

Pride and Confirmation: Christ Church, Cranbrook*

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Authenticity, Courage and Welcome for all....

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May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us, be with us this day, and remain with us always. Amen.

Good Morning

Here is a man with a withered hand. Here is a man who needs help and healing. Here are the ones who stand on the side and watch and wait. What will he do? Will the young man from Galilee, who has crowds following him, the peasant from the tiny town of Nazareth, will he cure this man? There are laws and customs, rules and commands will this one who is attracting crowds, unsettling the accepted ways of believing what will he do?

Right, wrong, in or out, included, and beloved, excluded and ignored or cast out and vilified? It mattered then; it matters now. If we are 14, 43, or 84, who's in and who's out who decides who counts, it's still a way in which our worlds are ordered.

Jesus, over and over again, looks at the ones who revere custom and history, more than humanity and care and shows a different way.

"Be you," says Jesus, be your authentic self. To the community he courageously says, "Care, welcome all."

Today we mark the beginning of the month of Pride. Pride for people made in God's image and likeness who happen to be LGBTQIA+/Queer. On some level as an out lesbian married for as long as it has been legal and partnered for 37 years to the Rev. Dr. M. Susan Harlow, I'm stunned to be a bishop. In my world, when I was growing up, if I ever told anyone, that I thought I was lesbian, I was convinced, and I probably wasn't wrong, that I would be shunned and scorned.

When I was 16, I had an experience on a retreat, of being completely and utterly loved by God in the person of Jesus Christ. That experience changed everything for me. I knew God loved me, the rest of the world, was still up for grabs.

And yet here we all are, celebrating Pride and rejoicing in the people today, who have decided to be confirmed, received or publicly reaffirm their baptismal vows. Two events that are not at all incongruous or disconnected.

Some in our world would say, you cannot be queer and be Christian. To which I say, look at the words and actions of Jesus Christ, he says nothing about homosexuality. What he does do is to welcome all people and advocate continually for right relationships which enable all of us to be our most authentic, courageous, welcoming selves.

That is what I long for, for all of us gathered today. Those of us making public professions of faith, those of us supporting and witnessing these vows and those of us celebrating Pride, with grounded, gracious admiration and love.

The reality is, that I'm in awe of all of you here today. In the midst of all that is going on in our world, here you are saying in spite of or perhaps because of the chaos of the world and anxiety of our lives, you are here today making a public profession of faith and who and how you long to be in the world.

I hope that you will experience today as a moment along your journey of faith, where you considered risking embodying the charisms of Jesus Christ. A specific time when you said, "What the heck, I'm going to do my level best to imitate Jesus."

I believe Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth exuded: Authenticity, Courage and an Openness to All. And I believe it is these three characteristics that he longs for his followers to embody: authenticity, courage and openness to all.

He is authentic. He never pretends to be anything or anyone other than who he is. Remember when Jesus is talking about his death, how he will suffer and be killed, and Peter pulls him aside and essentially tries to give him some PR assistance? Peter says, "Ah don't say that Lord, that's scaring people." And Jesus says to Peter, "Get behind me Satan."

Or the time when Jesus walks into the Temple sees the people selling animals that folks might buy and use to sacrifice to God and he just gets so peeved that he loses himself and starts flipping over tables, throwing coins and yelling and chasing folks out of the temple, saying, "You cannot turn a house of prayer into a marketplace."

Or the night before he dies, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus knowing what is likely to happen, scared to death, scared of death and pain, prays so hard that his sweat turns to blood, "O Lord let this cup pass from me, please do not make me do this...but not my will but yours." (Luke 22:42)

Jesus is real. He does not stand on ceremony, he doesn't hide his displeasure, and he names and faces his fear. Jesus, though he is the son of God, or in spite of being the Son of God, Jesus is completely and utterly real. "Rarely did people have to ask, "Gosh I wonder what Jesus is thinking..."

Authenticity.

Courage.

Jesus is courageous. The story in Luke's Gospel, of when Jesus is still a child and his family goes to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and after their time in the big city Jesus' family begins the return trip home and after a few days, they notice Jesus isn't with them...? [To be fair Mary and Joseph aren't the world's worst parents, it was just that families traveled as one large unit and the children would frequently run between the extended group, so it is possible to be decent parents and take three days to realize your child is gone, when for the last two days you thought he was with his grandparents...I digress]. But when Mary and

Joseph return to find twelve-year-old Jesus, there he is in Jerusalem with scholars and priests, talking about scripture and theology. Even if you are the son of God, I'm gonna say it takes some hutzpah and courage to engage adults in a serious religious conversation.

Remember too, the manner in which Jesus put himself in harm's way, over and over again. Going to the temple to teach and pray. Publicly calling out the scribes and pharisees for acquiescing to Rome, or even as he is arrested and accused, standing tall before Pilate and the high priest. Living into his call, knowing the pain that is likely to follow if he is judged to be guilty of inciting the people. Over and over again, he moves forward to his fate instead of quietly sliding away from the people and the spotlight.

Then that raw brutal courage on the cross.

Courage.

And in the midst of it— throughout his life Jesus offers a profound welcome to all. Ignoring, breaking, side-stepping the norms and stipulations of the day. Eating with Zacchaeus, the despised tax-collector, whom all would shun because he was shaking them down for money.

Chatting with the Samaritan woman at the well, who had by all accounts four husbands and a boyfriend. A pious Jewish man would not have been in the company of a Samaritan woman with that sort of history. Yet there he was and she becomes one of the first to announce him as the Messiah.

Or Coming to the aid of the woman accused of committing adultery. (Where was the man by the way?) Questioning the men who were there to stone her, wondering aloud if the one who was without sin should perhaps throw the first stone. All the while drawing literal and metaphorical lines in the sand. And eventually looking up from his work to see that only he and the woman remain. Then asking her, "So where are they who have accused you?" She looks around states the obvious, they are all gone. "Well then says neither do I accuse you. Go and sin no more."

OVER and OVER and OVER again, Jesus of Nazareth offered a full and complete welcome to all.

Authenticity, Courage and Welcome for all. This then is what Jesus of Nazareth embodies. We who want to be, we who long to be his followers, this too is how we are called to be.

Do you think you can pull it off?

To which I say, well even a broken clock is right twice a day. Which is to say, I think, by ourselves on our own, we can every once in a while do it for sure. But to really do it, to be *authentic, courageous, and utterly welcoming* regularly I think we need each other. For try as we might we are not the Son of God. But with each other in a community of faith, in a community of communities of faith we can, together, help each other along and call each other into our very best selves.

Together we are saying, we long to be like Jesus, straight and Queer, together with Pride we can make this longing, tangible and real. And the chaos, fear and anxiety that seems to fuel

our world will be set aside, as we live into God's hope and God's call for all of us. Together.
In Christ's name we pray.

Amen