



**Season 03.Episode 05**

**TITLE: Why Are Christians and The Church So Mean to Other**

**Cultures and Faiths?**

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Welcome to MomenToUs! I am Pastor Rebecca Grate, the Pastor Mission Developer for MomenToUs and the host for our weekly podcast.

At MomenToUs, we believe that God is present with us in each and every single one of our moments.

We believe that our stories are connected to God's story and to one another's stories.

We believe that this connection and relationship changes our lives and our entire world.

Before we begin, I invite you to take a deep breath in, hold it while you count to three, and then slowly release that breath.

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This fall, we are embarking on the big task of answering some of your all's Burning Questions. I knew as they came in through our Facebook and Instagram stories that they were important questions, but I had no idea how timely they would end up being given the current state of events in the world, particularly the global conflicts in Palestine, Israel, Guatemala, Venezuela, Ukraine, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

To be clear, I am not an expert in any of these conflicts; I know very little. My personality and my theological training wants to have me believe that I can jump in head first and offer some truth in the midst of all of the headlines that are coming at us from every direction, but I'm going to invite you to join me in the boat of decentering ourselves from the conversation.

What we can do in the midst of these conflicts is:

- 1) Pray for peace to become what rules the land rather than war, violence, and the death of civilians. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land livestreamed a Prayer Service on their Facebook Page on Saturday, October 14, 2023. I've included a [link](#) to a portion of that service in the transcript for today's episode.
- 2) Evaluate our news consumption, and this includes what we view on social media. This will consume our time, but before you share any story, even if it's from a trusted source, look for it to be verified by at least one other reputable source, ideally more than one. I've included a [link](#) in the transcript to view where your preferred news outlets fall on the Media Bias Chart to help you find news outlets that are moderate in their reporting.
- 3) If we are able to contribute financially to relief work, please do so. [Lutheran World Relief](#) and [Lutheran Disaster Response](#) will each donate 100% of designated funds to relief work. Both organizations work globally, with communities impacted by disaster and war to help rebuild communities and restore livelihood.

If you're curious about having some more intentional 1-on-1 conversation about how we are called to respond in these conflicts, please send me an email or a DM on our social media and we can find time to meet.

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So, why are Christians and the Church so mean to other cultures and other faiths? I can promise you any overview of an answer I can put together for a single podcast isn't going to go nearly deep enough or broad enough to get to any amount of a root cause. But that doesn't mean we can't start wondering together.

Within Christianity, there are several different large branches - there are our Orthodox siblings, our Roman Catholic siblings, our mainline Protestant Siblings, and our general Protestant siblings. Within each of these branches, most clearly with the variety of Protestant denominations, they are typically categorized as being "conservative" or "liberal," even though church denominations can't vote. But, the particular lenses they use to interpret scripture continue to help people grow in their faith in a way that tends to stay in alignment with what they hold to be true about Scripture. That just makes sense.

A few podcast episodes ago, when we answered the Burning Question, Why does the Bible contradict itself?, we briefly touched on two different ways of interpreting scripture: believing Scripture is inerrant compared to believing Scripture is inspired. Those who believe Scripture is inerrant believe it is without error or contradiction. Those who believe Scripture is inspired believe it is "God-breathed" and guided in its recording to a specific audience at a specific time, so those pieces of information are included in our interpretation for our present day.

Broadly speaking, trust me I know there are nuances, but broadly speaking, those denominations that believe the Bible is inerrant tend to lean more “conservative” in how people live out their faith in their relationships with the world and how they vote on particular issues and candidates.

Also broadly speaking, denominations that believe the Bible is inspired tend to lean more “liberal” in the same ways.

It is also not uncommon for denominations with these two different interpretive lenses for Scripture to not join together for worship or ministry. Sometimes, they’re even prohibited from joining together. And thus a dividing line is drawn.

This particular dividing line is just one symptom of how fractured all of Christianity is. There is no unilateral agreement on: what baptism and communion are and what happens during them, how to interpret Scripture, how God is simultaneously one God but also exists in Trinity, why Jesus was born or why Jesus died, how we are called to care for our neighbor, if grace is limited or unlimited, who is welcome at worship without question or how much you have to change in order to be accepted. And Christians have been fighting and arguing about this for over two thousand years. The fractures continue to multiply and grow deeper.

Combine all of that with our society’s need to be self-sufficient, the only person who is right, and whoever can argue their point the loudest wins and it’s a recipe for explosion, especially when it’s lived out over generation after generation after generation. We see this playing out in other arenas of our life, not just within what we know and understand the church to be.

It is no wonder to me that people have deep questions about Christianity - about what the church they are attending actually believes and how they interpret Scripture and how that translates into our daily lives.

It is no wonder to me that there are people who have immense power in our world and are using their platforms to conflate hatred with their faith.

It is no wonder to me that in the midst of our exhaustion from a lifetime of global trauma that we are seeing people leave the church in droves because they, those they love, their questions aren't welcomed in the church they have known or have wanted to explore.

It is no wonder to me that when I mention I'm a pastor to someone in casual conversation, their entire demeanor changes, shame comes to the surface, and more often than not, the conversation ends fairly quickly.

The infighting within the Christian church has pushed out wonder and the ability to live together in the midst of disagreement. And we see this playing out across the globe, through how Christians interact with citizens of other countries and members of other faiths.

What can we do about this?

You've listened to this podcast, which is a good first step. This shows you're listening to the nudging of the Holy Spirit to grow in your faith.

If you are already connected to a faith community, talk with your leaders about starting a small group or a Bible study about current events. There doesn't have to be prep work for this - have someone pull up a few newspaper front pages and start there. Talk about your initial responses and then wonder together about what you

think Scripture and your faith community says about this. Invite your community's leader to join you, for some or all of the sessions. They may be able to add some additional nuance to the conversation.

If you're not already connected to a faith community, gather together with a group of friends and do the same thing. There may be a faith leader in the community who would love to accompany you for these conversations, either long term or as an invited guest speaker for a session or two.

When you see someone being mean, stand up to them. Christianity is a religion of peace; meanness, hostility, and violence are antithetical to how God has called us to live in the world.

When you yourself are the one being mean, stop immediately and begin the inner work you need to do to learn more about your faith and how that was shaping your behavior. And, if you're able, apologize to whoever you were mean to.

Christians everywhere are going to continue to mess up and misspeak and overstep, but we can begin to take the steps toward ushering in peace, even in our small corner of the world where we typically spend our days. It may not change things dramatically and globally, but it can definitely change smaller day-to-day things. Sometimes the Holy Spirit works restoration as a sweeping event, but most often, it's in the very slow and steady work of changing how we interact with one person at a time.

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I invite you to take a few deep breaths in to help center yourself for prayer. This prayer was shared by the Southern Ohio Synod earlier this week, as the first waves of

news from Israel and Gaza emerged from our news outlets. It was adapted for use from our hymnal resources.

### **A Prayer for Peace**

Gracious God, grant peace among nations. We especially pray for Palestine, Israel, Guatemala, Venezuela, Ukraine, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

We pray for wisdom and compassion for all leaders to seek a swift end to violence. Send comfort and protection to all civilians caught in the midst of these conflicts.

Cleanse from our own hearts the seeds of strife: greed and envy, harsh misunderstandings and ill will, fear and desire for revenge. Make us quick to welcome ventures in cooperation among the peoples of the world, so that there may be woven the fabric of a common good too strong to be torn by the evil hands of war.

In the time of opportunity, make us be diligent; and in the time of peril, let not our courage fail; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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Thank you for joining us for our weekly MomenToUs. We are looking forward to growing with each of you and are so grateful you are a part of the MomenToUs community.

In our next podcast, the burning question we're going to be addressing is: I'm in my 20s. Why isn't there anyone else my age at church? Join us as we chat with someone in their 20s about why they are and aren't active in different portions of the day-to-day life of the church.

Thank you to our Mission Partners, the Southern Ohio Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Their financial contributions and prayer have been instrumental in bringing this new ministry into existence.

This week I also want to thank [Faith Lutheran Church in Whitehall](#) for inviting me to preach and lead worship with them and also lead their Adult Sunday School class. They aren't currently livestreaming their worship services, but they are on social media, so you can check them out later today! Inviting me to supply preach or lead an education event or retreat or simply be present with you all for worship and to answer questions are additional ways that congregations and ministries can partner with MomenToUs.

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Earlier this month, we published our second quarterly report on our social media pages and on our website. We would love for you to take a few minutes to read through it to see how God is continuing to show up through this ministry ... and how much we have grown over the past three months.

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I have an announcement about our next gatherings! We have two opportunities to connect during the month of November:

On Sunday, November 5th, we are going to meet at 10 AM for Brewed Theology at Java Central in Uptown Westerville. There won't be a set agenda for the day, but we'll gather to talk about whatever is weighing on us that particular day, generally talking about something related to the Bible, religion, faith, current events, or how all of those are intertwined together. For this gathering, you do not have to show up with



any sense that you hold the answer to any of the questions, but we'll work toward our answers together, sharing our expertise, our faith, and our life experiences, knowing that God is present through all of those things. We'll plan to meet for around an hour and a half or two hours, depending on everyone's schedules and how the conversation is flowing. If you can't join us at the beginning, you're welcome to pop into the conversation whenever you're able to join us!

The second gathering will be for Bedtime BS on Sunday, November 19th from 7-8 PM. For this gathering, we will be meeting via Zoom so that those who have littles at home that cannot be left alone after they have gone to bed can join us. For this Bible study, we're going to be reviewing how ELCA Lutherans read and understand the Bible. And, we'll also chat as a group to figure out how often we'll meet together, which will help us figure out what portion of the Bible we'll jump into first. This gathering will meet for an hour before we all head to whatever else our Sunday evening needs from us to settle and prepare for Monday morning.

If you're definitely planning to attend or even just thinking about attending, we are asking for you to RSVP so that we know how many tables to pull together at Java Central and to give the staff there a heads up on our group size so that they are prepared and can help us secure the proper space. And, we're asking for RSVPs for Bedtime BS so that you can receive the Zoom link via email ahead of our meeting time. There is [a link](#) to the RSVP in the transcript for this episode and it will be shared on our social media pages later this week, in the posts themselves and in our stories on Facebook and Instagram.

Anyone is able to attend these gatherings, no matter how often you have attended a Christian church or how long it has been since you have last attended. You do not need to have the basics of the Christian faith down; we are gathering to learn and grow in our faith together. For right now, these gatherings are primarily for adults, but middle schoolers and high schoolers who like engaging in these kinds of conversations are welcome. We'll be branching out to offer opportunities for younger kids to gather at some point in the future.

We can't wait to see you all at these events!

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If you would like to support the ministry of MomenToUs, attending our in-person events and inviting others is one way to do so. Engaging with us online is another. If you are able to give financially, you can visit our website and find more information about how to donate electronically or by mailing checks to our Synod P.O. Box. Each one-time or recurring gift combines together to ensure the MomenToUs Community continues to grow.

Until our next podcast, remember to breathe deeply and that God is present with you every single moment.

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Music:

Best Moment - Music by [SoulProdMusic](#) from [Pixabay](#).

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