

Before we really begin, I want to take a moment and let you know that at my suggestion last week that you go and get a burger at Five Guys if you hadn't done so previously, that a few of you did exactly that later on Sunday. Maybe it wasn't even their first time, but I got photos from the Adairs – you can see Allan there enjoying his burger. That's the kind of smile you'll have as well, if you go, and even bigger if you're wearing a Mariners shirt instead of that one. And then one from the Leavitts as well – they didn't get themselves in the photo for fear of blinding me with their bright smiles. It was also our son Blake's 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, and we said we'd take the family out to a restaurant of his choice – omitting ones like



Daniel's Broiler, because I didn't wanna spend \$800 on a dinner – and I kid you not: not knowing our current series title, he chose Five Guys! So, there's an “ussie” from the Norths at the restaurant as well. If you go, send me your photos and we'll include them next week. ☺



Ok, let's move on. It's been said that if you ever find the “perfect church” don't join it. Why? Because you'll ruin it. ☺ This statement can be received one of two ways. Either it can be a shot to our pride – “Who, me? Ruin a perfect church?” – or it can be received the way in which it's intended to: communicating that there's no such thing as a perfect church. Of course, I've also heard it said that if you want the perfect church, then go start it yourself. Now, you still have the problem from the first saying, that your presence will ruin it. So, you're stuck, either way. Better to simply accept that there is no such thing as a perfect church.

Intellectually, we all know that. Every church is made of people, and though we are saved by Jesus and much healing and more holy living is real: our sins, shortcomings, hurts, unhealed mommy or daddy issues or scars from

other relationships, defensive tendencies, people-pleasing tendencies, neediness, and all the rest: Whatever are the issues that any one of us has, they are brought into the church as well. This is why Pastor Rob's class on Emotionally Healthy Spirituality (book/videos by Pete Scazzero) is such an important step in discipleship.

**So: We really can't expect perfection in a church – though so frequently we do.** People “church shop” ad nauseum to find the perfect place. I know of a guy who went to 25 churches to find the right one. He landed at one I was pastoring – the last one he checked out. He loved it. Said it was *the one*, after all those visits to others. About three years later he left, because he decided that we weren't quite what he was looking for. So, there's no perfect church. But, this lack of perfection doesn't mean we just allow whatever problems exist in our churches to carry on as though Jesus can't heal them and transform them. **We don't ignore the imperfections or sweep them under the rug.**

Several months ago, I noticed water on the floor in front of our washing machine at home. I didn't ignore it. I mopped it once, just in case the water had been spilled by a kid out of a cup...but when the water returned, it was evident that it was coming from the washing machine. And just letting that go could ruin the hardwood floor it sits on and that I spent countless hours installing, let alone sub-flooring, etc. Ignoring it would be letting it grow, and could be costly. So, I told Gwen to fix it. ☺ Just kidding. I called a repair guy to come fix it.

**Similarly, in the church, we want to address problems before they grow and become issues.** Ideally, structures are set up in place to prevent problems from occurring in the first place. But the church is made up of sinners (yes, saved by grace, but still sinners), and where sinners congregate, organize, make decisions, and work together, there are bound to be some challenges/problems/conflicts to overcome. So, today, we're talking about the problems in the church and how best to address them, as we continue our series on the five shortest, and perhaps the five most over-looked books of the New Testament in a series called, “Five Guys.” So, let's dive into **today's**

**passage** about a problem in the first century church as we read the entirety of 3<sup>rd</sup> John. This is God’s word to you and me today...

So, the letter is addressed to a man name Gaius. We don’t know for sure who Gaius is. **There are three other Gaiuses in the New Testament, and Gaius was one of the most common names of the time.** One of them is mentioned in 1 Corinthians and again in Romans, and then there are two different Gaiuses in the book of Acts.

Then John writes some “hope you’re doing ok” kinds of things before giving a few sentences of encouragement about Gaius’s faithfulness to some of the “brothers and sisters in the Lord.” **Specifically, Gaius has shown good hospitality to them, as these “brothers and sisters in the Lord” visited him to share the good news of Jesus in Gaius’s church, or in his city.** We know that was their purpose because we read in verse 7 that they went out for “the sake of the Name” – meaning, the name of Jesus. The purpose of the travels of these brothers and sisters in the Lord was to share the good news of Jesus, the Name that is above all names.

Then in verses 9 and 10 we get to the imperfections of the church, and John doesn’t mince words. He calls out a guy named Diotrephes. We don’t know who Diotrephes is – there’s no other mention of him in the New Testament. But he is clearly some kind of church leader. And there are four things that Diotrephes does that are inhibiting church unity and ministry, and making for a painfully imperfect church. **First, he’s all about himself (verse 9).** John writes, “Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us.” He loves to be first, and while that could certainly be a compliment (Super Bowl winner finishes first, and that’s a good thing), that’s clearly not how John intends it. Diotrephes wants to be the church leader with the most social media followers, the biggest church in town, have his name in the public eye, be in a position of influence and power....and really be doing all that for his own benefit; for his own sense of self-worth above others, and not for Jesus. He wants to be first, and to be seen by others as being first.

**Second, Diotrephes is not hospitable toward other Christians (verse 9 and 10).** John writes that he and his companions were not welcomed by

Diotrephes, nor were others welcomed by him. We're not sure who the others are, but we know who John is. He is someone who literally followed Jesus with the other 11 original disciples...he knew Jesus personally. So, if John showed up here today and wanted to share with us some wisdom and insight about what it means to follow Jesus and shine the light of Christ, I'd welcome him with open arms and I'd hand him the microphone, no questions asked. But Diotrephes rejects him, as well as others, and you can't help but wonder if his selfishness and self-promotion is part of the motivation for his lack of hospitality: to keep other Christian leaders at bay so he's in the spotlight.

**Third, Diotrephes is spreading “malicious nonsense” about John and his companions (verse 10).** This is nonsensical stuff about John and others, with the intent to harm or undermine their ministry. In the early 1900's Mark Twain, along with some others, popularized a saying that seems to have originated in the 1890's, that I will paraphrase ever so slightly for you. Some of you have heard it before, I'm sure. It goes like this: **“There are three kinds of lies: lies, darn lies, and statistics.”** I'll let you guess which word I had to alter for church purposes. ☺ Diotrephes is spreading lies and darn lies about John and his companions...and for all we know, he's using bogus statistics to support it all. It is all detrimental to the unity of the church and its mission.

**Fourth, he's stopping *other* people from being hospitable and welcoming to others, and even putting those people “out of the church” (verse 10).** So now, he's really overstepping his bounds and his authority. He seems to have decided that he's in charge, he's calling the shots, because he “knows best,” and anyone who wants to carry out ministry that is different than what he deems is best, will be put out of the church by him.

**In short, Diotrephes is a renegade.** He doesn't want to be a team player, he doesn't want to be accountable to anyone, and he wants to be the one around which everything revolves. And, sad to say, but not unexpected at the same time because all people are susceptible to temptation: it's not the last time this happened in the Church. Things didn't change when the calendar flipped from 99 A.D. to 100 A.D. We've even seen it here in the Seattle area with

churches and church leaders who have been in the spotlight for all the wrong reasons, with renegade behaviors and decisions that have led to all kinds of brokenness. **The behavior isn't excusable; but frequently in those instances, church organizational structure doesn't foster accountability for the pastor or other church leaders.**

Often this is because the pastor started the church, was perceived as the “expert” from the get-go, and it's the pastor who set up the organizational structure right from the start in such a way that the pastor is at the top of the organizational chart. Not every church that starts that way ends up unhealthy...but the propensity to be unhealthy is much greater. And not every church with good structure is immune to problems either. But regardless of church structure: **The result of renegade leaders like Diotrephes always ends with the gospel message being undermined so that new people don't come to know Jesus, and people who are already Jesus-followers end up hurt and their faith damaged or broken.** In other words: Renegade church leadership makes for a severely imperfect church and prevents people from coming to Christ, and pushes away those who are already Christ-followers.

So, how do we avoid this and have healthy churches and healthy church leaders? The remedy is then given by John in the next paragraph: Imitate what is good . **When he says this, he specifically means: what is good as defined by Jesus and the gospel message.** Jesus is the definition of what's good – it's an “objective” goodness. This is not a subjective “good” like whether you're rooting for the San Francisco Forty-whiners today, or the Kansas-Swiftie Chiefs. *You* define which is the “good” team to root for.

**The point is, similar to the two kinds of truth we talked about last week: there's subjective goodness and objective goodness, and Jesus sets the standard for objective goodness.** He's the definition. So, Jesus is our ultimate one to imitate, but there are others in our lives who help model this as well. And Paul highlights for them a guy named Demetrius as a good example for them. Today, we might think of those who set the examples are people with titles: staff person, pastor, Elder, Deacon, teacher, small group leader, etc. But that's wrong thinking. Most people in a church like ours

don't have "titles" – but we're all setting an example in some sphere of life of what it means to be Christ-like and live with his goodness.

In the language of our vision statement, we are all "leading people toward Jesus where we live, work, and play." At least, hopefully we are leading people toward Jesus, and not away from him. You're definitely leading people one way or the other, just by interacting with people in your spheres of life. The question is, are you leading them toward Jesus, or away? Are we being an example of the kind of Jesus-centered goodness that Demetrius sets an example of here? And the thing is, this Jesus-centered kind of living is what helps us overcome imperfections in the church: What John writes here about imitating what is good is the antidote to the problems in the Church.

Because: **Everything that Diotrephes stood for (selfishness, control, power, etc.) is countered/combatted when we allow other Christians to set an example for us and impact how we live our faith.** When we look to someone else as our model and example, we're setting aside our selfishness; we show humility and a kind of hospitality toward them by welcoming them and their teaching and their example into our life so we'd live more like Jesus as well. We become a team player and foster unity in the church when we look to others and emulate them as we together emulate Jesus.

We mutually encourage one another and spur one another on to live good lives that are rooted in Jesus, so his values shine through throughout the church and out into the world. **So ultimately, it all comes down to Jesus and our allegiance to him, our submission to him, our foundation on him, our identity in him, our forgiveness through him, and our love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control because of him, as we live out our faith together.** Jesus is the one who makes any of that possible as we root ourselves in him, together: Encouraging one another, spurring one another on in faith and in ministry and mission together.

Do we do it perfectly in the Church? No. Do some sins fly under the radar until one day they blow up? Unfortunately, sometimes it happens in the Church. We've all seen headlines and social media posts about that kind of

thing, and it's sad when it happens. Maybe you've even been part of a church that was not just imperfect, but unhealthy and hurtful. If that's been your experience somewhere, I'm sorry, and I pray Rose Hill can be a place of healing for you.

So, we see in this passage that: **When we stay focused on the Name (verse 7) – the name of Jesus – and find our unity there and our example for living there, and look to one another as “in the flesh” examples of Jesus’ goodness...when we do that together we are much more likely to be a healthy church. Not a perfect one, but a healthy one.** One where our sins and our slip-ups are confessed and acknowledged before they blow up into something big, where forgiveness is offered and received, and where the aim is simply to point people to Jesus and make disciples of his. May it be so here at Rose Hill, and in all the other churches around the globe, so we'd be healthy, no matter how imperfect we may be, and bring all the honor and glory to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let's pray...Amen.