

Thanksgiving, Baptism and Pride

I speak to you in the name of He who Is, who Was, and who is Yet to come. PBS

This weekend is Thanksgiving. For some of us it means getting together with family, either by birth or by choice. For others of us it is about spending time in creation, looking at the beautiful colours that surround us. And of course there is the food.

So, let me ask you; for what are you grateful?

Yesterday I attended Pride Central at the Fernie Senior's Drop In Centre. It was festooned with Pride colours; red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple. There was a selection of rainbow cupcakes. There was face painting, the kitchen was open and there was Tea with Royalty. And by Royalty we mean two Drag Queens and a Drag King. And let me tell you; they were all so lovely.

Carrie, Jenna and Duke were holding court at the Seniors. They answered questions, talked about their journey to being royalty and shared some of their journey to fabulousness. Carrie is from Fernie. She came home last summer to marry her husband at her father's homestead. Jenna was raised a devout Jehovah's Witness who, when she realised she was gay, was kicked out and lost not only their faith, but their family, friends and community. Duke works in a male oriented industry and also sews his own costumes. Each of these beautiful children of God spoke openly of the blessings they see in their lives; through the drag community, their families of birth and families of choice.

I had an opportunity to speak to each of them individually and they were so gracious in giving of their time. I invited all three of them to attend the Affirming Service this morning at Knox.

Today, in addition to celebrating Thanksgiving we are gathering to welcome the newest member of our Christ Church family; Vivi Adelaide Shea Hawkins.

Pride: What does that word mean to you?

I was raised not to be prideful. It is considered one of the seven deadly sins, pride. Now, for those of you who know me well, you know that I love words and wordplay. The word pride is defined as

"a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements, the achievements of those with whom one is closely associated, or from qualities or possessions that are widely admired.

"he takes great pride in his appearance"

and

confidence and self-respect as expressed by members of a group, typically one that has been socially marginalized, on the basis of their shared identity, culture, and experience. "the bridge was lit up in rainbow colours, symbolic of LGBT pride"

Where is the sin in this?

Well, it's like this. There is no sin in having pride. The sin comes in believing you are better than someone else. Being smug or superior is the sin, not pride.

Please understand, Pride exists because there remains inequality in Canada and across the world. Fernie has taken strides and is now able to offer Marriage Equality at Knox United and Christ Church Anglican. Wonderful strides!

We, members of the LGBTQ+ community want, no, demand equality. We don't want to be better than anyone else; we want to be the same. It sounds simple enough, yet it's not.

Looking at the Gospel for today, Jesus was travelling between Samaria and Gallilee when he was approached on the outskirts of town by ten lepers. It was demanded by society at that time that if you had "leprosy" which we would define today as any significant skin disease or disorder, you had to declare yourself as "unclean".

They implore Jesus for help. They say "Jesus, Master, have mercy". And just like that, they were told to present themselves to the priests and they were made clean. They were healed. Just like that.

One of them, a Samaritan, was overcome and grateful. He went back to Jesus and thanked him. Jesus says "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Ouch Jesus...kinda harsh!

Now, as a society we have distorted what a Samaritan is. We use the phrase Good Samaritan regularly as though it is a good thing. And while it is...it's important to remember that Samaritans were not particularly liked back in the day. Samaritans were a closed gentile sect that considered themselves to be adherents to the law, the Mosaic laws. They would tell anyone within earshot what they were doing that was against the laws of decency. In fact, they follow their own version of the Torah and considered themselves to be the "true Jews". I would dare say they would fall into the territory of being prideful.

So for someone who considers themselves judge and jury on the rest of society; for one of them to come back to Jesus and thank him made a big impression on Jesus. Incredulous, Jesus admonishes the other nine, that he is thanked only by the "foreigner".

In this day and age having Pride is to hold space for yourself...to know where you belong and be unapologetic about being who you are. Having Pride is not about acting superior to anyone else, it is simply knowing who you are. Holding space and living an authentic life. And this is one of the many reasons why Pride festivals are important.

It is an opportunity for the community as a whole to come together and celebrate diversity and commonality. If you look at the Pride flag, six distinct colours, each representing something very special, together make up a rainbow.

For those of you who know your bible, you'll remember that God sent a rainbow as a promise to Noah after the great flood that never again would God send something so

destructive as to kill all but a few select members of humanity.

A rainbow.

For me, the rainbow is a symbol of hope, of diversity and of love.

My theology used to be very broad, now it is quite narrow – if it's not of Love, it's not of God. Simple, eh? Perhaps. Yet in practice it can be quite challenging. That is the topic of another homily.

Today, Knox United Church officially became a member of Affirm United. We welcome all people, regardless of gender identity or sexual expression. We are all God's people and we are all fabulous in God's eyes. Each and every one of us. Fabulous!

We have so much for which to be thankful today. And not only today but this weekend. And not only this weekend, but every day.

I am grateful to the Hawkins family for bringing Vivi to be baptised. And please let me say, baptism is not where God meets the baby, God has known Vivi since before she was born. God has known Vivi longer than her parents have. Just as God created and loves each and every one of you, gathered here today.

I am grateful for the opportunity to meet Carrie, Jenna and Duke. For their generosity of spirit in gracing our small corner of creation with Storytelling time at the Library, Tea with Royalty at the Senior's and a Glitter Ball. For sharing their stories of triumph, hope and love. They are truly a blessing.

And I am grateful to you for being with us today as we draw the family circle wider and welcome Vivi.

Christ Church Anglican, together with Knox United Church are affirming congregations where all of God's children are welcome. And where anyone can be married. Because in God's eyes we are all the same. We are made in God's image. And God doesn't make junk.

Giving thanks to God.

Let all God's children say "Amen"

Happy Pride, y'all.

Rev'd Andrea L. Brennan, Incumbent
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Jeremiah 29.4-7
Psalm 66.1-12
2 Timothy 2.8-15
Luke 17.11-19