

Who Are We? Why Pride?
6 June 2021 - Pride Sunday

I've struggled with today's sermon...more so than I usually struggle with assembling a sermon. I enjoy the research, I am usually lifted up with reading and meditating on scripture to bring the ancient words into a present-day perspective. There's just been so much happening in the world as a whole and so much happening close to home that has demanded my attention.

My mind has been pulled into two distinct directions:
The first - the significance of Pride and why even in the 21st century we need Pride as in LGBTQ+ Pride.

The second - the remains of 215 Indigenous children found on the grounds of the Kamloops Indian Residential School. The atrocities are not a new concept in Canadian History. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission concluded in December 2015 following six years of listening, researching and compiling stories and information.

When the Anglican Church of Canada was in the early days of discussing marriage equality, one of the biggest stumbling blocks was from the "conservative" areas of the Church, and one of those areas was the Indigenous Church which I found surprising as I've known several two-spirit Indigenous Christians. It's one of those shoulder shrug areas that I will develop more in the sermon for National Indigenous Day in two weeks.

Our reading today is from Paul's second letter to the Church in Corinth in which he is talking about our spirit of faith. Paul writes "but just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—I believed, and so I spoke—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence." (2 Corinthians 4.13,14, NRSV)

Paul is writing that we believe what we say, and we believe what we have heard, and in doing so, we know that there is a connection between our beliefs, our thoughts, and our speech.

Let's take a step back for a moment to clarify a couple of words.

The first word: Pride. I discovered two definitions of pride. The first - "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". And the second - "consciousness of one's own dignity".

Remember that word - dignity.

Next let's look at the second word: Shame. "A painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior".

The second definition of Pride "consciousness of one's own dignity" most clearly explains why LGBTQ+ Pride is still necessary. I have heard from many people, after a heavy sigh "Why, in THIS day and age, do we still NEED "Gay Pride"?"

Here is a fabulous explanation to why we still need LGBTQ+ Pride.

Gay pride or LGBT pride is the promotion of the self-affirmation, dignity, equality, and increased visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people as a social group. Pride, as opposed to shame and social stigma, is the predominant outlook that bolsters most LGBT rights movements.

Dignity. Remember that word?

LGBTQ Pride **is not** about forcing a "gay agenda" on the world. It is not about elevating one group above another. **It is about** recognising the inherent human dignity of every human being, regardless of their sexuality, or gender identity. Everyone has the right to live their life as a beloved child of God. Nowhere in our sacred story will you hear God say that we are not born to love. Nowhere in our sacred story does God say that love is bad, or wicked, or evil.

Please keep in mind, at the end of the day, I am a prude. I believe you are free to love whomever you wish, in whatever way you wish. But aside from hand-holding, a hug or a peck on the cheek...please keep that part of you private.

Just the same as I am not interested in what you do in your bedroom, I am not interested in sharing what happens in mine.

Pride is about making the valleys rise and the mountains fall until the horizon is all level. In other words, everyone is treated the same; regardless of who they love; That until everyone is free to marry in the place of their choice; That until everyone is safe to walk down the street holding the hand of the person they love without fear; That until every human being is free to live their life without fear of their sexuality or sexual identity, there will be a need for LGBTQ+ Pride.

The same could be said for the Black Lives Matter movement.

The same could be said for the All Children Matter movement.

Back to Paul's letter. He writes: "yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God". (2 Corinthians 4.15, NRSV)

Grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. In other words, the more people we treat equally, the greater we all receive God's grace and glory. The more we try to understand those who are different than we are, the more we open our minds and hearts to understanding what it is to be a Child of God. To live in the fullness of God's love with inherent human dignity.

One of the most recognisable symbols of LGBTQ+ Pride is the rainbow flag. It was Isaac Newton who first recognized the colours of a rainbow after looking through a prism. He named those colours as red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Indigo was eventually removed because without a prism it is impossible to distinguish it from blue.

The original pride flag contained pink and turquoise which were removed as demand increased and the colours of pink and turquoise were more and more difficult to source.

It is commonly believed that the meaning of the six stripes of the Pride flag are:

Red = Life

Orange = Healing

Yellow = Sunshine

Green = Nature

Blue = Serenity

Violet = Spirit

If we think of the appearance of the rainbow in scripture, it was God's symbol to Noah and his family after the horrific flood which destroyed all but those who were on the ark. It was a promise that God would never again destroy the earth with a flood. Promises of life, healing, sunshine, nature, serenity and spirit.

For Paul, God's glory is felt most deeply after our life on this earth is finished. If we have given ourselves and our souls to God, "we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens". (2 Corinthians 5.1, NRSV)

In order to achieve this we need to live in the fullness of the promises made by God, promises we made at our baptism to recognise the inherent human dignity of everyone we encounter. It is not our job to determine who is worthy of God's love and who is not. God is the only judge that matters. The rest of us are meant to live our lives with the fullest expression of our dignity, recognising that dignity in everyone we meet.

In other words; we are called to treat others, the way that God treats us. We are called to love others the way God loves us.

For many years I struggled with the word pride. Not Pride as in LGBTQ+ Pride, but as in individual pride. The first definition "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." I was always told that it was wrong to feel pride. That if I expressed pride in myself I was bragging and that was, at the least impolite, and at the worst, unforgivable.

I can clearly remember my mother's voice if I tripped and fell over something or otherwise made a fool of myself "proud of yourself, are you?" and I'd immediately feel my face flush with shame.

To this day, it is difficult for me to say I am proud of myself, or of a skill I have been blessed with. I love showing pride in the gifts of others, yet for some reason, I don't give myself that same grace.

Remember the second definition of pride "consciousness of one's own dignity"? That is something I am now better at understanding. My own dignity as well as the dignity of others.

And while I feel proud to be part of the LGBTQ+ community, and proud to be a follower of Jesus and a believer of God, it is difficult for me to feel pride as an ordained member of the Church. I do remember, with great pride, and humility, the feeling of the weight of the bishop's and colleagues' hands on my head as I knelt before them on the evening of my Ordination.

I feel profound shame that the Church to which I have dedicated my life has been involved in the cultural and physical genocide of entire nation of people. With no respect for their dignity, language or customs. Forcing them to adapt language and customs that were not familiar, out of a sense of superiority; both moral and cultural. I will explore this more fully in two weeks...

For now, the last words belong to Paul:

"So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal". (2 Corinthians 4.16-18, NRSV)

2 Corinthians 4.13-5.1

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