

“[RE]FRAME - When Conflict is Just Fighting with God”

Scripture: Mark 11:27-13:37

Graphics: frames, pictures, conflict, agreement

Big Truth: The story of Jesus’ final week on Earth has multiple levels of understanding and meaning. What the events and actions seem to be on the surface are not always what they appear. In our walk with Jesus in the church, it’s easy to lose sight of the bigger picture while reading or hearing about the events of Jesus’ life. This series will help us see the bigger picture through the scenes that lead to the cross and empty tomb on Easter.

Focus phrase: Focusing on God’s will for me silences the conflict in my life.

1. Introduction

A. PRAY!!!

- B. (grab frame) To [RE]FRAME a picture is to physically remove an old picture from a frame and put it into a new or different frame. When you do that, you will see the picture in a brand new way...new colors, new faces, new objects.
- C. To [RE]FRAME a circumstance or story is to understand something in a new way...in a different way...a way that, just like the picture, can help us see something in a different light.
- D. So far, in this sermon series, called [RE]FRAME, we’ve spent time with Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem on a colt. We answered the question: *what kind of king is Jesus?*
- E. Last week, we watched Jesus passionately dismantle part of the temple as he proclaimed that dead religion in the temple would not produce more fruit...that the temple was going to be replaced in Him. The question we answered was: does Jesus have my heart and is He my first love?
- F. In both of those stories, we reframed the old narrative to see some things that maybe we hadn’t seen before.
- G. In our third message for this series today, we’ll continue to do that same thing.
- H. Today is all about **conflict!** Conflict is something in which we ALL engage. Conflict is most often pretty simple: it’s two people or sides that have offered their truth and those two truths are not the same...so we get conflict.
- I. Stephen Moyer said, “Conflict is drama, and how people deal with conflict shows you the kind of people they are.”
- J. But conflict isn’t all bad. It can lead to change! Thomas Paine said, “The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.”
- K. Conflict was brewing in Jesus’ life during His last week on earth...and He addressed the conflict...not by destroying it, but by walking through it.

- L. We have conflict in OUR OWN lives. It may not be fist-fights or name-calling, but we struggle with our politics, our relationships have conflict - sometimes complicated or hidden for years, our work, our community, our schools. Not only that, but we have internal conflict - with what we want, what we need, what we think. AND, not only those, but we also have conflict with Jesus and His desire for us to follow Him, to obey and serve and share what we have. We want to do ONE thing and Jesus wants us to do another.
- M. None of that is foreign to Jesus. But Jesus has some things to teach us about His RESPONSE to conflict. If we listen, we can reduce the conflict in all areas of our lives, just like Jesus did with a religious leader one day. Conflict and how we deal with it is at the core of who we are as followers of Jesus. If we fight like the world, we will not only lose the conflict, but lose our souls in the process. Jesus has a better way for us.
- N. The section of scripture that we'll look at today spans almost three full chapters in the gospel of Mark. And it's CHOCKED FULL of conflict.
- O. Before you get wide-eyed on me, we're not going to read it all. But it's important to point out some major themes to identify the CONFLICT we see around Jesus.
- P. Then, we'll zoom in on one particular and familiar passage...and we'll REFRAAME it to see some things we maybe didn't see before about the antidote to conflict in any form.
- Q. This message is called When Conflict is Just Fighting with God. As we'll see, conflict is less about being at odds with others...and more to do with being at odds with God's best plan for our lives.
- R. If you're taking notes this morning, here's where we're heading: **Focusing on God's will silences the conflict in my life.**
- S. In your bibles, turn with me to Mark chapter 11, starting in verse 27.

2. Scripture

- A. Now, Jesus had just rode into Jerusalem, alarming the religious and political leaders who were in charge in the city. Conflict was brewing.
- B. Jesus then walked into the temple and overturned tables and cast people out. Again, something that angered the people who were in charge of the temple.
- C. And throughout this next whole section, from 11:27-13:37, there were leaders like the Pharisees and Sadducees...and they had high priests and scribes and elders. In different scenes, there are some or all of these characters. For our purposes today, we'll just call them all the **religious leaders**.
- D. Those religious leaders were in serious conflict with Jesus and his disciples soon after they arrived on the scene.

- E. In verse 18, we read last week, here's what Mark wrote, "And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it (the commotion in the temple), that kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching." Talk about CONFLICT!
- F. Jesus and his teachings were the SOURCE of the conflict.
- G. In verse 27, they're all back in Jerusalem...back in the temple. Mark writes, "Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?"
- H. Conflict. After worship, you can read what Jesus said to them...but Jesus answered them by asking a question they couldn't answer. That sure CONFOUNDED those religious leaders.
- I. Not only that, but Jesus went on in chapter 12 to tell the parable of the Wicked Tenants. And in that parable, Jesus basically said, "You religious leaders are wicked and will kill the Son of God AND God will destroy you." Wow! Subtle, Jesus! MORE conflict.
- J. Look at verse 12:12. "When they realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So they left him and went away."
- K. In the next TWO sections, it's not the chief priests grilling Jesus, but some OTHER religious leaders sent by them to grill Jesus...trying to TRAP Jesus (it says in verse 13).
- L. They asked Jesus about paying taxes in verses 13-17. They asked Jesus about resurrection in 18-27. In both cases, the trap they'd planned didn't work. And, in fact, the Sadducees and Pharisees actually found themselves being amazed at Jesus...maybe not on-board, but at least wondering why He was different.
- M. So there was conflict and more conflict...BUT, a crack in the plan of the religious leaders to trap Jesus, have him arrested, and kill him.
- N. The next section, verses 28-34, is where we'll focus today...but skip over that for a minute. Right after that section, the conflict continues...questions about David's Son, Jesus denouncing the scribes, Jesus' bold prediction that the temple will be destroyed (in chapter 13), and Jesus' teaching that what is now will be gone...and it will be replaced.
- O. The conflict was increasing because the religious leaders had their truth on one side, and Jesus had His truth on the other side.
- P. And one side was going to win...and one side was going to lose. The amazing thing about this whole conflict is that the losers would become winners if they

were to sit down, release their control of power, and truly understand what Jesus was saying...and who He is!

- Q. American labor leader and civil rights activist Dolores Huerta is quoted as saying, “When you have a conflict, that means that there are truths that have to be addressed on each side of the conflict. And when you have a conflict, then it's an educational process to try to resolve the conflict. And to resolve that, you have to get people on both sides of the conflict involved so that they can dialogue.”
- R. So, we get to the main picture for today. Jesus’ teaching of the Greatest Commandment, right in the middle of Mark’s narrative about the incredible conflict happening around Jesus. In chapter 12, verse 28, one single scribe - one man who had heard what Jesus was saying and who witnessed all the conflict - came near and heard the conflict happening. But also heard Jesus.
- S. This scribe, whose name we don’t know, wanted to sit down and dialogue with Jesus. Maybe he wanted to keep trying to trap Jesus, but that’s not the feel we get from this section. The sense we get is that this single scribe wanted to find a way through the conflict. The conflict around him...but more importantly, the conflict within him. Let’s read this section...

T. READ verses 12:28-34

- i. Right smack dab in the middle of all this conflict swirling around Jesus and this scribe, these two teachers agreed with each other.
- ii. The conflict was about power and control and tradition and money. The conflict was about me, us, we, them, you, they...about taking sides and finding ways to distrust and trap and shame the other. To kill Jesus. The conflict was just fighting with God...and fighting God causes people to fight each OTHER!
- iii. The way through the conflict was to listen to Jesus, not about me versus you or us versus them, but about the God at the center of the universe. The way through the conflict was to trust that there IS one God, that God wants us to love Him, and that God wants us to love each other.
- iv. The conflict that seemed to be about everything BUT God’s true will was REFRAMED so that God’s true will was the focus of the discussion.
- v. God’s will is that the scribe would acknowledge that there is only ONE true God...not many. That he should love God with everything he has. And that he should love his neighbors in the same way he loves God.
- vi. Jesus was saying, in the midst of the conflicts around him, that if we make those three things the MAIN thing, then there is NO room for continued conflict with others or within ourselves.

- vii. And if conflict is continuously present in the life of a person who is following Jesus, then she or he is not obeying the greatest commandment. Notice I didn't say just present, but continuously present. All conflict doesn't stop...it just doesn't STAY.
- viii. When this season in Jesus' life was REFRAMED with God in the picture, then at least this one scribe saw Jesus' truth, which, church, is THE ONLY PURE TRUTH that exists in this world.
- ix. This is ALL about God's revelation of who He is as seen in Jesus.

3. Application

- A. Conflict is no stranger to our world, our nation, our government. Conflict is no stranger to our communities, or our schools or businesses. Conflict, for sure, is no stranger to our United Methodist denomination or the Church of Jesus Christ. And, you know that conflict is no stranger in your own life.
- B. It seems like, this week, while preparing a sermon about conflict, I experienced more conflict in my life and in the world than ever before. And we sometimes feel powerless to fix it, especially when it's global viruses, large groups of people in conflict, interpersonal conflict with no clear solution, or when we're in unfamiliar territory.
- C. I'm certainly not going to stand up here today and say that if you do these 2 or 3 things, then you won't ever have conflict in your life.
- D. In fact, I would go so far as to say that without some conflict in our lives, you and I couldn't grow or even begin to broaden our minds to see more than we see now. We wouldn't be compelled to humble ourselves, or learn to listen and love more than we do now. Without conflict, you and I wouldn't be awakened to the need or desire to change...to be more like Jesus.
- E. When conflict flares up in your life, you have three options.
 - i. #1 - You can ignore it and pretend it isn't happening.
 - ii. #2 - You can square off and fight for *your* truth, seeking to destroy the other. Or...
 - iii. #3 - You can define yourself with what you know about God's standards, and then turn to the One True God and ask Him, "What do you want, God?"
- F. It may turn out that God's answer to that prayer, while in the conflict, is that He's the one pushing the conflict in order for the mission to continue. God may be creating a keen awareness that something is not right and must be addressed for the sake of His justice.
 - i. As we take a 30,000-foot view of this while section of scripture, the first part has the religious leaders pushing the conflict...questioning and planning traps and wanting to kill Jesus.

- ii. By the time we get to the second half of this section, after the discussion of the Greatest Commandment, Jesus is one pushing the conflict - foretelling the temple's destruction, questioning the religious leaders, and asking people to dig deep to ask themselves what they truly believe.
- G. So, it might be that you're experiencing the conflict because God's in inviting you to consider things in a new way...or to find a way to get on board with the mission of God to make disciples and truly love God and others.
- H. On the other hand, God's answer to your prayer for clarity in the conflict is that He wants you to change because He sees something in you that's not yet perfected.
- I. Changing means that you have to humble yourself and possibly let someone else get their way, OR God is asking you to change your mind, lay down the pride, and truly love the other.
- J. That doesn't always mean that the disagreement is settled. It means that God is putting His desire to teach you, change you, and use you to show love and grace to your neighbor ABOVE the conflict.
- K. Either way that prayer is answered, conflict is what leads us to the Greatest Commandment to love God and love our neighbors.
- L. If we go all the way back to Creation, conflict entered the world when the first humans decided to rebel against God and seek to be like Him. Conflict is just fighting with God.
- M. Every time you and I, as followers of Jesus, give into temptation to sin, cheat, lie, steal, gossip, lack care or love, or even hold grudges, it creates an internal conflict. It creates relational conflict. Jesus wants that conflict to be reconciled. Not to be ignored...but to love through it so that peace can rise.
- N. Every time you find yourself wanting to fight or make a point or win, conflict is present. God is calling you to turn to Him and ask, "God, what do you want?"
- O. EVERY TIME there is conflict, God is wooing you back to the most basic command - the greatest commandment - to love Him and love others.
- P. Focusing on God's will and way will calm the conflict because it will no longer be about the other or the internal struggle...it'll be about loving God and loving your neighbor.

4. Conclusion

- A. Jesus knew that the only way for the world to be saved was by walking through the conflict...through the mockery, the beatings, the shame...all the way to the cross.

- B. When he started to see some of the people - including the religious leaders - understand what he was teaching and who he was, He kept reaching farther and farther to extend the conflict to others...so that they too would come to believe.
- C. Imagine a church that is far more interested in inviting people to believe in Jesus, and of loving each other, than with fighting in conflict about the things that divide us or living with the internal conflict.
- D. Jesus is inviting us, today, to REFRAME conflict and our daily lives, along with the work of the church to be focused on the mission of love.
- E. As Jesus presses on, so do we, to the cross and the empty tomb.
- F. This week, take stock of ANY conflict in your life, and then pray the simple prayer, "God, what do you want?" Focus on loving God and loving the other party in the conflict...maybe that other person is yourself.
- G. Then, listen for Jesus' words, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God."
- H. Let's pray...