

## There's nowt as queer as folk 5 July 2020 – Pentecost 5

My parents are from Manchester England. They married in 1961 and came to Canada in 1966. I was born in November 1967, nine months after they moved into their new house. My parents both used colloquial language which I picked up and which often got me into difficulty at school.

One of my Dad's favourite phrases was "Eee, there's nowt as queer a folk". This was usually preceded by a head bob gesturing to a strange looking or strange acting person. It remains one of my favourite phrases. Of course the language within it can be interpreted differently today...but the basic meaning is "sometimes folks behave or look quite differently from me". It never had anything to do with sexuality.

When we look at the Gospel for today, I dare say if Jesus had been from Yorkshire or Lancashire he'd have used this phrase. 'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn." (Matthew 11.16-17, NRSV) It seems that Jesus can do nothing right, by the community.

His cousin John did not drink and was said to have a demon. Jesus himself ate with ordinary folks and was called a glutton and a drunkard. "Eee, there's nowt as queer as folk".

Looking next at the Song of Solomon. This is a beautiful piece of poetry, likely set to song, that was written, in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century. It is a love poem written from one lover to another. This particular section is called "Springtime Rhapsody". The language is beautiful, speaking of birdsong and the end of the rains. "My beloved speaks and says to me: 'Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land. (Song of Solomon 2.10-12, NRSV).

Such beautiful imagery. We do not know who the Beloved is. We do not know exactly who the poem is written for, yet we know they are very fond of each other. Some of the images in the Song of Solomon do not translate well into 21<sup>st</sup> century parlance. "Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved. (Song of Solomon 4.1-2, NRSV)

"Eee, there's nowt as queer as folk."

The Old Testament reading today is about the marriage of Isaac to Rebekah. The chapter begins with Abraham calling over a servant and giving him strict instructions to bring back a wife for Isaac. He's given specific instructions on what the bride is meant to be. She is to be kind and generous. She is to be selfless and willing to travel back to Cana to be part of Abraham and Sarah's family. Easy enough, right?

Oh, and an angel will tell the servant if he has chosen well for Isaac.

So the entourage heads out with 10 camels and a pile of gifts for the bride's dowry, as well as jewellery for the bride. After a while they see Rebekah who is carrying water. The servant asks for a drink and she not only gives him one, but volunteers to water the camels. She's kind and generous. The servant asks if there is room for him and his entourage for the night. She responds that there is more than enough room.

The servant gave her a ring for her nose and bracelets for her wrists. She takes him back to her parents home where they stay the night. And when her father and brother have finished speaking with the servant, who relays his mission, she is given in marriage to Isaac. A beautiful story about the acquisition of a woman to be a bride, bartered with camels, jewellery and gifts.

"Eee there's nowt as queer as folk".

Next, in Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes of a universal frustration...he knows what he should do, yet seems unable to do it. He does things he knows he shouldn't, yet he does them anyway. Given today's circumstances, this letter could have been written today, or at least in the last couple of months.

We know we're not supposed to visit people, yet we do so. We're not supposed to touch people outside our bubble and yet the longing for touch is very strong. We are allowed to re-open our buildings, yet we need to be safe first, and protect the most vulnerable.

What I've found particularly difficult is the separation from the folks who are unable to join us online. Being able to see faces, read body language. Being able to hug you. I miss it so much.

You may be aware that I have adopted a 13 year old orange tabby called Vinnie. He is getting settled into his new surroundings. He is hiding less and exploring more. He is curious, yet also skittish. He wants to be near me, yet not when I vacuum. He doesn't want to sleep in my bedroom, yet if he hears me snoring he'll come in and smack me across the head to register his disapproval. And then he'll return to his perch in the living room and go back to sleep...looking absolutely innocent. I'm quite certain, when he looks at me he's thinking "Eee, there's nowt as queer as folk."

The most powerful part of today's readings is the last part of the gospel. It is a reading that is used often at funeral services. 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' (Matthew 11.25-30, NRSV)

We have been unable to meet together for worship for 15 weeks. And, as of today, it will be at least 10 more weeks, until we can gather in our Church buildings for worship. It seems like it was yesterday and it also feels like it's been years. Do you know what I mean?

Weary. That's a perfect word to describe how we are feeling. Weary.

Who would have imagined a year ago that we would be afraid of gathering in groups? That we would wear masks to carry out the most basic of errands? That we would go

months without human contact? That we would fear leaving our houses and fear strangers? Who would have imagined that we would change so quickly into how we worship together?

I don't think anyone could have imagined a Eucharistic exile like this one.

"Eee, there's nowt as queer as folk."

And yet...

And yet we are discovering new ways of being Church in the world. Children and neighbours are drawing on our buildings and sidewalks in chalk. Virtual scavenger hunts are happening online. Community parades for Graduation, Teacher Appreciation, Birthdays and Canada Day, driving through the community, filled with antique cars, honking and waving.

In some ways our world is much smaller then it was 15 weeks ago. And yet, our Worship is so much larger. We connect with folks in the Elk Valley, in different parts of British Columbia, Ontario, Alberta, Montana and Florida. I cannot think of another reason why or how we would have come together, the way we have.

I see small signs of kindness in people smiling, even while wearing a mask. Neighbours helping neighbours. Birdsong. Dandelion snow. The rains are over, the sun is out, we turn our faces to the sky.

Life as we know it has changed. And it continues to change. Yet the one constant we have in our lives is God. The One who created, sustains and comforts us. The One who loved us into being and brought order from chaos.

Surely, all that is happening, is doing so to show us, what is really important in our lives! It's not wealth or riches. It's not prestige or reputation. It's not getting the most stuff or acquiring the most debt. It's about building relationships with God, with others, and especially with ourselves.

Because you know what they say..."Eee there's nowt as queer as folk." Amen

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Pentecost 5 – There's Nowt as Queer as Folk  
5 July 2020

Genesis 24.34-38, 42-49, 58-67  
Song of Solomon 2.8-13  
Romans 7.15-25a  
Matthew 11.16-19, 25-30