



Dry Bones

Hear the Word of the Lord

Weekly Topics

Week 1: How did we get here?

- Translating between old and new worldviews
- The origin of a violent God

Week 2: **Why do we suffer?**

- An evolutionary and mimetic understanding

Week 3: Jesus' message of love

- More on mimetic desire and scapegoating
- The death of scapegoating

Week 4: The importance of Church

- Feeding our conscious and unconscious

Week 5: Pulling it all together

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Last week

1. Our foundational retreat principle: Faith and science cannot truly contradict.
2. We are on a quest – who are you Lord God & who am I?
3. We understand truth *and* express it from within our worldview. There is no other way to do it.
 - Changing worldviews is hard work.
 - “We” used to believe in a static worldview – God created a long time ago and is pretty much done now.
 - Over the last century we’ve begun moving towards a dynamic worldview – God is in the middle of creating the world and is nowhere near done!

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Comments/Questions from last week

1. Bible questions – “Why did God do that?”
 - Church Tradition – including the Bible – teaches about God and our relationship with God. This is where the truth is.
 - Our question should always be, “what is this saying about God and our relationship with God?”
 - See “Hey Deacon Tom” article
2. How do we teach this stuff to kids?
3. Are we really getting less selfish?
4. Why did the saints mortify themselves?

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- Yahweh Prayer
- Scripture, Ez 37:1-11, 12a, 14a NRSV

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.”

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Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.

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Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: ... I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live..."

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Why do we Suffer and Die?

The mystery of suffering...

- If God created perfect humans, why did they sin?
- Why didn't God know that people would sin?
- What's wrong with knowledge?
- Why was God so heavy-handed with punishment?
- How could a loving God allow the holocaust?
- Why do the innocent and good suffer?
- Why do animals suffer?
- Why do some people get away with murder?
- Why does God bless some people and not others?

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Why do we Suffer and Die?

Some questions about suffering are based on a Fundamentalist understanding of the Bible.

- The Genesis creation stories are not historical events, but wisdom.
 - Chapter 1: The chaos of the world (and our lives) turns to goodness and order when we hear the word of the Lord.
 - Chapter 2-3: We turn from God (love) when we become obsessed with what is not ours, and then blame others for the consequences of our obsession. This causes suffering.

Other questions about suffering occur because they are unanswerable in a static worldview of salvation.

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Why do we Suffer and Die?

The wisdom of our Christian salvation history as expressed within the static worldview...

- God created (past tense) the world and us a long time ago.
- Our 'first parents' introduced sin, suffering, and death into the world.
 - Sin = breaking our relationship with God (and each other).
 - One person's actions impact the whole community.
 - The concept of Original Sin emerged in the 3rd century and was fully formed by the 5th century with the writings of St. Augustine. It became dogma at Trent (16th century).

– Wikipedia, Original Sin

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Why do we Suffer and Die?

The wisdom of our Christian salvation history as expressed within the static worldview...

- Jesus lived and died without sinning and was resurrected.
- We share in Jesus' victory over sin and death through our relationship with him, the fruit of which is a moral life.
- Yet we still suffer and die – thus, the reward for our good works must be in heaven.
- God the Father allows suffering – which implies that God could stop the suffering if God wanted to.

This is how most people thought salvation worked the until modern times.

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Why do we Suffer?

So how do we express the wisdom of salvation within a dynamic, evolutionary worldview? This theology is still being worked out, but today we'll look at suffering and death from this worldview.

Suffering originates from the chaos within evolution.

- Genetic mutations, death, self preservation, survival of the fittest, environmental disasters (tornados, earthquakes).
- This is not hopeless because Teilhard sees a direction to evolution...

Attraction ➔ Connection ➔ Complexity ➔ Consciousness

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Why do we Suffer?

Understanding why we suffer is key to understanding salvation. Today we'll investigate three aspects of suffering related to self-preservation and survival of the fittest:

- Original sin.
- Mimetic desire – we desire what others have.
- Scapegoating – what we do when our desires are frustrated.
 - "Discovering Girard", by Michael Kirwan
 - Excellent philosophy website – <https://iep.utm.edu/girard/>

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Original Sin

The key to “thinking dynamically” about Original Sin is to let go of the static idea that creation happened at a moment in time...

- People draw a line in evolutionary time and say, ‘this is when humans evolved’, but evolution is an incremental process that keeps chugging along.
- The only creative process that we have evidence for is evolution.
- Evolution requires a drive for self-preservation. For me to survive, I must kill. Otherwise, I will starve.
 - Taking more than I need is selfishness.

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Original Sin

The key to “thinking dynamically” about Original Sin is to let go of the static idea that creation happened at a moment in time...

- Self-preservation is the seed of Original Sin.
 - Sin assumes culpability (responsibility).
- As freewill evolves, so does sin. As humans evolve and gain freewill, we become more culpable for selfish actions.
 - Other primates/animals have more limited freewill and are thus limited in their capacity to sin.

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Original Sin

The seed of Original Sin started with the beginning of life (as self-preservation) and grows as creatures become conscious (self-aware) and capable of choosing love.

Attraction ➡ Connection ➡ Complexity ➡ Consciousness

The wisdom in the Genesis creation stories recognizes that there is something within us that separates us from God (love). It has been with us forever. This is true in both the old and new worldviews.

- The Bible and our Church teach about God and our relationship with God.

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Wisdom of the Christian Tradition

Humanity cannot overcome Original Sin individually – only through our connection to God and the Body of Christ. We are connected to Christ through our Baptism into the Church.

- Do you see where the teaching that there is no salvation outside of the Church comes from?
- The idea that we cannot individually overcome Original Sin will become very important over the next two weeks.

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Wisdom of the Christian Tradition

The more perfectly we love, the more human our community becomes, the more we become the Body of Christ. We are becoming the image of God.

- The view from the static worldview is that we were made in the image of God – and blew it.
- The view from the dynamic worldview is that we are evolving into the image of God.

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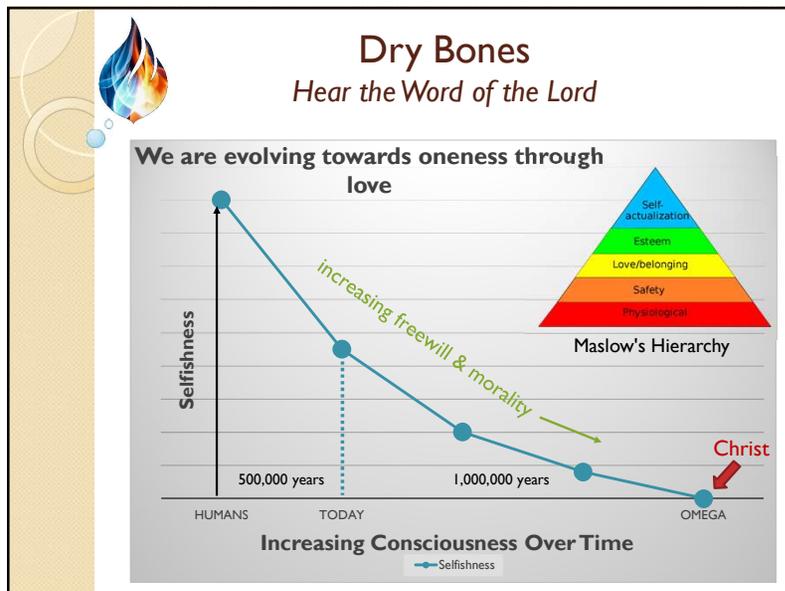
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Wisdom of the Christian Tradition

The Truth in both worldviews is that to be fully human is to be made in the image of God.

- God is separating the baby from the bathwater!
- What will be the next worldview? How will it impact our understanding of God, being human, and sin?

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Mimetic Desire

We've identified self-preservation as the seed that evolves into Original Sin...

- Self-preservation is a necessary instinct that enables us to kill to survive.
- When self-preservation wants more than it needs, it becomes selfishness.
 - Self-preservation = the protection of oneself from harm or death, especially regarded as a basic instinct in human beings and animals.
 - Selfishness = seeking or concentrating on one's own advantage, pleasure, or well-being without regard for others.

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Mimetic Desire

We've identified self-preservation as the seed that evolves into Original Sin...

- Selfishness evolves into mimetic desire.
 - Mimetic Desire = After basic needs are satisfied (food, sex, safety, shelter), people's desire becomes social.
 - People want what other people want.
 - Who are the people that have influenced you?
 - Mimetic desire can inspire you.
- Mimetic desire becomes a social problem when we are frustrated in our efforts to obtain our (competing) desires.
 - Escalating mimetic desire ➡ rivalry ➡ violence.
 - Desires – power, love, money, respect...

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Evolutionary Development of Original Sin



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graph TD
    A[Self-preservation] --> B[Selfishness]
    B --> C[Mimetic desire]
    C --> D[Original Sin]
    D --> B
  
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Escalating Mimetic Desire

What happens when I am denied what I desire?

- Frustration builds and the desire intensifies.
 - Desire becomes a need. Ex: I am not secure without...
- If I am strong enough I take what I want, but then competing desires may be frustrated.
 - Ex: Putin wants Ukraine and respect as a world leader.
- If my desire is impossible to obtain,* rivalry brews.
 - It is rightfully mine. This is unfair – which might be true.

* Impossible to obtain because of limited resources (I want your girlfriend), personal limitations (lack of musical talent), fear of punishment (too risky), wishing for what can't be changed (better parents), or social injustice (inferior education).

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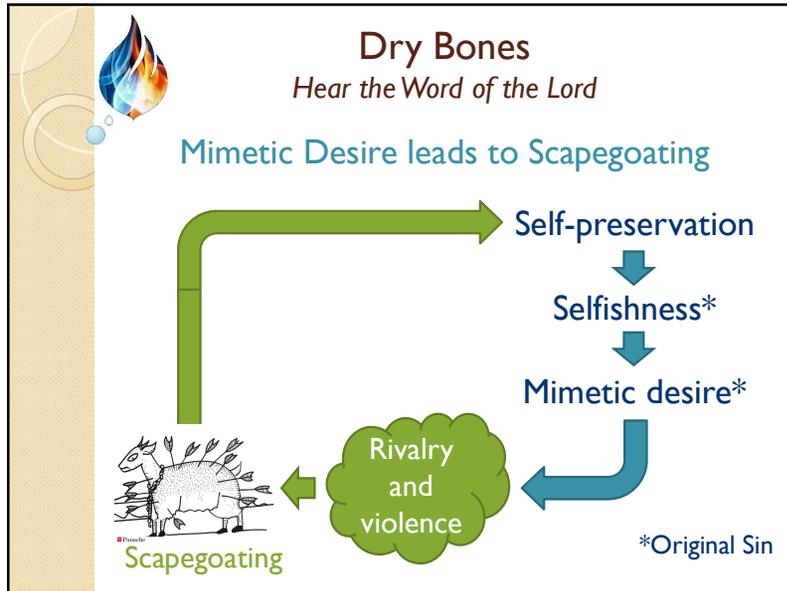
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Escalating Mimetic Desire

When I/we can't have what others have...

- Community tension builds as unfulfilled desires multiply.
- Violence erupts.
- To relieve the threat of violence, the community (or person) releases its violence on a scapegoat.
 - Scapegoat = A person or group who is blamed for the wrongdoings, mistakes, or faults of others, especially for reasons of expediency.
 - A goat sent into the wilderness after the chief priest symbolically laid the people's sins upon it (Lev. 16).
- For scapegoating to work, the injustice of it must go unrecognized. Otherwise, the rivalry won't be relieved.

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Mimetic Desire and Scapegoating Example

The second creation story via mimetic desire...

- God created man and woman and gives them everything they need in the garden of Eden. (static worldview)
- God tells them to be vegetarians but not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
 - God provides, so no need to desire more or to be ashamed of what you have. Judging good/evil leads to mimetic desire.
 - What kind of trees are in this garden?
- They see the unobtainable fruit and Adam exaggerates by telling Eve, 'God won't even let us touch that tree.'
 - The corrosiveness of mimetic desire begins.

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Mimetic Desire and Scapegoating Example

The second creation story via mimetic desire...

- The snake sees an opportunity to fuel their mimetic desire. Offering his sympathy for God's unfairness, he says, 'Did God really say you can't eat anything?'
- The woman replies, 'It's not quite that bad, but we will die if we touch the tree of knowledge!'
 - Yeah, God is so unfair. Mimetic desire is now in full swing.
- The snake impugns God's motive. 'God is a liar! You won't die. God just doesn't want you to have what you deserve.'
 - Notice how assuming ill-intent fuels evil? God, who provides everything, is now the source of their suffering.

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Mimetic Desire and Scapegoating Example

The second creation story via mimetic desire...

- Adam and Eve believe the snake to get what they want, but down deep they sense their wrongdoing.
 - We know this because they feel shame & begin the cover up.
- God comes by and says, 'why are you guys acting so weird?'
- The man says, 'because I don't have a thing to wear.'
 - The attack on God is obvious. You, God, promised to give me everything I need – but you're not doing it, are you! I should never have trusted you.
 - The scapegoating has begun.

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Mimetic Desire and Scapegoating Example

The second creation story via mimetic desire...

- God knows where this accusation comes from but gives the man a chance to explain. The man immediately throws the woman – flesh of his flesh – under the bus.
- The woman says, ‘how was I supposed to know the snake was a liar?’ Implying that God should have warned her.
- Suffering and death have entered the world.
 - Mimetic desire raises its ugly head again in the next Bible story; the murder of Abel by his brother Cain.

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Mimetic Desire and Scapegoating Example

The second creation story via mimetic desire...

- Creation is (only) the context for this story’s wisdom.
- The storytellers use a static worldview because that is how they understood the world.
- The story’s wisdom is that humans have always been susceptible to mimetic desire, and it can be deadly. This is true in both worldviews.
 - This is not the only way to interpret the wisdom within this story. No wonder it has been told for 3,000 years!

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Summary

So, why do we suffer? Because we’re not done yet.

- Evolution requires chaos; including genetic mutations, self-preservation, survival of fittest, environmental uncertainty.
- Self-preservation & survival of the fittest have evolved into selfishness and mimetic desire – but God’s not done yet!
- Unfulfilled mimetic desire leads to violence & scapegoating.

Why do we die? Because death is necessary for life.

- You and I would not be here without death.
- Death enables the next generation to evolve.
 - Evolution is the only method we know of that God uses to create life. No evolution, no life.

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Summary

However, evolution is not random. Fr. Teilhard tells us that over billions of years, creation has a clear direction...

Attraction ➡ Connection ➡ Complexity ➡ Consciousness

- The more conscious we are, the more freewill we have.
- The more freewill we have, the more we can love.
- The more we love, the closer we are to the kingdom of God.

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Revisit... Why do we Suffer and Die?

The mystery of suffering...

- If God created perfect humans, why did they sin?
- Why didn't God know that people would sin?
- What's wrong with knowledge?
- Why was God so heavy-handed with punishment?
- How could a loving God allow the holocaust?
- Why do the innocent and good suffer?
- Why do animals suffer?
- Why do some people get away with murder?
- Why does God bless some people and not others?

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Table Discussion

It is through our relationship with each other and God that we have hope of relieving suffering

Name one thing that struck you in today's presentation and that you will think/pray about this week.

Insights to share with the whole group?

Next Week –
Jesus' message of love... and the death of scapegoating!

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