

Seinfeld. **Festivus.**

Airing of the Grievances. The great Jerry Stiller.
George Costanza father invented his own holiday
after fighting with another man...
Put up an aluminum pole
And at the Festivus dinner on Dec 23 you gather your family around
and tell them all the ways they have disappointed you over the past year.
The tradition of Festivus begins with the airing of grievances.
I got a lot of problems with you people and now you're gonna hear about it.

Few of us want to talk about conflict.

Who here likes conflict?
Even if you don't identify as conflict-averse,
my guess is that you still don't particularly like conflict.
Conflict touches us where we're most vulnerable.
It can feel like a threat to our sense of peace, community,
and even sometimes our sense of self.
Yet, as much as we may dream of a world
without conflict, we aren't there yet.

Conflict is a part of life.
We face it at work, at home, and even in the church.
When someone hurts us, our natural instinct is
to talk to everyone except the person
who caused the pain.
The problem is not with conflict itself
But with how we fight.
We gossip first: We text our friends or vent online
instead of talking to the person.
We build walls: We let small hurts turn into deep, cold silence.
We avoid truth: We pretend everything is fine
while bitterness grows inside us.
Last year we talked about church clothes.

Do you know what church clothes are?

Not growing up in the church, I didn't learn about those
until I became a student pastor
out in rural Statham, GA, outside of Athens.
People there back then, especially kids, had different clothes
for church and for the rest of their lives.
Maybe you did too?

The church clothes were distinct.
And once in a while, even, if you were going to some
fancy gathering of some sort, then you were told
to wear your church clothes.

The funny thing about church clothes is that
they were more than just clothes. Right?
Yes, they looked nicer and were worn less often.
But you probably knew even as a fairly young child
that when mom or dad told you to wear church clothes,
they were asking for more than just what you put on your body.
“Church clothes” didn’t just look a certain way,
they were worn a certain way.
She was asking you to put on your church attitude.
He was drawing attention to the fact that certain
things were expected of you in this outfit.
And I don’t just mean to keep it clean.

Or maybe I do mean that.
Keep it clean in thought, word, and attitude.
Keep it clean in how we treat one another.
Keep it clean in what we say about people behind their backs.
Keep it clean.
Are you wearing your church clothes every day?

When we went away from church clothes,
because God doesn’t care what we wear,
did we go away from church attitudes?
And of course, God doesn’t care what we wear
but God does care how we clothe our souls.
And church clothes maybe helped us to see that
what we do when we come to church
is not like every other facet of our life.
That we are coming into the holy space and place of God.
And that our attitude and actions reflect
upon God and each of us as a follower of Jesus
not only here but everywhere.
But maybe, just maybe, it is a good thing that we
don’t have church clothes anymore.

At least, it is a good thing if we got rid of them

because we believe that we should be in our church clothes all the time, not just on Sunday morning. I'm pretty sure that Jesus didn't want us to compartmentalize our lives into church and non-church. I'm pretty sure that Jesus wants us to live every day as though we were in the presence of God - because we are. And that we live every day as though we are loving our neighbor as ourselves - because we are.

Yet we need reminders.

We need to take a moment and take off the clothes of this world with all the expectations that go with that outfit and put on our Christ clothes again.

This process of reminding,
of taking the time to reset our thinking
and acting is the answer to the question:
"Why do people need the church?"
How do people need the church?
How can I be the church in this world?
So, what is one sign of how to be the church?
It is probably our Leadership Lesson for this week
How we deal with Conflict.

So, how do we enter into and move through conflict faithfully?
Amazingly, Jesus gives us a road map.
Of all the things that we wish Jesus had given us clear answers for,
we get a very clear picture of how to navigate conflict in Matthew 18.

But that raised a question for me, "Why don't we use it more?"
I wonder if that's because it requires skills
that are uncomfortable to practice.
Jesus asks us to have the courage not to triangulate,
but to go to the person one-on-one.
This is no airing of the grievances, my friends.

15 "If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If you are listened to, you have regained that one."

Here in the Gospel, it is the function of the church
to be a force for reconciliation.
We are in the business of putting things together,
of healing the breaches between people,

of overcoming that which keeps us apart.

It is about making sure that no one feels like an outsider.
And that everyone is seen and heard
even when we don't agree.

"Wait a minute", you might say,
"there is a call to 'outsider-ness' in this passage."
We have been taught to believe that we are
to give reconciliation our best shot, to be sure,
but that if it doesn't work,
then we can boot folks out.
That is what verse 17 is saying, isn't it? Is it?

17 If that person refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector.

Verse 17 says that if the one who has caused
the offense refuses to be reconciled,
then treat the person "as a Gentile and a tax collector."
"Yes!," we say, "toss them out."
Except, wait a minute, how did Jesus treat tax collectors?
He put one on his team.
How did Jesus treat Gentiles?
He preached to them; he invited them.

In other words, I don't think these words
give permission to cut anyone off.
Instead, we treat them, the sinners,
the breakers of the covenant,
the enemies with love and invitation.
We are always, always trying to heal what is broken.
And people are broken. our nation is broken...
I discovered that I preached
On this very text last September
Among the division of Charlie Kirk and Jimmy Kimmel
And still we are asked, how do we
respond to the world in our church clothes?
And in our church clothes, how we continue to seek
bringing people together, not further apart?

We might have to change tactics in dealing

with those who refuse to be a part of the community.
Jesus treated those inside the community
much differently from those outside.
And in fact, he was worse with those inside!
Worse, as in harder on;
worse as in having higher expectations;
worse as in being ready to call them
out and point out their failings.

The outsider was encouraged and invited,
challenged to be sure, but with love and gentleness.
The insider?
Jesus didn't have any trouble telling them what he thought.
An airing of his grievances.
Much like we don't have any trouble giving
others around us a piece of our mind.
But when Jesus says to treat the other like outsiders,
he wasn't saying to turn your back on them or treat them as enemies.
He was telling us to change tactics.

16 But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

And all along, he was saying we ought to be doing this together.
This reconciliation thing is a team effort,
not an individual exercise.
It is what we are about.
It was so important that it was Jesus' last prayer
for his disciples and all people.
That they all may be one.

The invitation to our Communion liturgy says,
"Christ invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another"?

Loving Christ (worship) –
repenting of sin (reconciling with God)
and **living in peace** (reconciling with one another)
are all part of the same thing - worship and reconciliation.
The church is a reminder to the world
that we all need a Savior.
And the church is the evidence that living in

the “being saved” community is a more complete,
more reconciling, more joyous way to live.

Why do people need the church?
Because we as a world forget
to put on our church clothes.
Or wait, maybe it isn’t church clothes,
but church dinner and what we are
supposed to do when we come to the table.

**There was another holiday created
this time by God and the Israelites.**

Passover was to remember when God, through Moses
Saw them through another conflict.
After 9 times of trying to resolve it.

But you are probably asking “how does Jesus way
through conflict to reconciliation have to do
with the instructions for the Passover meal in Exodus?”
Maybe the call for a day of remembrance might be
another key to understanding our role in dealing with conflict.
First, the day invites the remembrance that
ultimate protection comes not from our power but from God.
That belongs to God alone.

And second, to make sure we are aware of God’s presence
and call upon our lives in everything that we do
even in our conflict,
but third, we are also called to do these things
so that others might see God through us.

**18 Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you
loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**

We are active signs of God’s presence in the world.
We commit ourselves again
to presenting the goodness of God in the world around us.
We do that best by how we care.
We care for one another and seek reconciliation whenever possible.
How we care for God’s people everywhere
by giving and helping and loving.
By wearing our church clothes in all that we say or do.

We are the sign that God is God

and God is still at work in the world.
that what we say about God
shapes how we live in the world
and how we treat those around us.

And then, like the Israelites on the night of the first Passover,

remember as a congregation that

we can face the conflicts in our life and world—

the ones we can reconcile and the ones we can't—
because God is with us.

And maybe remember something else.

When we feel the most threatened or under attack,
God does not call us into further conflict.

Or are we called to cast out, beat down, or oppress
any enemy as unworthy of our attention and love.

Conflict is meant to be resolved, not replaced with other conflicts.

The sacrifice has been made; we remember and lead with grace.