



LESSONS for LIFE

April 19th 2009, 11:00 a.m.
RADICAL ACCEPTANCE
Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes, C.M.

SACRED READINGS

Lesson: ACTS 4: 32 - 35

Gospel: JOHN 20: 19, 24 - 26

Before I begin my sermon this morning I just want to say welcome to all the “metafactualists” who are here in church today and if you have no idea what I’m talking about please go to the web-site and watch last Sunday’s sermon!

You know, there two styles of preaching: one is where you take a great scripture and expand upon it or you take a great principle and you talk about that principle. Another way of preaching that I’ve seen to be most powerful was exhibited by Troy Perry the founder of our denomination and that style of preaching is one which tells some stories and in the mist of the story the message becomes clear. Well you’re going to get a mix of both maybe more the second then the first this morning.

When we talk about radical acceptance we talk about accepting or including others. We usually think of people around us that are thought of as different for some reason or another and how important it is to accept those differences and celebrate those differences.

This morning I want to raise the concept with you that sometimes we fail to accept what is. We fail to have a radical acceptance of what is because we are disappointed that something isn’t exactly the way we had expected; we had hoped for or expected something to be a certain way and when it doesn’t turn out that way instead of exhibiting a radical acceptance of what is we let the disappointment cloud us and we fail to embrace what is before us.

This past Friday April 17th should have been the twelfth birthday for Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover. He lived in Springfield, Massachusetts. He never identified as being gay but the kids in his school thought he was and they taunted him and bullied him. His mother called the school and begged them to make the school a safe place for him. Ten days before his twelfth birthday Carl hung himself. He could no longer take the bullying or the taunting. He should have woken up that Friday morning to look forward to blowing out the candles on the cake and unwrapping presents but he couldn’t take it anymore.

Today I want to talk to us about creating a different kind of world. Today I want to talk to us about how we can be part of transforming our world to be a place of radical acceptance where people can live and be raised in safe places, in safe churches, in safe schools and in safe communities.

That morning when the women went to the tomb to prepare the body of Jesus they took their spices with them. When they arrived at the tomb it was empty. The body of Jesus wasn’t there. Naturally they were disappointed; naturally they were upset. Now they could have gotten really angry and stormed out and left; they could have been so disappointed in what wasn’t there that they could have missed what was because right outside the tomb they met the angels who had good news for them that Jesus was alive.



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Mary Magdalene - right outside the tomb met Jesus. She could have been really upset for what wasn't there but the disappointment of what wasn't there didn't cloud her from being able to celebrate what is.

This week for those of you who were here last Sunday you know that I went to New Brunswick on a trip. I was invited by the High school Council for high schools in New Brunswick to come and speak at a conference and when the Human Rights Commission found out I was coming they asked if I would address a human rights meeting, a public lecture, and when the high school in Woodstock found out I was coming to visit my mum in Woodstock they asked me to come to Woodstock High School.

It was an amazing trip! one that was so powerful for me from beginning to end. It was one of those where you feel so inadequate to try and express the power of the experience but I will try. It didn't start off well though. I flew into Fredericton; my sister was working so we had agreed that I would take a taxi from the airport to her home and when the taxi driver came to pick me up and saw me in my clerics he started to preach at me about how awful the world was and how the world is coming to an end, so I made the decision not to come out to him during that ride! I thought it was a wise decision not to go into detail why I was in New Brunswick.

The next morning my sister and I drove to Woodstock New Brunswick and if you don't know Woodstock it's in Carleton County New Brunswick. It's known as the Bible belt - probably the most conservative, most fundamentalist area of the province!

Woodstock High School has a teacher named Richard Blaquiere, a teacher who has been working for human rights in many areas; in particular LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-gendered) students and many years ago he had set up a gay-straight alliance in the school. They had invited me to come and speak and they had gathered together in the food sciences lab which was the largest space left because other spaces had been booked. Two classes - which was the most we could accept because of the size of the room - plus the girls hockey team and the gay-straight alliance group, so about sixty to seventy students crowded into this room and I was to begin by telling my story so I got up and talked about being raised and growing up in Bath New Brunswick, knowing I was gay from way back. And as soon as I started talking about this people started crying; all around the room people were crying. For some it was just a couple of tears coming down their faces and for some they were just sobbing because it was the first time for many of them to hear an openly gay person speaking in public about who they are, the struggles and the joys of that experience.

After the talk the teacher said, "There's someone who wants to talk to you, Brent," and a young boy in grade 10 was there and he was sobbing and sobbing and he said a year ago in grade 9 he came out to his parents who were very conservative Christians and they kicked him out of the house and for a year he hadn't been able to go home and for a year he stayed with friends and as he cried and literally sobbed he said, "Your talk today has changed my life." A young woman came up to me and said, "I want to thank you for what you've done for my uncle. He and his partner got married and when we came out of the church there were protestors outside. Since then they have adopted a baby and they are very happy." At the end of my talk they told the story of the hockey team and the real reason I was there. That year they had two members of the hockey team in grade 10 come out as lesbians on face book - a kind of a public way to do it - and word got around the school and I got the chance to meet those two young women. Word got around the school and other schools so when they played they were hassled by the other high school. One of my sisters is a teacher and she asked me what school it was which hassled them and I said, "I don't know but I will find out for you." I asked the girls and it was her



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high school and she was physically shocked because she is so proud of her school and yet never realized. Well, guess what that school has in store for it now when she gets back!

The heterosexual members of that hockey team wanted to stand up for their friends who were lesbians, so they got some *stop homophobia* buttons and they all wore them when they played that high school. Coaches wore them, some parents wore them and later on other schools experiencing some hassles asked for them so they too could wear them.

After my speech at the school it was a day of silence that has been organized for a number of years in support of gays and lesbians. What happens is - students sign up and for the first half of the day - they stayed silent; many of them had put duct tape over their mouths and walked around school the whole day showing solidarity for gay and lesbians. Some had signs explaining why they were silent as witnesses. Then at 12:30pm they all marched from the music office to the cafeteria where all the students had banners and they all stood there in solidarity together - about sixty of them - until 12:30pm when they had their shout to end the silence; their shout of liberation and they yelled as loud as they could for about thirty seconds. Everyone in the school heard that.

I was also told the story of Mitch who last year was in grade 11 and he was just coming out and he participated in that last year but he stayed in the back because he was just coming out but before lunch was over he moved up to the front and tapped the person on the shoulder who was holding the banner and asked, "Can I hold the banner?" He moved to the front and was there holding the banner and he was crying and crying and one of the teachers asked, "Are those tears of joy?" and he said "Yes, because I can finally do this." Woodstock High School!

That evening I went back to Fredericton to speak at the University of New Brunswick Law School, the lecture that the Human Rights Commission had set up and advertised. They said to me beforehand, "We have no idea who is coming so you might just be talking to us," but very quickly the room filled with students, parents, teachers, clergy and people I went to high school with who are still alive! (laughter). Lots of folks came out for that lecture and sitting near the front were my three sisters, my brother-in-law and my nephew.

The next day I was the key-note speaker at an educational conference. They were hoping for about forty people because it wasn't officially a day off since they would need to hire substitute teachers for people to come. They hoped for forty people but over sixty people came including teachers, counselors and administrators and the topic was about how to create a safe place for gay, lesbian and trans-gendered students in schools. Brave teachers that have created gay-straight alliances, brave teachers that stood up for students, brave teachers that at times stand up against parents in their schools. At the end of the conference they asked if anybody wanted to join together and form an executive to work with schools throughout New Brunswick; they meet together and begin to plan, and about ten people joined together for that steering committee. One of them was my sister.

That evening my family all came together for a potluck, my family does food the best. My three sisters and my brother were there. As well, my nieces and nephews with their boyfriends and girlfriends were there because they wanted to meet the gay uncle! As I sat back and watched a house full of people I was so proud! From the moment I got out of the taxi for the rest of that trip I was overwhelmed by the number of comments from people who have said they had seen us on TV. What we have done has changed their lives and the lives of their families and friends. They were so thankful for the work of



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justice that we have done through the years. It was literally overwhelming including to just when I was getting on the plane to come back it was like God wanted to get one more in. A woman came up to me and tapped me on the shoulder and said “Brent you don’t know me but I know your sister Jolene. I run with her in the running group. I was at your lecture on Thursday night and it was very moving and I’m so proud of what you’ve done.”

Today I want to talk to you about my own radical acceptance of what is moving way past the disappointment of what could have been. I’m so blessed to have been born gay, I am so blessed to have been born into Bath United Baptist Church celebrating what is moving past the disappointment of what could have been and I am so blessed to be here in this church, to have the freedom you give me to do what I do. To have the freedom to travel and to speak; so blessed by the staff who carry on the work when I’m not here, probably enjoying it more when I’m not here.

Today I was upstaged by Maggie. Sherry has an amazing voice and has been here to sing a number of times. We are so grateful for the connections our music department has to great folks. When Sherry and Kelly found out they were pregnant and that Bailey and Quinn were going to have another sibling, through a variety of events and tests they found out that their next child was going to have Down syndrome. Sherry came here and sat in the balcony that first Sunday after they got the news and it was a time of a bit of sadness knowing that they were going to be caring for a third child that would have some challenges and that would be a challenging situation and knowing that their child would be raised in a world that wouldn’t be as loving or as understanding as it could be and thinking about where their daughter could be safe. *My House Shall Be A House Of Prayer For All People*. Sherry and Kelly, I’m so thankful that you trust us enough to raise all three of your children here, but if I can be just a little biased to say thank you for bringing Maggie to us and entrusting Maggie to the care of this congregation, so thankful that she already has two adopted grand mums in our church and because Maggie was baptized today in this community you are all Aunts and Uncles as of today.

Today Sherry is going to sing the offertory and I want you to hear the words of the song so that when you hear them sung the power of the words, the singing and the meaning behind them so that they can’t be missed by anyone:

*Before you had a name
Or opened your eyes or anyone
Could recognize your face.
You were being formed so delicate in size.
Secluded in God’s safe and hidden place.
With your tiny little hands and tiny little feet
And little eyes that shimmer like a pearl.
In you I heard a song and to make it all complete
God brought my masterpiece into the world.
You are a masterpiece. A new creation
God has formed and you are as soft and fresh
As a snowy winter morn and I am so glad God
Has given you to me. Little lamb of God
You are a masterpiece and now you’re growing up
And your life’s a miracle. Every time I look at you
I stand in awe because I see in you a reflection of me.*



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*Maggie I see in you a reflection of me too and you
Will always be my little gift from God and as your life
Goes on each day how I pray that you will see
How much your life has meant to me.
I'm so proud of you, what else is there to say
Just be the masterpiece God created you to be.*

Maggie blessed us when she was in her mother's womb. Maggie blesses us today. May we be a blessing to our world.

Amen.