

The Rev. Jakki R. Flanagan - Proper 6, Year C, RCL

Luke 7:36-8:3

Galatians 2:15-21

June 12, 2016 – St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT

Before we hear the sermon... I don't know if you heard the tragic news, but I'm sorry and sad to tell you, a mass shooting took place in Orlando, Florida at a Gay Nightclub early this morning...

Approximately 20 people are dead, with more than 40 taken to local hospitals...

Let us have a moment of silence before we continue....

"Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we **may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion..."ⁱ**

~And the Pharisee said to himself "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is..."ⁱⁱ

Whew – it's warm out there and in here. Finally – it feels like summer...finally, June is here.

And for those of us in the LGBTQQIA community, that's Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex and A-Sexual Communities, also referred to as, "Alphabet Soup" - the month of June also means, it's PRIDE.

PRIDE in the LGBTQQIA Community, is a time to celebrate. A time to say that who we are as people, and the love we share, is something to be proud of....

it is worthy...it is equal.

In so doing it's also pushing back against society's long-standing assumption that we should be ashamed, closeted, or much worse.

In other words, PRIDE is a time to recognize our "great self worth."

A time to claim who we are, and what we are.

PRIDE is usually celebrated with a fabulous parade, a parade that is over the top and bursting with joy, and sometimes this parade is followed by a festival.

At my first PRIDE festival there were many wonderful booths and events, *and* I met my first *Radical Fairies*. The Radical Fairies are a group of men, and like any other group define themselves, in a variety of ways... *their* description...or what one *could* call, their ministry, is to:

"through the blessings of nature... and spirituality:

*"refuse hierarchy and embrace consensus" being "passionate about empowerment... queer people finding non-judgmental cooperation."*ⁱⁱⁱ

And while this all sounded wonderful, what captivated me even more, was their "outward and visible signs" of their "inward and spiritual grace"^{iv}: they *wore* fairy attire.

Adult men, in gorgeous green swirling materials, glitter, and wings.

They refused to be invisible.

I remember thinking... "I wish I were that bold."

"I float like a butterfly and sting like a bee."

For many of us, of a certain age, that quote evokes images of Muhammed Ali, who died this week. A well known, iconic figure, whose words floated and whose punch and choices, stung.

For some, Muhammed Ali was a controversial figure, for many others, he was a source of awe and inspiration.

He was an African American heavy weight boxer, who:

~in 1960 won an Olympic Gold Medal, and won the Heavyweight Champion title three times

However, what truly made him stand out was:

~His poetic rhyming, upbeat persona, and bold claiming of self, "I am the Greatest" he said, at a time when Black men were expected to, as one author put it, "keep your dark head down, mouth shut, and occasionally confirm how grateful and blessed you felt."^v

~Muhammed Ali also became a Nation of Islam follower and based on his faith, refused to be inducted into the armed forces and into the Vietnam War.

For this “he was convicted of draft evasion, sentenced to five years in prison, fined \$10,000 and banned from boxing for three years.”^{vi}

He refused to be invisible and acted on his faith, at great cost.

President Obama said he was:

“..Not just a fighter in the ring, but a man who fought for what was right. A man who fought for us.”^{vii}

In today’s Gospel reading Jesus pointed out the invisible, a woman, asking Simon, “do you see this woman?”^{viii ix}

Jesus said her faith had saved her, but the others in the room likely had faith as well, however *this woman* took action, she had *shown great love*.

The Pharisee didn’t understand what was happening.

He didn’t see this woman as a person,

he didn’t see the woman’s gift of love and the risk she took to express it...

Her gifts were not what he could understand... her gifts were not his own.

What I hear in the Gospel reading is not that it’s our faith per se that saves, but our love through faith, and I would say the “saving” is what happens right here in *this* **Kingdom of God**.

Sometimes when we don’t understand others’ gifts, their prophetic witness, they may seem heretical... irrelevant... dangerous....

it can sting.

Our hate and fear can destroy us...chew us up...cause us to do terrible things, however our love and faith will save us, right here, right now.

The woman in the Gospel could have had, great faith alone.

Yet she showed compassion and love, despite how others may have treated her.

This Gospel reading starts with a nameless woman – and ends by naming three women, Mary, Joanna, and Susanna.

It ends with “Jesus going into the cities and villages, proclaiming *and bringing* the good news of the Kingdom of God,”^x with the 12, these three named woman “and many others who provided for them out of their resources”^{xi} which we could assume would be financial, but I imagine it was so much more.

This Gospel names women – the invisible – as having gifts of their own, equally worthy... gifts that previously were not recognized as such.

Often times, when a minority group attempts to create change, Whether it’s radical love and acceptance or shaking off the discriminatory yoke of the status quo the dominant culture tries to diminish them, tries to make a mockery of who they are and what they are.

And those creating change are charged with being:

- Angry
- Fruity
- Militant
- Uppity
- Dangerous

Whether it’s addressing:

- Who Gets to Use Which Bathroom,
- #Blacklivesmatter, or
- Ending Rape Culture

“For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.”

We could hear this portion of Galatians read today also as where we are journeying with the Gospel:

- Muhamed Ali was sentenced to prison because he refused to fight in Vietnam
- A man sexually assaults an unconscious woman and the judge barely slaps him on the wrist, because he's a student and athlete at a prestigious university
- Gay men and Lesbians used to be arrested in this country – **and still are in other parts of the world today** just *for being* Gay and Lesbian... and

to make clear we've still a long way to go –

A mass shooting took place at the Gay Nightclub, Pulse, in Orlando Florida.

Sometimes the system is wrong and the status quo can go on no longer. And as Reconcilers of the Kingdom of God, we are called to see that injustice and act upon it.

Refusing to be invisible,

Calling out Disturbing and Dangerous Societal Norms

And Jesus said to Simon "Do you see this woman?"!!!

May we be bold as we look to see each other, and those who are not yet seen...

May we be bold as we make known to others, who and what kind of people we are as Christians

As we:

share our gifts,

take action and reveal our faith as one of radical welcoming and love

that we are Bearers of the Gospel, Reconcilers of the Kingdom of God

"May we all..... put on our fairie wings, then float like a butterfly, and sting like a bee."

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- ⁱ Collect, Proper 6, Year C, Revised Common Lectionary
- ⁱⁱ The Gospel of Luke, 7:39
- ⁱⁱⁱ Folletere: A Radical Fairie Sanctuary <http://www.folleterre.org/about-us/>
- ^{iv} Book of Common Prayer, *An Outline of the Faith: commonly called the Catechism, The Sacraments*, pg. 857
- ^v Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, *Muhammed Ali became a big brother to me-and to all African Americans*, Time Magazine, June 20, 2016, pg. 18
- ^{vi} Muhammed Ali <http://muhammadali.com/news//#/1967-muhammad-ali-refuses-army-induction>
- ^{vii} Robert Lipsyte, *Ali: Champion, Outcast, Hero, Legend*, Time Magazine, June 20, 2016, pg. 34
- ^{viii} The Gospel of Luke, 7:44
- ^{ix} Journey with Jesus, *What the Body Knows*, June 5, 2016
<http://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/1002-what-the-body-knows>
- ^x The Gospel of Luke, 8:1
- ^{xi} The Gospel of Luke, 8:3