friday I'm going to sidestep these issues and look at it from a Christian perspective.

So how do we interpret it? In Acts we hear of the Ethiopian eunuch sitting on the back of his chariot reading this passage from Isaiah in dismay. Philip asks him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The eunuch responded,

"How can I unless someone explains it?" Then Acts tells us, beginning with this Scripture, Philip explained the good news of Jesus Christ.

The cause of the servant's suffering is poignant and straightforward: our infirmities, our diseases, our transgressions, our iniquities are placed on him. Place-taking is an offensive idea in the modern west. Kant put the matter bluntly: it is irrational and impossible for the guilt of one party to be transferred to another. But then we have the scapegoat. The logic of the Scriptures demands a different account of the matter. The Christ through his humanity suffered for us in both his life and death and this is a central metaphor for God's act of reconciliation.

In the language of verse 5, he took our blow so that we could have peace (shalom). He became willingly the scapegoat. According to Girard we, the guilty, turn and pick on someone else to take the blame. Here the "someone else" volunteers to take the blame, to suffer, to be persecuted. The innocent one, spotless and free of guilt, is willingly standing in the place of others. He does so both by identifying himself with sinners -- *he made his grave with the wicked; he was numbered with the rebellious* (53:9,12) and *by taking their guilt on himself in innocent suffering; he shall bear their iniquities; he bore the sin of many* (53:10-12).

We are used to scapegoats that we choose – not vice versa, scapegoats that choose themselves. So these are profound verses of Scripture. They bring before us an acute consciousness of our own sin and rebellion. These words are not laced with therapeutic attempts at self-help. They reveal us as we truly are, even if our consciences do not bother us; even if we do sleep peacefully at night.

"All we like sheep have gone astray." Whether recognized or not, our state is a precarious one when standing before the suffering servant on this Good Friday. While at the same time, beauty arises out of the ugliness. Hope emerges from the horror. We might call it the ugly beauty of God's ultimate act of reconciliation. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" Paul tells us. When we stand before the cross we see perfection itself suffering for transgressors like me.

The servant is confident of his ultimate vindication. Isaiah 53:10 reveals the servant confidently looking forward to the seed promised him on the far side of his suffering and death. His days cut short by death will be prolonged in the offspring made righteous on account of his work. "*Out of his anguish he shall see light.*" Mourning yields to rejoicing. Or in the words of Hebrew 12, it was for the joy set before him that he endured the cross, suffering the shame and despising the loss. Such love for sinners on this Good Friday causes us to put our hands over our mouths as we lift our hearts to the Lord. George Herbert's (1593-1633) oft-quoted poem "Love" makes effective the point.

LOVE bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lack'd anything.

'A guest,' I answer'd, 'worthy to be here:'
Love said, 'You shall be he.'
'I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on Thee.'
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
'Who made the eyes but I?'

'Truth, Lord; but I have marr'd them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.'
'And know you not,' says Love, 'Who bore the blame?'
'My dear, then I will serve.'
'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.'
So I did sit and eat.

004 Judas – scapegoat *par excellence*

I've called this address "Judas – scapegoat *par excellence*" because it is so easy for us to view Judas as the real villain of the event we are commemorating this afternoon.

In the Christian tradition, Judas' name is synonymous with betrayal and possession. In Dante's *Inferno* Judas belongs in the inner ring of hell along with Cassius, and Brutus, the arch-traitors. Yet the Gospels tell us very little about him, who he was, why he betrayed Jesus, and what on earth possessed him.

So, who was he? There is a tradition that says Judas was the nephew of Caiaphas the High Priest, he who was determined to get rid of Jesus. Judas was persuaded to become a secret agent in a plot to ensure the downfall of Jesus.

In John's Gospel whose passion we read earlier, we are told that Judas betrayed Jesus for money and that he was a thief. In the other Gospels, the name Iscariot seems to be linked to a fanatical sect of Jewish nationalists who were professional revolutionaries determined to overthrow their Roman masters. According to this tradition Judas is gripped by the spirit of the Zealots, and when he realizes that Jesus is not going to be the new political Messiah he had hoped for, he hands him over to his enemies. We also read in John chapter 13 and Luke chapter 22 that Judas was possessed by Satan. The words used are "Satan entered him," implying that he is somehow taken over by the Devil in order to carry out the most wicked of deeds. One modern psychoanalyst writer suggests that Jesus was betrayed because of Judas' lost childhood. In other words, it wasn't Judas fault at all and we must blame his parents!

Poor old Judas. Here we are with so many theories. The writers of the Gospels agree that he was a bad man. Their writings give us at least three possible reasons why: he was in it for the money, he was politically disaffected, he was possessed by the Devil. Of course they may all be right: most of us have mixed motives for what we do. The point I'm trying to make is that Judas fits into our Scapegoat theme so easily. When an evil act is committed, we blame someone else and so even the gospel writers are not above the language of blame and scapegoating.

Furthermore, they shift the responsibility all too easily from a tragic and suicidal human being on to a cosmically evil figure in which Satan appears to triumph over God. Judas is one of those figures who are vilified by the writers of the Gospels. Although the Gospels are good news because they bring us good news of salvation, these writers still name their enemies. Judas comes out at the end of this narrative as the arch-betrayer and instrument of Satan. The problem however, reaches its peak in the commemorations of Holy Week. In churches all over the world on Palm Sunday, with the dramatic readings of the Passion narrative, congregations are reminded that it was the Jews who called for Jesus to be crucified. "Let his blood be upon us and upon our children," the congregation shout out as they play the part of the crowd. Although we all shout it out, we all know who is really to blame, don't we? We are left in no doubt that the blame for Jesus' death belongs partly to a Jewish crowd, buying for blood.

Of course, the Romans are simply foreigners who are going about their job: the execution of Jesus is not their fault. I'm pleased to say that this anti-Semitic tone makes many Christians squirm today. So does the treatment of Judas at the hands of the writers of the Gospels. Laying full blame at the feet of one man or one race seems crude, simplistic, and even primitive. Is not the actions of the disciples running away just as much a betrayal? But our blaming and scapegoating attitude is by far an easier option to take... ask any failed sports hero or politician. They'll tell you how they had to take the blame. We call it euphemistically "Taking one for the team." Why can't the team as a whole take it? Why just one person? One person to blame is convenient and neat: and we are let off the hook.

I'm going to suggest we look at Judas in another way, as the shadow of Jesus. Jung speaks about our shadow selves; so let's look at Judas as the shadow self of Jesus. Notice he too could cry for his persecutors' forgiveness for they do not know what they were doing. Judas, too, was despised and rejected, acquainted with grief. He got mixed up in the politics and the passion, and he killed himself in despair. He, like Jesus died with what appears as nothing achieved and with no hope. Like Jesus, he has been misunderstood his mission seemed to have failed.

This sentiment is captured wonderfully by Peter de Rosa in his poem,

'Judas':

Judas, if true love never ceases,
How could you, my friend, have come to this:
To sell me for thirty pieces of silver,
Betray me with a kiss?

Judas, remember what I taught you:
Do not despair while dangling on that rope.
It's because you sinned that I have sought you,

I came to bring you hope.

Judas, let's pray and hang together,
You on your halter, I upon my hill.
Dear friend, even if you loved me never,
You know I love you still.

Martyn Percy writing about Judas says that a few years ago the artist Laurence Whistler created a set of thirteen engraved windows for a church, one for each of the twelve disciples, and one for Christ. It was the twelfth of these windows, the one featuring Judas that caused controversy. The parish rejected it, clearly feeling that Judas belonged in hell. But Whistler had drawn on other Christian traditions about hell. For example Julian of Norwich in one of her 'shewings' says she went to hell and found no-one there. While Catherine of Siena said she would not go to heaven if she thought there was anyone in hell.

Whistler's engraving was nicknamed the 'forgiveness window'. It showed Judas with a rope around his neck being pulled up into heaven, the coins - blood money - falling from his hands and becoming petals and blossoming flowers on the ground. This, of course, is the very opposite of Dante's vision of what befell Judas. But it ties in well with another modern myth about him.

Noting that on Good Friday, after the death of Jesus, all the disciples having fled and run away, Norma Farber in her poem 'Compassion' asks where we might have found Mary, the mother of Jesus, later that day:

In Mary's house the mourners gather.
Sorrow pierces them like a nail.
Where's Mary herself meanwhile?
Gone to comfort Judas's mother.

005St Peter - The scapegoat and spontaneous people

We all know, from numerous preachers' comments and our own reading of the Scriptures that Peter was a spontaneous person. His actions were often impulsive and immediate. As the old saying says' he often engaged mouth before he engaged brain!

In spite of having a wife and a mother-in-law who was poorly, he left his fishing nets and joined the itinerant band that accompanied Jesus around Galilee and up to Jerusalem. While sailing across the Sea of Galilee, he suddenly spots Jesus walking on the water and he wants to walk to him. So he steps out of the boat and only when he starts to realise what he is actually doing – walking on water – does he lose faith and start to sink – only to be rescued by Jesus reaching out to him. With Jesus and the other disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane he leaps in to rescue Jesus by chopping off the ear of the High Priest's servant. But most significantly when Jesus asked his disciples who the people thought Jesus was, and they said John Baptist or Elijah or one of the Prophets then Jesus said: 'But who do **you** say I am?' Peter leaps in boots and all and says, the Christ the son of the living God.

Yes, Peter was an impulsive person and it is this very human trait that makes him so attractive for us. Why did Peter start following Jesus, I wonder? What was he seeking? The messiah – as he called him at one point but later denies him as such? Did Peter want, as St Richard of Chichester says in his famous prayer to follow God more nearly and Love God more dearly day by day? The trouble was Peter was merely a fisherman not a learned scribe or Pharisee. In his day-to-day life he couldn't keep all the commandments to their nth degree. It was in and through Jesus that Peter could still see his way to follow God and draw close to God.

But as a normal human being he was typical of Girard's mimetic theory. He copied others: as he copied them he became more like them – saying things on impulse, doing things without thinking of the consequence. This brought about rivalry.

Just to remind you of Girard's mimetic theory. We copy others, we mimic them. By doing this, the unique differences between people – the things that differentiate them - become lost. As we become more alike rivalries arise because we are all after the same goal. Now, Girard sees in Peter's denial the exceptional strength of mimetism.

Girard says that in all human life impediments are placed in the way and causing one to stumble or fall. These impediments are signifying mimetic rivalry thus Peter's denial of Jesus. In these situations no one escapes responsibility, neither the envious nor the envied. Peter the envious by his denial is hurt, Jesus the envied by Peter's denial is executed.

Girard claims, for example, that all the disciples actively turn against Jesus by their running away. Peter, we know didn't run away, but follows Jesus to the High Priest's House where he waits in the outer courtyard warming himself by the fire. For Girard fires always create community. Hence the reason township gangs hanging around fires made in 45gal drums on street corners today. This creates community for the gangs. Communities according to Girard breed mimetic desire, the desire to be like everyone else, to belong, to be in the 'in' group. For Girard this means that Peter becomes actively hostile to Jesus, seeking his death. I would put it less strongly and say Peter by his denial does nothing to prevent Jesus' death.

So Peter lets Jesus become the scapegoat for impulsive and spontaneous people; the one to blame for their spontaneity. But Jesus was, as I said already a different scapegoat from the norm. He went willing to his sacrifice. Also as we have heard - he was both the priest and the victim. He most certainly was sacred - so sacred that he was the Son of God. His example in standing up to those who wanted everyone to be the same is the example we are called to follow. This we will explore in my final sermon shortly.

006 Mary and the scapegoating of women

What do I mean by that title? Surely Mary is a heroine, a true saint, the Mother of God, Theotokos as the Orthodox put it and even *Christokos*, Mother of Christ as protestant church theologians call her. Anglican theologian Hugh Montefiore, former Bishop of Birmingham, while denying the immaculate conception and the bodily assumption of Mary into heaven, says "Christians rightly honour and venerate her as one of the great saints of God. God had signally honoured her by choosing her to be the mother of Jesus." So what am I getting at by this title?

I wonder how much of the church's position on Mary has been placed there by the male hierarchy of the church? Did they think that it would be easier to control the thinking and behaviour of women if we hold up to them a wonderful model to follow? So Mary's virginity is emphasised not just as a symbol of new creation when Jesus, the second Adam, came but as perpetual virgin to show her purity as something all women should strive for. Her response to the Angel Gabriel, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word...' was this a lesson for all women to say to their male Lords and Masters 'Here am I, let it be with me according to your word'?

Women are often referred to as the weaker sex and so men often use women as the scapegoat for their own weakness. A classic example of this could be St Jerome. Jerome was a great intellect in the church who learnt Hebrew and Greek at a time when few Western Church leaders could understand these languages. With this knowledge he translated the scriptures into Latin and his version is known as the Vulgate and was the version used by the Roman church right up to the 20th Century. However his attitude towards women showed a tremendous immaturity. He appears to us today as the archetype of a neurotic intellectual. He savagely condemned the whole female sex. He knew from experience what the wealthy, licentious women of the Roman aristocracy were like, and he must have based his portrayal of sexy women on them. Like many other neurotics, he made a distinction between love and sexual lust. Love was divine, virginal, manly, asexual. Sexual lust was obscene, fit for pigs and dogs, rather than human beings. In marriage a woman should become as a man, practice continence and serve Christ. Why have children? Childbirth was a dirty, strenuous affair and brought nothing but worries. Virginity, however, was from the Gospel. To be Christian meant to be or to become a virgin and to renounce sinful life. Adam and Eve had a sexual relationship only after the Fall. Marriage and sex were dominant from the Fall to Salvation through Christ. Christ was man living without sex. For Jerome, rebirth in Christ conferred 'virginity'. Fear of sex induced. Jerome to speak out even against bathing. For Jerome women became the scapegoat of his own sexual desires. It was him that was feeling lustful but was women who were trying to seduce him!

I spoke earlier about Rene Girard and his understanding that human beings sought someone to blame in their rivalry to mimic one another and so a sacrifice was sought, the spilling of blood was needed. He wrote: "When men are enjoying peace and security, blood is a rare sight. When violence is unloosed, however, blood appears everywhere ..." Now, for a man, the sight of his own blood must always be associated with trauma and violence. Men's bodies do not bleed unless they are wounded. But for a woman, the sight of her own blood is routine, and the messages it gives are usually to do with fertility and birth. To quote Girard again: "The fact that the sexual organs of women

periodically emit a flow of blood has always made a great impression on men; it seems to confirm an affinity between sexuality and those diverse forms of violence that invariably lead to bloodshed.”

Girard argues that not just in overtly violent sex acts, but in childbirth and in the violence provoked by sexual infidelity, for instance, there is an inherently violent aspect to sexuality: He says... “We are tempted to conclude that violence is impure because of its relation to sexuality. Yet only the reverse proposition can withstand close scrutiny. Sexuality is impure because it has to do with violence.” In other words, he is suggesting that women’s blood is defiling because its sexual associations imply violence.

Once again it seems to be women who are being made the scapegoat for men’s violence. But Christianity has emphasised (some might say destructively), the problems that surround women’s sexuality in its association between Eve, women and fallen nature, but it has also recognised that this curse is undone in Mary. The undoing of Eve’s curse occurs through Mary.

If, as Girard suggests, women’s blood is closely associated with violence in men’s minds, then it seems a small step for Christian men, who reject violence, also to reject women’s bodies which have a disturbing tendency to bleed.

Paul tells us that Christianity represents the ending of divisions between the Jewish and Gentile worlds and the breaking down of the old rituals and taboos that kept these worlds apart. Why, in this great act of reconciliation, does the taboo against women persist? So Mary becomes the opposite of a scapegoat for us men? And, yes she is a model for women, but not as a pure virgin obedient-to-men type, but as living example of compassion and caring a person who is a strong and powerful example.

007Scapegoats - Who do you scapegoat? Do you scapegoat yourself?

This afternoon as we gathered around the foot of the cross for the past few hours we have thought about the idea of a scapegoat. It developed from ancient cultures. It was different in Hebrew and Christian societies because the scapegoat in our tradition was an innocent victim. We saw how the suffering servant, whether we see it as being the people in exile in Babylon about to return or as Jesus, the Messiah, was the innocent victim who under went much so that others could have life.

We saw how the old Jewish Day of Atonement ritual could be re-interpreted by the early Christian Church as the suffering of Jesus. The goat symbolised Jesus as the victim, dying for the sins of us all. But because of Jesus firstly, being totally innocent of all sin and secondly being God's son, here from the beginning - *In the beginning was the word* - Jesus also becomes for us the priest. As one of our favourite communion hymns puts it 'thou on earth both priest and victim...'

We explored Judas as the scapegoat *par excellence*. We also saw how Peter and Mary (and through her all women) become victims of scapegoating. But to end I want us to look at ourselves. Jesus said that we are to love God and love our neighbour as ourselves. This is a good phrase to use to explore our relationship to scapegoating.

Firstly, Jesus tells us to love God. And this we try to do to the best of our ability. But the trouble is we fall so short of what we think God requires from us. Remember Jesus said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount - be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. And we are not perfect. Why? Because we live in the world and we are happy to slip into worldly ways. In this we are falling into Girard's Mimetic Theory, we imitate what we see in the world. We want to be like film stars, the rich and famous. As we all strive for this, few of us achieve it. So we have blame someone. Recently, Jeremy Clarkson, the Top Gear presenter, had a disagreement with the producer of Top Gear resulting in a fisticuffs. Anyone who punches his boss is usually disciplined. But when the BCC suspended Clarkson, social media was filled with vitriolic attacks on the BBC. Our hero who we are trying to emulate becomes a victim, so we blame someone else. BBC becomes the victim. I hasten to mention that I hope none of your are hoping to emulate Jeremy Clarkson - this was merely an example of how we seek scapegoats by accusing others.

In his statement Jesus adds a further requirement to love our neighbour. We are to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. How often we forget this part of the statement. Yes, we try to love God, yes we love our neighbour - but sometimes we end up scapegoating someone. But when we fail to love God and neighbour as much as we think God wants us to do, then we start hating, not loving ourselves. We start beating our breasts and saying how terrible we are. Many people seem to have a perverse pleasure in blaming themselves for everything bad that is happening around them. I'm sure you have met the situation. A loved one dies. It must have been my fault because I didn't

prayer for them when they became ill, it must be my fault because I didn't go to Church every Sunday, it must be my fault because I had lustful thoughts toward that person at the office so God punished me by allowing my loved one to die.

This is such a sad, sad attitude to take. It might surprise us but the world doesn't revolve around us personally. God loves all of us {As the choir sang just now – God so loved the world...} and God will not make another suffer in order to teach us a lesson. All we are doing in this case is making ourselves scapegoats.

So as we come to the end of our exploration of scapegoating you must be asking how it can be different for me in the future? Perhaps I need to use a model Karen uses in her work. It is called the Drama Triangle. Imagine a triangle the three points labelled, Rescuer, Victim and Persecutor. In our interactions with each other and with God we fill one of those three roles, Rescuer, Victim or Persecutor. As a rescuer we try to be helpful to all people which in and of itself is wonderful but sometimes the other person doesn't need or want our help and they start feeling that they are victims. What happens then is that the victim has had enough and so turns on the rescuer with a snide or nasty comment. What has happened is that victim has moved one step around the triangle and become the persecutor the rescuer, now being attacked by the person they tried to rescue feels like a victim. So they have moved around that Drama Triangle.

I'm sure you can see how this works in our interactions with other people. But does it work with God? Well, we don't know how God feels but let me give you a scenario. Your loved one is desperately ill, so you pray and bargain with God to heal the loved one. You are the victim and you are asking God to become the rescuer. But unfortunately the loved one dies. And you become angry with God, you become the persecutor and, dare I say it, God becomes the victim. But of course, God is no victim. So you decide that you will no longer believe in this God. So you are now Godless and you have become the victim.

We can however turn this Drama Triangle into a Winner Triangle. Yes, we will still be Rescuer, Victim or Persecutor but how we approach these roles is important. Instead of Rescuing –be Responsive –show care and compassion but negotiate what help the person needs and what you are prepared to offer. This shows genuine belief in the other person being able to take their share of the responsibility. Instead of being a Victim have a Voice – be courageous to allow yourself to be vulnerable and ask for support rather than just hint and pretend hopelessness. Instead of being a Persecutor and controlling and bullying others to do it your way, be Powerful . There are times when you can take charge and say what needs to happen, but do it in a respectful way that allows the other person to still keep their power.

If we follow this way of living in all our dealings with God and human beings we might follow less the mimetic theory of Girard and our lives might be more open to what God has in store for us.