

“How Long Until We Extend More Kindness?”

June 28, 2020 Covid 15
Psalm 13 & Matthew 10: 40-42

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Good Morning Wall Street Family.....

I invite you to think with me for a moment: What do the following phrases have in common?

- National Accessibility Week
- Orange Shirt Day
- Black History month
- Pride Week – Pride Month
- International Transgender Day of Visibility
- International Women's Day
- The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- National Diversity Day

As I prepared for today I realized more clearly than ever that these special days actually represent people who have been considered marginalized; people who have been valued less than another and not just at a particular point in time, but often still today. These special days act as an opportunity for folks on the margins to have a voice.

Friends, sadly these are days that remind us that we live in a broken world; a world where unless you measure up to a particular standard, you may be seen as an “other.” In fact in some communities not only does it mean you are seen as an ‘other’, it means that you are not welcome within a particular community.

It also should remind us that we have a long way to go to create an equitable, inclusive society – A ‘God Designed’ kind of world without prejudices. And there is hope!

In case you missed it, the month of June is identified as Pride Month around the country. Brockville Pride normally has a full week of activity, including a Drag show, Pride Parade and a Pride service at Wall Street. But because of CoVid19 that had to change, and the LGBTQ+ voice was not heard so loudly in Brockville.

The United Church of Canada deemed June 8th as Pride Sunday; however that did not work for our church. I’m actually glad it did not work

out that way, because today is the actual date of the Anniversary of the Stonewall riots. June 28, 1969 – was the date that the Gay and Lesbian Community stood up to the oppression and unjust treatment they experience at the hands of the corrupt police. For years before, and often still today, the LGBTQ+ community was/is looked at as the “other” by many communities. Homosexual people were looked at as people who were mentally unstable, sexually deviant, sinful, wrong, evil and the list goes on. And yes, Gay Christians did exist in 1969. The Gay Christian community, I have no doubt, called out to God, and still to this day call out to God saying... ‘How much longer Lord will you forget about me/us? How long will you allow us to be persecuted for who we, for who I am?’

What about you? Have you ever felt like asking, as David did: “How much longer, Lord, will you forget about me? Will it be forever, How long will you hide your face from me?”

It was the spring of 2016 and I was looking for work after Kemptville College closed, and since I hadn’t found any work I was hoping to go back to summer camp where I had spent some part of the previous 33 summers looking after kids, telling them about Jesus and baking bread. Then boom – I got a phone call telling me I was no longer welcome to come and serve at camp. That because I believed that gay marriage was an okay thing and because I felt that my gay Christian friends should be allowed to work at camp, I could no longer go back.

Years previously I had just signed off on their code of conduct; knowing I did not fully accept it all; but I wanted to be at a camp where I was part of a community and many of my friends were there. However, in my spirit, I knew the time had come for me to begin living more fully into the queer woman that I was, and not to just deny what I believed to be true about who Jesus loves and welcomes into ministry.

But there it was, I was being excluded because I was queer, from an organization that called itself Christian. But that is not where the brokenness ends. This past Tuesday I went kayaking with my son. We were chatting about life and he said, “Mom, I will never forget the day they called and said you could not come back to camp.” He knew how much I loved being at camp and that it represented a large part of my community. Now he wonders where God is? How can God let me be so hurt by an organization that calls itself Christian?

The problem in our world is that there are so many people who feel forgotten by God, or let down by God. And why is that... when we, the church, God’s children; are called to be the eyes and ears, the hands and feet of God to those around us?

Friends, our reading from Matthew today tells us that we can be rewarded for doing as little as extending a small glass of water to one of Jesus's children who is in need. Remember that this passage was written years ago to a small group of people, who are no longer around. So by extension and so as not to make this just a story about the past; we, or those who identify ourselves as being children of God; have a responsibility to be about kingdom building. "God loves ALL – so do we" is the slogan of Wall Street church. But what about now? What about when we are somewhat limited to our homes? Can we just ignore the world around us? Absolutely not! We are still now, perhaps more than ever, to be called to be the church in the places we are found.

Sadly, me and many of my LGBTQ friends, and my Indigenous friends, and my friends of colour and my friends who are differently abled, or differently aged, may be able to attest to the fact that the "church" is not always a safe place to be. So given that we seem to have adopted a new church slogan (and I love it) – 'Worship beyond the walls!'; how are each of us being Jesus to those around us? Are we welcoming our brother and sisters of in the LGBTQ+ community, are we setting a place for our friends of colour? Are we giving support to those who need it? Or are we hiding away, anxiously waiting for someone else to act. But wait you say – you can't do anything right now...well perhaps the truth is you can.

What are you watching? What are you reading? What is your reaction when you see news headlines that speak to injustice? What are you saying to others about "the other" people? As I said before, today marks the 51st anniversary of Stonewall. Have you become more familiar with that experience or perhaps another similar story? Have you stood up to people who are putting others down that are feeling particularly vulnerable right now?

Jules shared the story Red – A story that talks about being different on the inside than the label that is given on the outside. Have you spoken up to folks who put down or don't get another person's journey? So often we are labelled by what is on the outside, but if only people would take the time to discover what is going on in the inside, or what one truly has to offer this world, it would be a different place.

Let's go back to Matthew: Just to set the stage here, Jesus has just called out his disciples to go and be present to the people, to heal, to listen, to bring hope, and he has warned them that this will not be an easy task. This scripture was not just written to those few people close to Jesus at the time, because if that were true it would be a bit of a boring history book, but rather by being children of God here and now, this message is for us also.

We are called to both go out and to be kingdom builders and to be hospitable in our homes to those who need our support and encouragement.

This scripture talks about rewards. Whoever welcomes you (my disciple and all of us as children of God) welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.

By way of reason then we say; if people don't welcome God's fearfully and wonderfully made children, division is occurring and division is not of God. God wants to restore unity, inclusion and peace between individuals and between nations. God wants to see us embracing each other for the unique gifts and for the unique ways she has made each of us.

Friends, I really do not know what the rewards are in heaven. I can't know that. But rather, I feel the reward that is being talked about here is a reward that can happen richly here and now as we break down walls, and see unity and inclusion happen between all groups of people. The reign of God, the kingdom of God, heaven; is a place where division and hate do not exist. It is a place where all are valued and included. It is a place where we extend hospitality to those not exactly like us, so that we can begin to expand the circle; growing the circle wider to a place where all God's children are included. And at this point we will each be more richly blessed by learning something about ourselves as we interact with one another. We will learn more about ourselves as we learn more about someone else.

When you share your life with other people, regardless of their status, you are showing that your heart is in the right place. You do not have to be doing big things to make a difference, but a small cup of water speaks loudly to one who is incredibly thirsty.

What I love about the LGBTQ+ community, is that they are aware that as they protest and seek rights, they are doing so not just for themselves, but for other marginalized groups. They are a hospitable group of people. Achebe Powell is quoted as saying in the documentary "Stonewall Forever – A documentary about the Past, Present and Future of Pride: *“My expectation and that of many people of colour in that moment was that this movement would also understand that there had to be a commitment to issues beyond the ones that were clearly on the table. We are everywhere in terms of we are every permutation of humanity in terms of identity, from race, class and gender’ and what better movement to set as its vision and mission a connectedness with all of the struggles for justice? The work was cut out for us for sure.”*

Wall Street family, the work is still cut out for us today. The problem in our world is that there are so many people who feel forgotten by God, or let

down by God? I have no doubt some of you who are listening are feeling let down by God.

And so we need to be there for each other – We the church, God’s children, are called to be the eyes and ears, the hands and feet of God to those around us! So as we support one other, we can indeed reach beyond our walls and invite others to worship with us and meet Jesus face to face.

Let’s go back to Psalm 13. *“Please listen, Lord God, and answer my prayer. Make my eyes sparkle again, or else I will fall into the sleep of death. My enemies will say, “Now we’ve won! They will be greatly pleased when I am defeated.”*

Wall Street family, many of you have been the arms and feet of Jesus to me. Thank You! You are the reason I can trust God’s Love. (you have shown it – but we can always do better)

I feel like celebrating because God has rescued me and is helping me live into who he has called me to be. My LGBTQ+ friends who are listening today – may you know how deeply loved by God are you! My straight and cis-gender friends, you too are deeply loved by God! May we continue to welcome and celebrate each other as we emerge from our houses, back into our greater community.