

Drag Queens and Well Women

The relatively recent push to demonize and ostracize sexual minorities in our country is stunning and shameful.

Sexual minorities meaning LGBTQ+ folks.

Sexual minorities meaning drag queens or transvestites.

This demonization is particularly remarkable because of where it's occurring, largely in what's known as the nation's Bible Belt.

And in Tennessee, often proudly touted as the very buckle of that Bible Belt, some of the most draconian laws are now being enacted.

I must confess, I've never been to a drag show; and the clothes I'm wearing now are about as risqué as I'll ever get.

But to suggest drag shows are somehow harmful to children, while there's no facts to support such a claim, and thus ban them, seems to be little more than an attempt to vilify a vulnerable minority.

That vilification is particularly ironic because it's so prevalent in the Bible Belt.

It's ironic because Jesus, the one whom we are called to follow, repeatedly and consistently stands against vilifying others.

Particularly the marginalized, the minority, the vulnerable.

That to see people through the eyes of judgment and condemnation rejects the insistence of Jesus that the outsider be welcomed, embraced, loved.

“Remove the log from your own eye,” he says.

“Don’t judge,” he says.

Welcoming the despised outsider is on full display in today's gospel, this wonderful story – of the Samaritan woman at the well.

She’s part of a group that the Jewish people see as traitors and terrorists, with all of the contempt and disgust that such names imply.

Think Taliban or Al Qaeda.

Think Hillary Clinton if you’re a Republican.

Think Donald Trump if you’re not.

And our Samaritan is not only a member of this group, but she’s also (gasp!) a woman.

Jewish men never speak with Samaritan women.

And yet there’s even more to her infamy.

Because she’s not only on the outs with the Jewish people, she’s on the outs with her own people too.

After all, she's a five time loser at marriage.

Now shackled up with lover number six.

You can hear the whispers as she’s shopping at the local Safeway:

“Man eater.”

“Slut.”

“Jezebel.”

Going to the well in those days was a community affair.

Usually in the cool of the morning.

But she’s there alone, in the heat of the midday sun, because no one wants to catch what she’s got.

And yet, perhaps because of that, she’s tough!

She argues with Jesus about who’s right in the religion department: her people or the Jews?

But she’s also listening carefully.

Unlike Nicodemus, who last week pretty much gives up trying to get what Jesus is saying, this woman hangs in there with Jesus, and before long, she begins to feel something – like water lapping up against her feet.

She begins to see herself not through the eyes of gossiping neighbors or even through the eyes of her own disappointment and shame.

She begins to see herself through the eyes of Jesus.

Through the eyes of God.

And lo and behold, what she sees is a woman who is loved.

Who is, whole.

Who is, perfect.

Just the way she is.

She is accepted, as she is, by the very mystery in which we live and move and have our being.

Jesus says to her, just as Jesus says to every drag queen, just as Jesus says to you and I:

"I know you."

"I know your struggles."

"I know your pains."

"I know the deepest wellspring of your gifts and the darkest corners of your shadow self."

"And I love you."

"I accept you."

And in that acceptance, there is nothing but joy!

That is what Jesus does to people.

The tax collector, the prostitute, the person covered with sores and disease; when they run into Jesus, there is — unexpected welcome.

There is — love.

There is — wholeness.

No longer defined by other people's labels, they, just like our Samaritan woman, see themselves as they truly are.

Beloved children of God.

And one more thing about that woman.

She is thirsty.

But not for knowledge.

She's thirsty for wisdom.

When you think about it, the scene today is really a mirror image of what happened so long ago in the Garden of Eden.

In the garden, the serpent tempts the woman with the knowledge of good and evil.

Today, Jesus invites the Samaritan woman to receive wisdom.

Eve is run out of the garden because the knowledge of good and evil, without the wisdom to use it, creates only self-condemning judgment.

The Samaritan woman, who asks for, and receives, the gift of wisdom, runs into her town, with overflowing joy, becoming the first missionary to announce Jesus as the Christ!

She invites everyone to come and see the Messiah.

Yet, because she's asked for and received the gift of wisdom, she doesn't tell them what or how to believe.

She simply shares with them the same marvelous invitation that Jesus made to his first disciples:

"Come and see!"

In other words, it's not so much about "right doctrine" — but about encountering the one who holds all things together.

It's not so much about "right thinking" as it is about embracing the truth of our reality.

That we are all of us the beloved children of a loving Mystery in which we all live and move and have our being.

And there is this.

By simply urging her fellow townsfolk to "come and see" this Samaritan woman rejects the central mistake of each and every religion.

Each and every religion, each and every denomination, says loudly and proudly:

"The truth only lives here!"

Fr. Richard Rohr, the Franciscan priest, calls this display of spiritual arrogance nothing less than "group narcissism."

Which is the very thing Jesus consistently rejects every day of his ministry.

It's why he heals the hated Roman soldier's servant.

It's why he stops to answer the plea of the gentile Syro-Phoenecian woman for her daughter.

It's why today he spends more time talking story with this outcast of a Samaritan woman than with any other person in any of the Gospels.

Jesus comes to break down walls.

And he implores those of us who wish to follow him to do the same.

Whether those walls are racial or ethnic, sexual or religious, Jesus invites us into a life of unity.

Into a life of spirit and truth.

In his encounter with the Samaritan woman today, Jesus reminds us that we don't worship to be entertained – we worship to get to know Jesus. Butler Bass, paraphrased.

He reminds us that we don't serve the least and the lost and the left behind in order to earn brownie points for heaven, but because we slowly come to realize that it's in those faces where Jesus meets us! Id.

Which is why we receive Holy Communion each and every week (something that worship by streaming, sadly, cannot accommodate).

Bread and wine, changed into Christ's body and blood, which we then consume, making Christ part of our very being, so that we may become Christ in the world!

Accepting.

Loving.

Forgiving.

Serving.

It's a transformation that occurs slowly and unevenly, with lots of detours and hiccups.

Perhaps that's why the story of faith can only be told in sometimes confusing metaphors.

Through parables that make us scratch our heads.

Through hints and glances and stories that don't always seem quite clear.

Perhaps that's why we need to look hard whenever vulnerable minorities are held up to scorn — because Jesus always and everywhere stands with these very people — in solidarity and love.

The hard truth of Jesus is that faith is about changing hearts.

And only a willing heart, only a thirsty heart, can change.

While it's possible to change minds through force or intimidation or propaganda, changing hearts puts us on the less traveled road; the slower, often wandering, always gentler way.

Perhaps that's why salvation doesn't depend so much on being right.

Salvation depends on being thirsty.

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