

Four Scenes in the Life of Jesus Through the Scapegoating Lens

Ken Wilson, 3/31/19

[Review scapegoat theory as a lens for reading Scripture and understanding the meaning of the life, death, rising of Jesus.]

Oppression of all kinds employs scapegoat mechanism. Accusations are made that victims often internalize. These are often imbedded in the culture, like the idea that black men are more dangerous than white men. False narratives about women, minorities, are generated, that allow groups to resolve their internal conflicts by stigmatizing, oppressing, expelling.

The life of Jesus offers a path through this suffering. First for the victims of scapegoating but also as a call to stand with the victims for those who are on the long side of the power stick.

Today four important scenes-scenarios in the life of Jesus in gospel of Luke: Baptism/ Encounter with the Accuser in Wilderness/ Tensions from the Hometown Peeps/Family Tensions.

BAPTISM

Setting: John the Baptist arises as first publically recognized prophet in a few hundred years ... not in temple or capital city, but in wilderness, where Israel became the people of God, where best work of Spirit begins. His prophetic message, "proclaiming a baptism of the heart's transformation, for the forgiveness of sins"

Luke 3: 21-23

"so it was supposed" [the moral-sexual stigma attached to Jesus' uncertain paternity]
Today we call those outside the society norm on matters of sexuality & gender, "**queer**"
Grounds for making the case that Jesus was a form of queer.

"voice from heaven" Amy Jill Levine says this phrase is part of the Jewish understanding of Holy Spirit as a feminine presence; in Hebrew, **"the voice from heaven"** was understood as the **"bat qol"** or **"daughter of the voice,"** [*bat*, daughter (*bat mitzvah*) *qol*, voice] *bat qol* was a rare and special means of divine communication.

It's well known Jesus experienced God as Abba (Dear Father)

Less well known that in his baptism, the divine voice was an experience of the **divine feminine**. [Lord's Prayer today]
Rembrandt Prodigal Son painting

What if you experienced the voice of God as an experience of the divine feminine? Does that appeal to you? It's possible.

“you are my beloved, in you I have delighted” the feeling of intense, unconditional, inclusion or belonging, of favor [father was irritable, mother was opposite, cannot recall criticism—so it would be most natural for me to identify this voice with divine feminine

Super important as this is the experience of God Jesus conveys...feeling of unconditional inclusion-belonging. Ben's sermon “go where you are celebrated”

Easter baptism: immersion into Christ, and into the Spirit experienced as the bot qol, divine feminine

ENCOUNTER WITH THE ACCUSER IN WILDERNESS

Luke 4: 1-4, 9-13

Mystical-visionary experience induced by fasting, silence, long walks, immersion in nature without human contact [heightened sensory experience silence retreat] ... in wilderness Jesus is having a heightened sensitivity to spirit known as Accuser/Slanderer

The work of the Holy Spirit, bot qol experience is inclusion, belonging, favor, delight [opposite of shame]; work of the slandered is opposite: accusation that insinuates itself: lying to the self from within the self about the self [insinuation effect]

Any scapegoating event begins and spreads through accusation—spreading unconsciously through imitation in a crowd, which morphs into a mob, if enough people don't object

In the wilderness Jesus is getting a divine tutorial in how humans experience the power that drives scapegoating ... **psychological warfare of scapegoating on the scapegoated**

Notice: the Accuser/Slanderer presents in religious garb, wrapping its accusation in Scripture [White Supremacy wrapped its accusation against black people in Scripture—descendants of Ham destined for slavery as punishment from God; Gender and Sexual Minorities know well how accusation is wrapped in Scripture; as late as 19th Century

common to justify subordination of women texts of inferiority—shifted to “equal in dignity” but unfit to lead

Jesus refutes with his own Scripture.

The Accuser sets up a false frame: *If you are son of God, then you will do this.* All abusers do this, set a false frame, “If you really love me, then you will forgive me again for hitting you” If you really love me, you will lie to cover up my drinking ...

Jesus refutes by refusing to accept the false frame

Accusation takes this take: “If you are beloved of God, prove it be doing something extraordinary” Subtle “I don’t think you are beloved, but only way to prove it is going above and beyond

Women in male dominated fields know this pressure—have to perform at a higher level than their male peers to receive half the credit. **Michelle Obama memoir**, pressure she felt as black woman to prove herself in white-dominated, white collar land. Huge pressure on minorities to prove themselves by extraordinary performance.

Scot McKnight: If gay Christian movement is of God then it should produce new theology, new music

Work of accusation is episodic and opportunistic comes/goes/looks for an opportune time to return [cite text’

TENSIONS FROM THE HOMETOWN PEEPS [text on your sheet]

So now we know what the Spirit feels like [feminine voice of assurance, inclusion, favor, delight, belonging] ... and what the anti-spirit feels like [an accusing, slandering voice, that insinuates itself into the self, against the self, sets up false framing, seducing potential scapegoats into cooperating with their scapegoaters

In his hometown, both powers are at work. Long tradition in Israel that prophets were rejected by their countrymen. Mark of Prophet

Lk. 4: 16-30 Read and Comment

- *Jesus an observant Jew*

- *Spirit he received isn't just for him but for everyone, especially the destitute, downtrodden, captives*
- He sat (posture of teaching with authority)
- "gazed at him" foreboding, stare (minority experience: male gaze, scrutiny black people feel in a white crowd, gay couple holding hands in public, scrutiny a transgender person feels going into BR, attention the parent of an autistic child feels in supermarket)
- Initial false praise, followed by resentment
- Rivalry with another town (Capernaum)
- They feel entitled to signs because they are homies
- Jesus refuses their framing
- Accusation-resentment spreads like an electric pulse thru crowd, spontaneous scapegoating attempt that fails

MOST PAINFUL EFFECT OF JESUS HOMETOWN SYNAGOGUE REJECTION

What happened? How did his mother and brothers turn against Jesus this way? So upset with him that they attempted an intervention? Taking control of him by force, if he would have allowed it. Scapegoat theory has a simple answer: they unconsciously absorbed the view of their small village and of their synagogue. In the same way a gay child encounters an otherwise loving parent who can't rejoice in their wedding because their local church, and their entire social network can't. It's not a conscious decision, it's an unconscious act of imitation.

SUMMARY OF THE SCAPEGOAT MECHANISM

The bane of our existence is violence fueled by rivalry.

Our rivalries are fueled by our highly advanced ability to **imitate**, not just external gestures, but internal states, including **desire**.

We often want what others want because they want it. And we are unaware that our desire is imitative.

Humans have stumbled into a mostly **unconscious** mechanism for resolving internal group conflicts. Groups often tend to **project** our many internal conflicts (our rivalries fueled by wanting what others want because they want it) on a **vulnerable** individual or group. This starts when an **accusation** is made against them (usually false, or partly true, or simply irrelevant) and the group rallies around the accusation, which spreads throughout the group thanks to imitation. If left unchecked (by enough people objecting) the group turns into a **mob** that expels the accused, leading to a temporary peace-calm (until rivalries break out again.)

While ancient myths and stories often were told by the victors (the scapegoaters) who assume the guilt of the scapegoats, many stories in the Bible are told from the perspective of the victims who are innocent, of the crimes they were charged with. This is the unmasking of the scapegoat mechanism. The life, death, and rising of Jesus is part of God's effort to **unmask** the scapegoat mechanism so that we can walk in the way of love.

And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up and, as he was accustomed to do, he entered the synagogue on the day of the Sabbath and stood up to read. And a scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him, and having opened the scroll he found the place where it was written: "A Spirit of the Lord is upon me; hence he has anointed me to announce good tidings to the destitute, he has sent me out to proclaim release of the captives and sight to the blind, to send the downtrodden forth in liberty, To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And, having closed the scroll and returning it to the attendant, he sat; and the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were gazing at him. And he began by saying to them, "Today, in your ears, this scripture has been fulfilled." And all professed their admiration for him and were amazed at the words of grace coming out of his mouth, and they said, "Is this man not Joseph's son?" And he said to them, "Surely you will quote me this parable: 'Physician, heal yourself'; the things we head were happening in Capernaum, do them here as well, in your native country." And he said, "Amen, I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. And I tell you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was sealed up for over three years and six months, as a great famine took place over all the land, And to none of them was Elijah sent except to a widowed woman of Sarepta in Sidon. And there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them were cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." And all in the synagogue were filled with rage when they heard these things, And rising up they drove him outside the city, and led him to the edge of the mountain on which their city was built so as to throw him down; But he passed through their midst and went away.