**The World’s Gone Mad - Week 2 - Mad at Us**

**Message Big Idea**: God matures us as a community when we extend grace.

**Scripture**: Ephesians 4:3, 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, Matthew 28:19-20, Matthew 22:37-39, John 17:22-23, Matthew 5:23-24, 2 Corinthians 5:14, 18-19.

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**Introduction: Church Fights**

*(Series Graphic)* It may come as a surprise, but sometimes we don’t all get along! I know. Shocking, right? But sometimes we fight! And here’s the most shocking statement of all: sometimes we fight with each other. We fight, and we fight about the silliest things.

Thom Rainer, an author and church leader, did a Twitter survey to find out the silly things people fought about in churches. And the most common response: The temperature in the church building. Which is ridiculous, isn’t it? Everyone knows it should be set to 68 degrees!

Rainer went on to list 25 of the silliest arguments he gathered from his survey:

* A fight over which picture of Jesus to put in the lobby. His Facebook profile pic, of course.
* A dispute over whether the worship leader should have his shoes on during the service.
* And an argument that broke out because the church used cran-grape juice instead of grape juice for Communion. Obviously, Jesus used Welch’s Grape Juice when he said “this do in remembrance of me.”

While these examples seem petty and absurd, the truth is that most of us have experienced something at church that made us mad:

* A conflict in a small group.
* An argument about a political belief.
* A decision by a leader we didn’t agree with.
* A justice issue we felt was being ignored.
* A careless word that stung.

In fact, I want you to challenge you, before we get into today’s Big Idea, to let God bring to mind one or more conflicts you’ve had with people in a church setting…arguments that have never really been resolved…rifts that have contributed to disunity.

The reality is that if you stick around church long enough you will eventually get mad at something or someone. I’m not sure I like that some of you are nodding “yes” so demonstratively. ☺ Anytime a group of people get together, the opportunity for conflict is inevitable. It’s pretty easy to get mad at “us.”

**Series Recap**

We’re in week 2 of our series “The World’s Gone Mad.” It seems anger is in the air, doesn’t it? Everywhere you turn people are mad about something.

And we’re getting angrier! According to a survey of 3,000 Americans by NBC News and Esquire magazine, half of us say we are angrier today than we were a year ago.[[1]](#endnote-1) It feels like everyone is walking around with that “angry face” emoji above his or her head.



Last week we talked about **“Mad at Me”**. Sometimes our anger is directed at ourselves. We’re mad at ourselves for mistakes we’ve made. We learned that God’s grace is bigger than anything we have done or not done, and we can let go of our anger towards ourselves when we **Embrace Grace.**

Next week we’re going to talk about **“Mad at Them”** as we look outward at the things in our world that make us mad.

But today, we’re talking about **“Mad at Us”**, and whom do we mean by “us”? The church. Those of us who call ourselves followers of Jesus and come together in this place as a community of Christ-followers called “the church.”

Now after talking about all this fighting, I want to welcome our guests! Ha! Seriously though, this is a beautiful community with people who care about each other. But again, anytime you put a group of people together, there inevitably will be conflict. Chances are good that at some point everyone will experience getting “mad at us.”

**God’s Desire: Unity**

Why is it important to talk about this? Because what’s at stake here is something really important… something God desires for us as a community: **Unity**.

The Apostle Paul describes God’s vision for unity in Ephesians 4 when he says: *(add)*

***“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:3***

Paul spends the first three chapters of Ephesians laying the foundation of unity: that because of Jesus we are all brought together as one. Different people from different backgrounds all united in Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Then when Paul gets to chapter 4, he calls on Christ-followers to do whatever they can do to keep that unity that God has established in Jesus.

Notice Paul says, **“Make every effort.”** That’s because unity is not easy. It can be disrupted if we don’t work at it. Unity is not something that we can just assume will be there without any effort on our part. It’s as if Paul is giving us a heads up that there will be things in the church that will upset us. Not everything is going to be perfect where we’re all holding hands and singing kumbaya! The evil one wants nothing more than a church that is caught up in fighting and distracted from the mission. “But you don’t understand!” you might say, I’m mad!” I’m not saying we can’t or won’t get mad, but we’re called to maintain unity in the midst of it.

However, making every effort to keep unity is not the choice most of us make when we come into conflict with another person.

Let’s pretend you’re mad at the person sitting next to you. In fact, turn to the person next to you and say, “I’m mad at you!”

So what are you going to do about it? Typically we respond in one of two ways:

* Either we **Fight** – Some of us love a good fight. We verbally punch and jab maybe directly or passive aggressively. In response to conflict some of us fight and others of us choose…
* *(add)* **Flight** – Maybe you cringe at the thought of conflict. Your reaction is to run away from it.

Raise your hand if you tend to respond with fight? How about flight? See, half of us respond with fight and half with flight. Maybe we should put all the fighters together and see what happens. ☺

I tend to respond with “flight.” My reaction to conflict is often to put distance between myself and the other person. I avoid. I move on as if nothing happened. *(Share a short personal example.)* But when I look back on the times I have done that in my life, it is easy to see the result: a fracturing of unity.

That is what happens when we choose “Fight” or “Flight.” The bond of peace is broken. Unity is destroyed.

That’s not God’s dream for our community. His dream is unity. He laid the groundwork for unity through Jesus.

So rather than “Fight” or “Flight,” I want to challenge us to a third response; and it’s to **Unite** for the sake of God’s dream. For when a community is fractured, people get distracted, discouraged, and even disillusioned about what we’re really called to do. Making every effort to keep unity is so important.

**Unity: What it is not**

So if unity is so important, what does it actually look like? I think it’s important that we first understand what it’s not.

If you are a “flight” person, you may think unity means everyone thinking and acting alike. No debates! No relational conflict! In fact, it would be great if everyone thought and acted like you, wouldn’t it? Then we would all just get along!

Not exactly. **Unity does not mean uniformity.** And while uniformity would be much simpler and cleaner, God does not call us to uniformity. We’re not all the same. That’s something to celebrate. Think about it, how boring a world would we live in if we were all the same? If everyone were like me, we would be in trouble!

God never calls us to look the same, function the same, or use our gifts in the same way. He created us to thrive in different ways. A vital aspect of unity is not uniformity, but diversity. Paul describes this diversity by using the metaphor of a body:

***“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” -1 Corinthians 12:12-14***

The truth is the church functions best when there’s diversity, not uniformity. That’s because diversity compels us to look beyond our preferences and opinions and defer in humility to the whole. In diversity my focus is not on me as an individual, but on the community. Unity is so much deeper than uniformity.

“But shouldn’t we agree on at least some things?” Yes, we should. We would say that there are certain core beliefs that are important for us to agree on: beliefs about God, Jesus, Salvation, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the authority of Scripture. These are what we call the big ones. Outside of these big ones, we value diversity of preference and opinion because that’s what makes this community beautiful. That’s what helps us to function in the way God intends.

**Unity: What it is**

So, now that we understand what unity is *not;* let’s talk about what unity is. I could say a lot about this, but let me just jump to the bottom line and then explain how I got there. The bottom line is this -- **Unity is mission criticial** for what Got wants to do in your life and in this world. Mission critical! It’s important that we understand this because I believe most of us consider unity a nice thing or a good thing; but I’m not convinced that we understand that unity between us ­– God’s people ­– is mission critical.

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Let me share how we came to this understanding – that unity is mission critical…

**The Great Commission (GO!)**

When we think of Jesus and his mission, one of the first Scriptures we turn to is Matthew 28 where Jesus instructs his followers:

***“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” –Matthew 28:19-20***

This passage is known as “The Great Commission,” *(Venn diagram with “GO!”)* and in word it could be summarized as “GO!” We get excited about that! We believe that we have to go and take the good news of Jesus to all people!

**The Great Commandment (LOVE!)**

But Jesus didn’t just tell us to go, he also told us *how* we were to go. And we find that in the great commandment in Matthew 22:

***“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” –Matthew 22:37-38***

We aren’t called just to “Go!” *(Venn diagram with “LOVE!”)* we are also called to “LOVE!” as we go. Love is key! Love changes everything!

**The Great Collaboration (UNITY!)**

But there is a third essential part to the Jesus mission, and it’s what we’re talking about today.

* It’s why we are so passionate about being one church that meets in many locations around the Chicago area.
* It’s why we join together with other churches like we did earlier this year for the city-wide “Explore God” series.
* It’s why we are actively involved with partnering with churches across the country and around the world through NewThing.

*(Venn diagram with “UNITY!”)* We can call it “The Great Collaboration!” In order to carry out the Jesus mission, we have to join together. Unity is mission critical!

I believe that is why Jesus, on the night before his crucifixion, when a million different things had to be going through his mind, focused his prayer for us on one thing. Jesus prayed:

***“…that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me...” –John 17:22b-23***

Jesus prayed for unity. Notice, Jesus didn’t say unity was a nice thing or a good thing – no, he called it mission critical! Jesus says there is something about us living in unity; us getting along; us working together and loving each other that will convince an unbelieving world that he was sent by God to love them. Unity is mission critical! *(Completed Venn diagram)*

* Yes, we are to GO!
* Yes we are to LOVE!
* But here is what I believe is so often missing from the mission: We are to GO and LOVE, in UNITY!

It’s only when we put all three of these together that we will accomplish the JESUS MISSION!

**“Making Effort”**

This explains why Jesus was so emphatic about unity, and always challenges people to be reconciled with each other. Listen to what he says in his most famous sermon:

***“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.” -Matthew 5:23-24***

In these words I hear Jesus challenging us in several ways regarding unity…

First, Jesus is telling us that *(Add below the verse)* **Unity Requires Reflection.** Notice, Jesus says, ***“If you are at the altar and there remember that someone has something against you…”*** Unity requires that we regularly and honestly evaluate what is going on inside us. It’s easier to just feel mad; feel disappointed; and feel like you are in the right and that the other person is just a jerk! But Jesus challenges us to go beyond this primary feeling and ask, “Why am I feeling this from someone else?” OR “Why is someone acting distant or angry toward me?” Counselors will tell you that anger is a secondary emotion and that what a person is really feeling is hurt or pain. Once you do the work of reflection and start dealing with your own inner pain or how you might have caused other people’s inner pain, you are ready to take a step towards reconciliation. Dealing with this stuff is risky…emotionally and relationally risky, but it is essential to unity.

I think Jesus is also reminding us that *(Switch this out below the verse)* **Unity Requires Determination.** It is hard. Understand, Jesus spoke these words to people who lived in Galilee, about 80 miles north of Jerusalem. The only “altar” at which an offering could be made was that of the temple in Jerusalem. So when he says to leave the gift at the altar and go be reconciled to your brother or sister first, that might have involved a journey of a week or more back to Galilee to make things right before returning to give your offering. The difficulty in this proves Jesus’ point… reconciliation is hard! It will often require some kind of challenging decision on your part to lay down your pride or your own interests or your preferences. It requires determination to pursue unity.

One more thing we can take away from Jesus’ words: *(Switch this out below the verse)* **Unity Requires Initiative.** Unity starts with me! Unity is my responsibility. Unity is your responsibility. Unity starts with me!

* + In Matthew 5 Jesus uses an example of you recognizing that someone has something against you – and he says, “You go to him or her and be reconciled.”
	+ Later on in Matthew 18, Jesus uses an example where you realize that you have something against someone – and he says, “You go to him or her and be reconciled.”

Either way – if someone has something against me OR if I have something against someone else, unity starts with me! Let that sink in. Turn to the person next to you, point to your chest and say, “Unity starts with me.” *(“Unity starts with me.”)*

**Conclusion: Extend Grace**

If you stick around the church long enough, chances are you’re going to get mad. Anytime you put a group of people together, the opportunity for conflict is, well, inevitable. It’s pretty easy to get mad at “us.”

Last week, when we talked about our mistakes, the things we have done wrong or the things we just didn’t do right, the challenge was to **Embrace Grace.**

Today, as we think about the ways we have wronged one another, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the challenge I want to leave us with is to not only embrace the grace we have received but also (**Extend Grace**) extend that grace to one another. Let’s move beyond the conflict between us and

So let me ask you… Who is that person for you? The person who came to mind all the way at the beginning of this talk when I asked you to think of conflicts you’ve had with people in a church setting…arguments that have never really been resolved…rifts that have contributed to disunity.

* Is it someone in this room?
* Is it a friend and something has come between you?
* Is it a family member and you haven’t talked for months…maybe years?
* Or perhaps there is a long held grudge between you and your spouse?

Who is that person for you? Jesus longs for unity in his church, and that is why he says: ***”…go and be reconciled to them.”***

I know this is difficult. So why should we make the effort? Because it is the way to freedom. God’s grace has set us free, and we now can extend grace to set not only other people, but ourselves free.

God dreams for unity in his church.

Jesus prayed for unity in his church.

So let’s you and I ***“…make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”***

*Conclude by praying for reconciliation in relationships.*

**Communion Idea**

As we come to a time of communion, I want to share this from 2 Corinthians 5:

***“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”*** - 2 Corinthians 5:14 & 18-19

During this communion time, the God of reconciliation is iniating with you yet again. He is coming to you in the bread and in the cup. The bread is a reminder of the body of Christ broken for you and the cup is reminder of the blood of Christ shed for you. And while you sit passively in your seat, Christ comes to you offering reconciliation with God. All you have to do is receive it. So if you want to be reconciled with God, either for the first time or yet again – we welcome you to join us in communion.

1. <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a40693/american-rage-nbc-survey/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)