



**“CONFLICT AND COMMUNITY”**  
**QUESTIONS FOR GOD PREACHING SERIES**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**July 15, 2018**  
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**2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19**

6:1 David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand.

6:2 David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim.

6:3 They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart

6:4 with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark.

6:5 David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

6:12b So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing;

6:13 and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling.

6:14 David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod.

6:15 So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

6:16 As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

6:17 They brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the LORD.

6:18 When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts,

6:19 and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

### **Mark 6:14-29**

6:14 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him."

6:15 But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."

6:16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

6:17 For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her.

6:18 For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

6:19 And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not,

6:20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him.

6:21 But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee.

6:22 When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it."

6:23 And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom."

6:24 She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer."

6:25 Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

6:26 The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests,

he did not want to refuse her.

6:27 Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison,

6:28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother.

6:29 When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

The Word of the LORD

**Thanks be to God.**

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Richard: How do we respond to family and friends who continue to justify cruelty and discrimination against others? (put orange card in the basket)

Marcia: Will the world ever be a common humanity working together to solve problems and live in peace? (put orange card in the basket)

Richard: Why do Christians bicker over matters of the church? (put orange card in the basket)

Marcia: Why is there abortion? (put orange card in the basket)

Richard: How can we be tolerant of people who are not tolerant? (put orange card in the basket)

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This week on "As the Bible Turns" Michal (Meehal), Saul's daughter, burns with hate for her husband, David. And David dances without appropriate undergarments while everyone was watching. What will Michal (Meehal) and the other "Real Housewives of Jerusalem" do to make love or war between the house of Saul and the house of David?

Herod's birthday party goes off the rails when John the Baptist's head is delivered on a platter. Is King Herod really just a dirty old man? Will his kingdom turn against him because he divorced his wife to marry his brother, Philip's, wife? Will Jesus of Nazareth be the next victim of Herod's insecurity?

Anyone who says the Bible is boring hasn't read it very closely. This book is filled with relationship drama as cringe-worthy as *Keeping up with the Kardashians* and as much bad parenting as *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*. And violence that gives Quentin Tarantino a run for his money.

So, why are we surprised human life includes conflict? Why are we scandalized by disagreement and discord? Of course there is conflict; conflict is as old as human existence. The Bible tells us so.

Conflict is not the problem. The way we deal with conflict is the problem.

So why do we have such a problem with the very existence of conflict?

White supremacy culture socializes us to avoid conflict and to expect conformity. White Christianity often carries the banner of the aspiration of unity, while most white dominant churches display very little skill at cultivating communities where there is the honesty about disagreements and discord required to create true unity.

We mistake being polite and nice with unity. We would rather avoid than have to deal with tension, with disagreement, with unresolved feelings.

White supremacy culture tells us to think in terms of either/or, instead of the more ambiguous both/and that actually reflects reality.

White supremacy culture tells those in power, those in the dominant culture that we have the right to be comfortable, that we have a right to avoid conflict—and that we are justified in pathologizing those who bring too much emotion to a situation, with those who ask us hard questions or those who confront us with hard truths. White supremacy culture tells us power dominates, controls, enforces conformity, expands influence, conquers opponents.

White supremacy culture is a constellation of dynamics that define white dominant institutions and societies—like the PCUSA, like the USA. When I use this cultural description, I am not saying we are all overt racists. I am saying we have been formed by a culture that tells us white ways of doing things are superior to the ways other cultures do things. White Supremacy culture is about power and the way we are taught to use power.

And you and I, we, find ourselves in a cultural moment in which these white ways are being interrogated and investigated, scrutinized and dismantled.

So, for us, church, to be a life-giving part of that healing work of dismantling white supremacy in our society—we cannot assume a defensive posture. We are called to an open stance, a vulnerable and transparent stance. How we come to conflict, how we come into the tension of a cultural shift the magnitude of what our country is experiencing, is a spiritual practice, it is an act of faith. And we need God's help to do this work.

Jesus was not a conflict avoider. He also was not a one trick pony—he showed us the full range of human emotion—joy, anger, anguish, frustration, compassion, sadness, love, irritation, generosity, fatigue, and hope.

Why do we struggle so to follow his lead in such courageous and resilient self-understanding?

Why do we struggle so to see people and ourselves as beloved, as in need of healing, as worthy of our time and attention, the way Jesus sees them, the way Jesus sees us?

God, in your mercy, help us.

The image shows a musical score for a hymn. It consists of three staves of music in 3/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff contains the lyrics: "Spir - it, o - pen my heart to the joy and pain of". The second staff contains: "liv - ing. As you love may I love, in re - ceiv - ing". The third staff contains: "and in giv - ing. Spir - it, o - pen my heart." Above the notes, there are chord symbols: (Bm) Dm, (D/A) F/C, (G) Bb, (A7) C7, (Bm) Dm, (D/A) F/C, (Em) Gm, (D) F, (G) Bb, (Em7) Gm7, (D) F, (G) Bb, (D) F, and the word "Fine" at the end.

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This week on “As Facebook Turns” the sights, sounds, and algorithms of American disharmony: A huge diapered balloon baby floats over London and 250,000 protestors of a sitting American President; video footage of congressional diatribes and senatorial temper tantrums; and goat yoga is all the rage.

Like it or not, Facebook is one of the world’s main vehicles of public discourse these days. Social media platforms form a social commons where we encounter every kind of expression. And it swims in the morass of algorithms and Russian bots and echo chambers even as it brings people together across barriers of geography, culture, time zone, perspective, and ideology.

Some of you have joined me this week in the discussion that erupted on my Facebook page from a Tweet I posted. It was a simple observation:

Some reactions to @RepMaxineWaters are so profoundly twisted. She suggests oppressed people are tired of being nice, and then criticism of her

boldness takes the form of death threats, racial slurs, and dehumanizing accusations. [#WhiteSupremacyisadisease](#)

So far, people from every chapter of my life—from all over the country and all over the map religiously and politically, of diverse racial and gender identities have commented. It has garnered 140 comments and still counting.

We can easily cringe at how awkward and artificial and irritating comments on Facebook can get. No doubt, if you have been following this thread, you've had some of those moments. But I learned back in the days of angry and aggressive football fans trolling my website and my twitter feed, that social media also provides a great space to practice some of the antidotes to white supremacy thinking and behavior. With all its faults, Facebook is actually a space where we can practice sharing power.

Instead of engaging competitively, defensively, dispassionately, with shame or blame or impatience or fragility, we have a chance to practice power sharing with things like:

- Appreciation (thank you for caring enough to comment, thank you for sharing how you feel)
- Perseverance (this is hard, but I am going to stay engaged)
- Self-awareness (I am starting to feel really irritated about other people or negative about myself, I am going to take a break and go listen to the birds sing outside)
- Generosity (This must be really important for them to want to keep going in the conversation like this)
- Vulnerability (Here's why I feel the way I do, I have a story)
- Honesty (Your comments are confusing and I am having trouble following you)

But before you go into the fray, for it to be a spiritual practice, we have to ask ourselves a very important question about how and why our power will be deployed (power = the capacity to make an impact):

### **What is at stake for me in these interactions?**

Sometimes it is just to maintain connection—however thin that connection may be.

Sometimes it is about a confrontation because there is a problem or a pressing need to speak out—then I have to be ready to sit with tension and not move too quickly to resolve it.

Sometimes it is about gaining understanding—and then I prioritize just listening, just being present, resisting the temptation to control the flow of information.

How do we respond to family and friends who continue to justify cruelty and discrimination against others?

Why do Christians bicker over matters of the church?

Why is there abortion?

What is at stake for you in these questions? What is the story behind why church bickering and abortion and the hurtful tension in families are weighing on your heart?

God, in your mercy, embolden us.

The image shows a musical score for a hymn. It consists of three staves of music in 3/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are: "Spir - it, o - pen my heart to the joy and pain of liv - ing. As you love may I love, in re - ceiv - ing and in giv - ing. Spir - it, o - pen my heart." The score includes guitar chords: (Bm) Dm, (D/A) F/C, (G) Bb, (A7) C7, (Bm) Dm, (D/A) F/C, (Em) Gm, (D) F, (G) Bb, (Em7) Gm7, (D) F, (G) Bb, (D) F. The piece ends with a double bar line and the word "Fine".

This week on “As GCPC Turns” blown fuses and frustrating hot water heaters threaten the sanity of staff members, twice in one day twelve and then twenty people pack into a room to voluntarily talk about white supremacy, ten people say yes to taking the lead in helping us be Godparent “Padrino” church to someone who needs support because her husband was detained in the ICE raids, people reach out to talk about their pain and take a chance on believing that someone might actually care when they’ve been hurt by church in the past.

People come with their stories.

Remember Michal (Meehal) in our reading of 2 Samuel? She has a story. If you just read our passage from today you could take her for a petty, bitter woman.<sup>1</sup> But if you listen to her story, you will know that Michal’s (Meehal’s) feelings for David come from an excruciating place. Listen to Dr. Wil Gafney share Meehal’s story:

*Michal [Meehal] had been used by her father to trap David and used by David to escape the trap. Her father used her body to punish David, giving her to another man as his wife – still married to David in the eyes of the law and in her heart, probably still in love with him, now she has to sleep with the strange new man her father has given her body to. How she must have longed for David the swashbuckling hero and rebel bandit to come to her rescue. And then he did, with two other women in tow.*

*Michal [Meehal] might have been content to live with David and his new wives, that was the way of kings and she was a king's daughter. But David didn't want her as a woman or a wife. He wanted her back as a possession. She was his and no one else could have her. He took her back and then he abandoned her...The text does not say that [she] was barren, that would mean she and David were having sex [sleeping together]. It says she does not have a child, meaning that David did not give her one.*

*Michal [Meehal] had to watch as David impregnates Abigail and Ahinoam. [She] watches as David passes her by and married and impregnates Maacah multiple times... and Haggith... and Abital... and Eglah. All of these wives and their children are listed before Michal [Meehal] sees David cutting a fool. Is there any wonder she despised him in her heart? It may have been the first time she had seen him in person since he took her back. Michal [Meehal] will later have to watch as David passes her by and rapes and impregnates and then marries Bathsheba.<sup>2</sup>*

Will the world ever be a common humanity working together to solve problems and live in peace?

How do we tolerate people who are intolerant?

How do we respond to family and friends who continue to justify cruelty and discrimination against others?

Why is there abortion?

These questions come with stories, these questions come with hopes and fears, with wounds and healing opportunities.

But they will only come with frustration, with more reasons to misunderstand and marginalize, with more license to hate and otherize, if we can't learn how to listen devoutly and if we don't do our own inner work. What is at stake for us, Jesus followers, is nothing short of the integrity of our faith. Listening devoutly means being vulnerable, being honest, being grateful for the gift of someone sharing their story with you, and being self-aware—which takes a lot of intentional work and courage!



I can't tell you why there is abortion, just like I can't tell you why 25% of all pregnancies end in miscarriage or why 25% of women are the victims of rape or attempted rape or why the world can be such a harsh place for people who are in pain. I don't know the answer to those questions.

I wonder what's at stake in this question. Is it about finding the "right answer" to a moral dilemma, is it about blaming or shaming, is it about absolution and forgiveness, is it about vulnerability and a sincere desire to stay connected when so many say this issue must divide us, that you must choose sides.

I cannot help engage this question with my own story, with my own memories of some of the most challenging moments of my going on two decades of ordained ministry. I have walked along side many women all across this country, women who have suffered mightily from the fact that our country has politicized something that is so profoundly personal—our bodies. I have walked with women through shattering pregnancy losses, through infertility, miscarriage, sexual assault, stillbirth, releasing a baby for adoption, medical emergencies, and difficult decisions of termination.

As a pastor it is not my place to scrutinize decisions people make, it is my job to be a loving, compassionate presence in the most painful experiences of human life. I am there when people say goodbye to people they have loved for a lifetime; I am there when people lose jobs or struggle with sexual identity or decide a relationship is over. And I am there when you are angry or upset or confused or just need to talk because that is what we are all called to be as beloved community.

God, in your mercy, humble us.

Spir - it, o - pen my heart to the joy and pain of

(Bm) (D/A) (G) (A7) (Bm) (D/A) (Em)  
Dm F/C B<sup>b</sup> C7 Dm F/C Gm

liv - ing. As you love may I love, in re - ceiv - ing

(D) (G) (Em7) (D) (G) (D)  
F B<sup>b</sup> Gm7 F B<sup>b</sup> F

and in giv - ing. Spir - it, o - pen my heart. *Fine*

As the world turns, and Facebook churns, may GCPC be a place that yearns to show the world the truth of Jesus' good news—conflict and community go hand in hand in the kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup> Without conflict, community is a parody of itself—mimicking relationships that make and give life, while actually trivializing who God created us to be together. With conflict, and the Spirit's help, community can become a vivid expression of the very nature of God—love that goes the distance healing requires and doesn't count the cost.

Thanks be to God.

(sing hymn)

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Wil Gafney, PhD, "Why Michal Rightly Despised David."

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz coined the term "kin-dom of God" in her "Kin-dom of God: A Mujerista Proposal," in *In Our Own Voices: Latino/a Renditions of Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010), 181