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Ty Ragan

Rainbow Chapel

Calgary, AB, Canada

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Rainbow Chapel?

It was what my personal outreach ministry finally became dubbed when I purchased my parents' home, the home of my childhood for my own family to grow in. Up until then, the ministry had been done in coffee shops, church basements, hockey rinks, basketball courts, streets, alleyways, and restaurants...and the occasional basement movie and game night. Now it was a new hub to be tried to actually live this thing called Love a dude named Jesus taught and spoke about, it was about a house becoming a home not just for those that were "family" of the home, but home for those who came inside and found a place to belong free of whatever labels and "crosses" society has given them to bear.

Unplugged

Because for everything there is a season, and for now it is a season of fallowness as the family learns to spread beyond the home and find new places and ways to belong and spread love. The chapel is still within our own home, and the doors are always open, but for now it is a going out instead of a welcoming in, and one day the two shall balance.

Leaving Churchdom

My journey is at a crossroads, where I am done fighting the same battle for all to be loved and heard within institutions that are more concerned with money, history, dogmatic and doctrines. This work is not a collection of "ohh you're so wrong" but rather reflections on what love can do, what can it open up, why I have come here. It is sharing personal anecdotes, gospel stories, and meta-narratives I love to enhance the reflections and let them resonate in your soul. For me leaving churchdom is not a negative connotation within this work, it is as my beloved Shawna would say, stepping out in love, no butts attached. For leaving churchdom is throwing off a burden and simply letting four words and a punctuation mark be a guide in life: What Would Love Do? (WWLD?).

I hope you enjoy this collection of reflections, every so often I raise a challenge for you to do your own personal work and reflection, and I look forward to hearing how this may or may not have helped you. The one thing about the chapel, all types

came, all types shared, and all knew that bread would be broken,
a cuppa drunk, kids and animals would play, and we would
discover the common ground of our diversity of spiritualities
that fed us, created a unity of spirit to step back out into our
world in love.

Thank you,

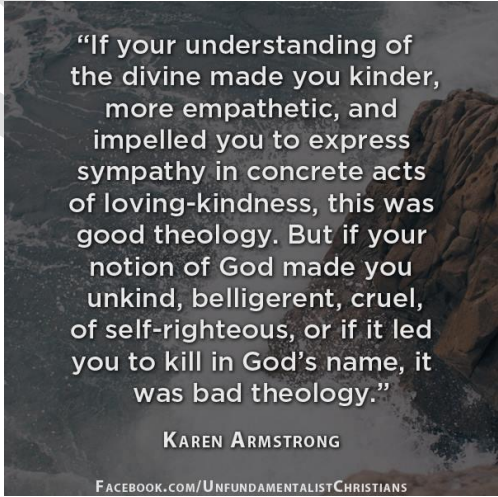
Shalom & Namaste

Rev. Ty Ragan, Psy. D.

Rainbow Chapel Living Room

Calgary, AB, Canada

August 23, 2014



"If your understanding of
the divine made you kinder,
more empathetic, and
impelled you to express
sympathy in concrete acts
of loving-kindness, this was
good theology. But if your
notion of God made you
unkind, belligerent, cruel,
of self-righteous, or if it led
you to kill in God's name, it
was bad theology."

KAREN ARMSTRONG

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The Pulpit Pains

October 1 my best friend returned to the source of all that is, or as my children understand such things "entered the tea party with Jesus" with those that went before in our family. They are both so young, yet have seen so many taken back into the Love that is eternal. Mum, is missed in my heart daily, and it was three days later I did my hardest service ever, and I must admit that as I stepped from that pulpit that day after honouring a life, a faith lived and learned from, stood at the door of the little church in Pineridge to thank family and friends before the tea a little piece of me stayed within the pulpit by the Urn that held her earthly remains.

A little piece of me that would take time to reclaim. Time to understand what had gone out, not from fear or hate or loss or grief but rather a piece that said this piece of my journey was coming to an end. The piece of the journey that was my understanding of God came from a life lived with parents, October 4, 2013 was the culmination of the hardest part of the journey for it was not the cancer that claimed my mother, it was the still most taboo of subjects within Churchdom... mental illness. She desired her battle to end, and simply went.

My children spent the Saturday before her passing with her, telling stories, jokes and playing. She seemed on the up take, the veil of depression of a summer having been lifted, and a veil of choosing her way to exit her years' long battle with cancer that had taken her from her home to a lodge to now this small room in Bassano, AB extended care facility. A once strong woman, so frail, so apologetic, only being able to admit to not

knowing what to do but simply being tired of being where she was.

A depression that under laid her condition, but one that saw sparks of joy in her life. One that brought to head conversations I have been having within my family for decades, since Junior High, about why Euthanasia was an ethical choice in life. Sitting in the quiet of her room with her alone as Shawna, my soul mate had gone for a walk to give us time alone. In the last few months when she had chosen to end treatments, in spite of financial hard ships we scraped together money to go back and forth to Bassano from Calgary to visit her face to face (she was so weak she had opted to get rid of her phone so our nightly phone conversations came to an end). She asked if I understood her choice, I could admit to understanding and knowing that she was making the choice that was right for her.

But then that last weekend, she had gone back on treatment, she was lively, things were looking if not for a healing, at least for a few more months, possibly one more Christmas. . .

To the Tuesday Morning a phone call from my Dad, Mum did not wake up; she had closed her eyes at night, and slipped into the warm embrace of Eternal Love. As I started the journey of preparing her farewell, I did not realize it was going to be entering a time of Sabbath from preaching/writing for myself as I stumbled to find the words after this time.

A time of not anger, but rather disconnect from the Holy Mystery, who had taken so many in my journey as a poverty worker: beloved family; close friends; and those who I journeyed with attempting to transform their lives; to now, letters from my son's school about children who had passed away and he would no longer see in the hallways of his school for children blessed with being different. Just a year shy of taking my Nanny (Grandma) from me and my family, now my Mum. A disconnect emerged where I could go through the per functionary movements within the archaic ritual that was Churchdom to ensure my children were still connected to a community where they could grow in their own understanding of the Holy Mystery to be able to make their own choices around spirituality as they aged.

Realizing now, it was probably my disconnect that made it so difficult for my son, Leland, to really connect within his Sunday school and had him coming back up to services, he is an intuitive sort that ways and knows when Dad is out of sorts. No matter how much I wanted the connection to be there (except I didn't did I?) it would not happen. No matter how many Sundays I sat in the pew going through the motions. Then summer hit.

The pulpit where I left a piece of myself that coolish day in October was offered up as the minister was going on holidays and needed pulpit supply. Two Sundays: how hard could that be? Just go through the motions, nothing major needed to happen, put together some nice safe sermons, use some stock prayers, and all would be good.

Only it wouldn't.

The ancestors wouldn't let me go through the motions. The Holy Mystery spoke to me once more, as it has at many times in my life taking the voice of one who has gone before. This time my mother's voice, reminding me of the story of Mary and the Rainbow Chapel, these are two stories to be known. Two stories that would not be "safe" sermons to give to a community where I simply wanted to go through the motions.

The calling was right, for entering the pulpit a new having shelved any baggage previous to simply bring a message from the Spirit that was speaking directly to my heart, opened up a dialogue of what was missing within our family's walk. Yes we could be cared for physically, mentally and emotionally; yet like the Medicine Wheel of the Aboriginal aspect of our family points out, a whole person has a spiritual/soul aspect that traditional Churchdom was not, a feeding of the soul that is through prayer; teaching and community that is active within one's life more than just one to two hours a week.

Something that has seemed or appeared or has been lost to the new world of social media and 24/7 existence, yet for those of us raising families is inherently necessary for the long term health and well being that a village is needed and that village is not something that can only exist within a very structured hourly confine or one that spends majority of the time speaking about don'ts (i.e.: abortion; same-sex marriage; divorce; etc)

rather than how do we live as neighbours, as family, as community.

As I left the pulpit on July 20th after giving my second sermon and headed to work in the buildings of the Community First Housing program I work for in the city it became more apparent that the Churchdom we were a part of as family was a welcoming little place, yet was not one where we felt nourished as a whole.

The question though had to be raised, what was the reality of being able to be nourished and live fully?





Stories a New

Feel the compulsion welling up once more. Compulsion you say? Well, for Wisdom Keepers¹ we hold the stories of our people and yes stories are meant to be shared. The medium chosen is what changes, ancient times it would be sharing around the fire, or when matriarchs would pass down the teachings of the ancients to the children around the kitchen and household chores.

This work will not be scholarly per se in that there will be many statistics or figures thrown about, if you want those numbers they can be easily found with a little elbow grease I am sure (but do not quote me on that). What this work is about is community within the spiritual sphere. No, check that, it is about the whole person. A whole person treated as such, for the story/journey that has brought them to the now within their community. A holistic approach to life, that speaks to the need not to be independent, but rather interdependent with one another.

¹ My Shamanic designation within the Munay-Ki practice out of Peru.

Spiritual pieces of this text will come from many stories of old, most notably of the Judeo-Christian vein, why you ask? Simple, due to a by product of birth as a Western Canadian of mixed heritage, this is the religion of my ancestry. So not slight towards anyone else, just sticking closely to what I know.

And when I state what I know, that is in a loose sense, for even though the church of Christendom speaks of community, I must be honest in stating that if it was too choose between an organized church (mainline, evangelical, Pentecostal, etc) or the Summit's Family Movie Night² we as a family find more welcome and community at the family movie night than at a traditional Sunday morning service or beyond.

For it is the beyond piece that needs to be examined.
The missing piece of our world. . .

C-O-M-M-U-N-I-T-Y

A place to belong; to grow one's own identity, renew or refresh said identity with age; and to be able to discover family: blood or chosen does not matter. Just think of those times growing up when what you did right or wrong at school would beat you home due to the parent grape vine before your BMX wheels hit the sidewalk outside your house. As I watch my children grow up in the same house I did, with some of the original neighbours left, I know that they will not experience this.

It is very rare we know our neighbours. It is even rarer that the same students are around each new school year with my daughter. For my son, he attends a special needs school, and with the Calgary Board of Education's designation system based on needs assessments that entails him being bussed across a city and no guarantee his friends will live in our community. Yup, cities, not the neighbourhoods they once were and as a result? A rise in displacement of self, loss of meaning and purpose in life, as well, let's be honest, an ability to have healthy social networks that allow for a healthy community, and actually reduces poverty.

² The Rundle Community Centre's Pub/Family Restaurant

Yet this is not what this work is about, it will start a journey with a simple experiment within a simple split level house, owned by a family of four, seeking what a local church could not offer any more:

C-O-M-M-U-N-I-T-Y.

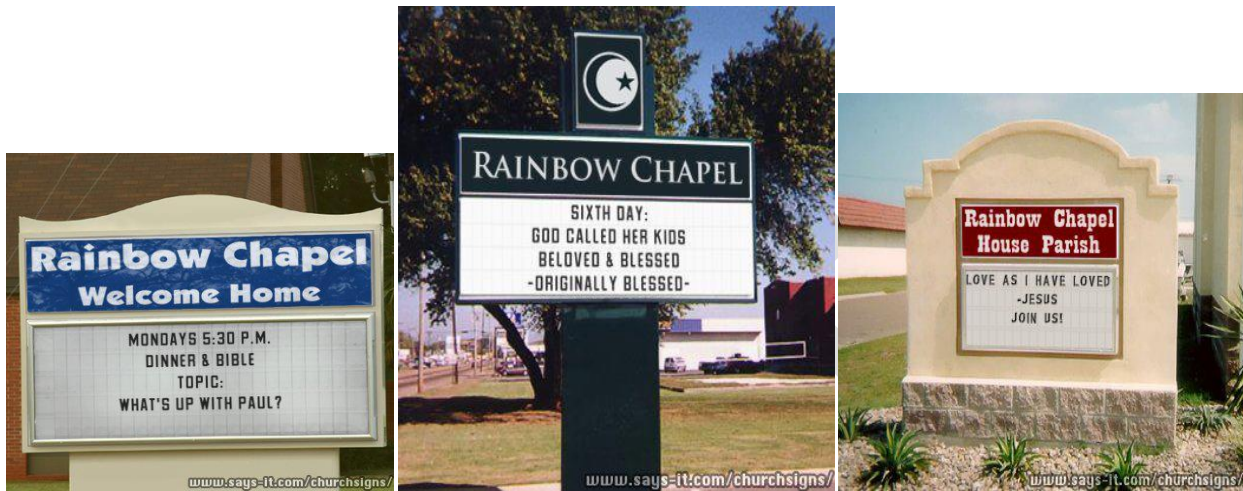
From this short exploration of a household lived for community, a broader conversation will emerge on the nature of the spiritual self, the often neglected piece of ourselves in healing and healing mechanisms as a whole.

From this then the conversation will take us to what next steps mean for the established church of today, or better yet religious world that is by far disconnected for what is needed in modern day Canada.

Welcome to the Rainbow Chapel Unplugged, and take the next step in the journey.



Rainbow Bridge



I still remember the first bible I owned that was actually mine (okay technically second if we count that little Gideon's New Testament from grade five). It was a Good News' Bible bought for me by my Mum from Blessings Christian Marketplace when I started teaching Sunday school at a United Church I attended with my Nan at 19 years old.

That bible served me well as I built many ministries within the United Church Presbytery in Calgary, AB, it was passed on to one of my volunteers as an encouragement to her stepping into her own as an adult. But I still remember pouring over that bible, re-reading, highlighting, scribbling, the hot chocolate and coffee stains...ah the young days feeling like I was making a difference with a new perspective. We had fun and games; bible studies; worship raves, yes it was showing the faith in a very tribal way. Working to inspire youth to live out the Gospel call of Justice that created conflict within the church for the established leadership always asking the question where the money would come from, and our refrain as leaders was simple, show a little faith, give a little trust.

Where had this passion grown in me though? I was not a church kid. Yet here I was building children, youth and young adult ministries in my spare time between work and studies.

Simply put I was raised to be a Universalist. My family baptized me in the Anglican tradition (though a parish meeting in a Catholic School). I attended an Alliance church pre-school; and then went from kindergarten to grade six in the summers to a Presbyterian (Ecumenical) Vacation Bible School. My Mum taught me to pray and love my neighbour; my Dad taught me to help others and give your all from your heart. There was an acknowledgement of a loving creator and the base line being love and doing good works in this world and life.

So after a drifting it was unique to become so impassioned within the church, to feel a calling to the pastoral life that would grow from classical education within an evangelical theological paradigm through Alberta Bible College and Canadian Theological Seminary for my degrees, and then into the Saskatoon Theological Union to supplement.

But the most shaping impact within my life as I worked at a bookstore in the early days of my renewed historic faith path³ asking my minister, Linda, how to pray, and she said it was a very personal matter. So being a bookworm I went to work and discovered a little book on St. Francis of Assisi by John Michael Talbot, this way of living a faith of community; justice and simplicity resonated within my soul. It struck within the mystic that would continue to emerge throughout my life.

Even for a time spent in formation with the Franciscans to further hone my understanding of my own spiritual Charism. This laid the foundation of understanding for creating communities of belonging for all God's Children. Yet these places of belonging were not able to happen in most part in established churches for they required a surrender that institutions do not always like, the way that things have always been done. The Spirit takes hold and guides a group of people together it does not care about human rules or institutions or how we believe things should be done, simply read the story of Mary of Nazareth in the Gospel of Luke [1:26-38](#) in which much is packed in.

³ Up to this point after leaving Vacation Bible School a spiritual journey to connect with the creator that saw me sampling and exploring religious traditions of the Eastern ways; pagan rites; and Judeo-Christian to find a way to connect with my creator and source.

In the time of Mary, women were not seen as much more than property to be exchanged between fathers to be betrothed. Mary would not have a voice, but here is the Creator coming to this non-entity, and asking her to choose her destiny. Just think of that for a moment, God breaking the rules that the institution kept telling the people these are the rules that God wanted obeyed, and what did God do to bring Jesus into this world? Well She tossed all those rules of patriarchy and oppression on their ear.

So as I a student of my belief system's ancient text, and a lover of the Sacred Story, read this and sit in a pew (or chair depending on the tradition⁴) and not realize that the institutional religion of my ancestors was/is rotting from the heart on outwards.

This church formation was not only spiritual in my world, but highly pragmatic with my poverty work through many avenues at the time in Calgary, most notably volunteer work with Inn from the Cold (a family homeless shelter as an overnight volunteer); reintegration mentor with the Calgary Young Offenders Centre; in school mentor with Alberta Mentor Foundation for Youth and paid/volunteer involvement for 13 years with the Mustard Seed Society (and a side trip into Hull Child & Family Services).

So when I read the words of Jesus from Matthew 25:31-46 more commonly known as the [sheep and the goats](#) it does beg the question in the 21st century who is the least of these that we are called not to judge but simply to love?

⁴ I have been involved in commissioned and collared ministry within United Church of Canada; Presbyterian Church in Canada; Anglican Church of Canada; Order of Ecumenical Franciscans; Third Order Society of St. Francis; Roman Catholic Church; Christian & Missionary Alliance; Restoration Movement; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. My most rewarding was when a group of people I once served online ordained me in the Universal Life Church Monastery so that I could be their credentialed minister and as a thank you for how I had ministered to them.

³¹"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, ³²and all the nations^[a] will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me. ³⁷Then the righteous^[b] will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?'⁴⁰And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' ⁴¹^[c]Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' ⁴⁴^[d]Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' ⁴⁵He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' ⁴⁶And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.'" (Matthew 25:31-46, NABRE)

The Least of these

My soul mate Shawna's profound and favourite saying about Jesus is simply "its love, no butts added." And this is true. This is the truth in the above teaching as well. Those mentioned were those of Jesus bar Josephson's time that would have been seen as their lot due to their actions and a holy person would not necessarily need to engage them.

But it begs the question though in the 21st century who would Jesus be telling us to simply love to show the love that exists in our hearts?

First let us reflect on this concept of love. The church (and I think I have a confirmation rock still with this on it) latched onto WWJD? (What Would Jesus Do?) unfortunately the institution has so misused the humble peasant preacher that in

some folks' minds and hearts Jesus can become synonymous with hate, not what he actually stood for L-O-V-E. So radical and life giving it so shook his world that the oppressive powers (religious, political and empire) silenced him via lynching. A theological aside I took a Sabbath in 2012-13 that allowed me to more fully explore Mary of Nazareth, and really it is the misuse of her son, that is why her as an apparition, and voice of equality, peace, justice and love is so powerful in the world from about the time of Constantine first using the Sign of Christ to conquer, to now where, well as humans we still love to throw around we are doing this as "holy" or "in the name of God" GAWK! Do we ever let mouthpieces on social media, main stream media and the citizens of the world let's rule by apathy of not voting get it truly wrong.

So, perhaps a more apt statement for the 21st century to truly get to the heart of this teaching would be: WWLD? What Would Love Do?

Are we as individuals and communities equipped to truly love in the radical ways that Jesus teaches here? That is to throw off societal or institutional norms and embrace the other? Are we willing to take a step out in faith, and simply see the Holy Mystery within one another, a yoga term I love is Namaste, honouring that mystery within one another labels vanish and all that is left is simply love?

Grab a journal, and begin scribbling, who is on your Matthew 25 list? Who are the least of these?

What labels need to become personal?

Who is your inner self calling you to love that you are hesitant to?

Better yet, a reflection to prepare for the next leg, what "don't" is you embracing or struggling with? Both are a good place to begin reflecting on why this belief is held and is it needed for your faith to be strong?

What Would Love Do?

¹⁻²Jesus went across to Mount Olives, but he was soon back in the Temple again. Swarms of people came to him. He sat down and taught them.

³⁻⁶The religion scholars and Pharisees led in a woman who had been caught in an act of adultery. They stood her in plain sight of everyone and said, "Teacher, this woman was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. Moses, in the Law, gives orders to stone such persons. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something incriminating so they could bring charges against him.

⁶⁻⁸Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger in the dirt. They kept at him, badgering him. He straightened up and said, "The sinless one among you, go first: Throw the stone." Bending down again, he wrote some more in the dirt.

⁹⁻¹⁰Hearing that, they walked away, one after another, beginning with the oldest. The woman was left alone. Jesus stood up and spoke to her. "Woman, where are they? Does no one condemn you?"

¹¹"No one, Master."

"Neither do I," said Jesus. "Go on your way. From now on, don't sin."

(John 8:1-11, The Message)

Churchdom in the Twenty-First Century, in spite of Pope Francis' good works, is still known more for what it is against, that basically being a beacon of light for people to discover how to live life with one another in community. See that is why the church has lost its way, we are more proud to declare what defines our faith, our non-negotiable: Anti-abortion; pro-death penalty; perpetual virginity of Mary; Jesus' celibacy; Jesus' married life; anti-LGBTQ persons; Biblical inerrancy; anti-euthanasia; anti-divorce; how communion is done; pro-this doctrine or con-that dogma; yet what we have created is a Pharisee-Sadducee existence that does not allow a faith of living.

A faith of love.

For we are far too concerned with the minute details that we hang our hats on and make us far too scared to enter into an actual dialogue, to go deep in our understandings and exploration of the spiritual for fear that one of these non-sequesters will be upset and then our faith will collapse.

That is what Jesus was speaking to these men about who dragged this woman caught in a reprehensible act in their estimation (I will save you the tirade about the man she was committing adultery with not being brought for a stoning as

well). Yet this ancient teaching sees Jesus writing in the dust, the scamp in me thinks a rather derogatory message to these misogynistic sons of bacterium.

Jesus catches them short by forcing true self reflection of these persecutors. Which one of you carries sin? Which one of you has never erred in judgement? Damaged a relationship? Made a pragmatic choice on one side or another and have to live with your decision?

Their conviction for execution could not hold. They surrendered their stones and turned away rather than berate themselves they needed to find self-forgiveness. To release the woman of their own detrimental self-judgements that caused them to project, caused them to pick a "sin of the week" to uphold and persecute so they could feel better.

Jesus, then in his kindly way, points out to her she is released from other's judgement, but this release only works if she releases herself. That's right. Self-forgiveness the hardest weight to shed, the hardest release, and the mental baggage that sticks to the soul and dims the light that is to shine brightly for the love from the Source.

When I was doing my Shamanic training I learned Chakra cleansing, and it is powerful to walk yourself or someone else through energy cleanse. A removal of the soul sludge as I like to call it for the person, a true purging of that which can hold one back from enlightenment. That is the moment when Jesus asks who accuses her, for she needs to release herself of the shame of the choice in the moment and realize she can step beyond her label and choose a life lived to its fullest for the Holy Mystery.

Or as Reverend Patricia Campbell aptly phrased it in the title of her 2010 book, "Giving God a good time" or truly living one's life fully for God. What a beautiful offer Jesus is giving this woman, to shed an imposed label and to choose life.

Are we ready to choose life? Are we ready to release ourselves from labels that hold us back? Thinking that stagnates? Are we ready to move all the minor things away for simple things like Love?

³⁴When the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they came together.³⁵And one of them, an expert in the law, asked a question to test Him: ³⁶"Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?"^[u]

³⁷He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."^[u] ³⁸This is the greatest and most important^[u] command. ³⁹The

second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.^[a] 40 All the Law and the Prophets depend^[a] on these two commands."

-Matthew 22:34-40, HSCB

A building of community that was summed up in a three way love affair: Love God with your everything, and think it through Genesis 1 tells those of the Judeo-Christian tradition we are created in God's image. We are to love God, our loving creator, crafted in His image, and She called us beloved, blessed and very good at creation, this has not changed. Our everything goes into that love of the Holy Life within, from out of that pours out love of our neighbour, and when we contemplate loving our neighbour we must first love ourselves.

Each piece fits together.

And it boils down to L-O-V-E.

So, reflect before you act.

What Would Love Do?

DRAFT

Dancing the Circle

Matthew Fox, a defrocked Dominican (Roman Catholic) priest, re-frocked within the Episcopal Church, a leading theologian around the wisdom movement of Progressive Christendom has written a simple saying that stuck with me. I have read most of his works, digested them, learned of the Cosmic Mass, the Cosmic Christ, and even love the analogy of One River, but many wells we can drink from. But this image is the one that sticks with me as he wrote of the needed end of patriarchy. For Jacob's ladder the staying image from the book of Genesis to be burned down fully within Churchdom, and to be replaced with the joy of Sarah's laughter and dancing of the circle from Genesis when she found the new life within her (Isaac).

What does dancing the circle mean for us today? It was the theme of the two services I put together in July 2014 that brought me back into the pulpit, Dancing the Circle and the Dancing the Circle wider. It is about family dinner in a way, building inclusion and welcome into one's own home.

The most damaging label we have in 21st century Canada is "have and have nots" or the "1%", I have built a career on passion, some call me a poverty worker, some a missionary, sadly the work I do within shelters and aiding individuals transitioning from homelessness to home is rooted mostly in a loss of hope. But it is also an industry upon itself.

This is a piece where the circle needs to be drawn and danced wide. Where our communities need to become places of welcome for individuals regardless of their background, and where we need to learn how to live together, what safeties different types of people need.

At the turn of the 20th century in Canada immigration was at an all time high. So much so, that something called a "homeless shelter" took route at the midpoint of our vast country. The Winnipeg Mission ran by J.S. Woodsworth was a place where new immigrants could come for health care, learning, receive tracts of land upon the prairies and get aid with re-settling (and during their stay have the basic necessities of life covered).

As a guest lecturer at Mount Royal University on homelessness and poverty issues, I do remember shocking a first year class by showing them a picture of my children and introducing them as fifth generation homeless shelter kids. I had great-grandparents on their way to settling the prairies that had stayed at Woodsworth shelter.

It was a struggle for some students, in spite of my doctorates, and my other letters and work experience, they admitted to move beyond this admission and listen. Why?

A label had overtaken their comprehension, and had closed their circle. In fact, it had reinforced in their own selves the idea of climbing a ladder of independence, instead of dancing a circle of interdependence. On these guest lecturers I would also challenge the Protestant Work ethic assumption by inquiring how many students in the class got there on their own. Many would say they did, they worked hard and earned the grades. But I would push and ask how they physically got to class that day, some would say drove, so did you build your own car? Pour your own road? Build the classroom? For those sipping a bevy did you make it yourself from growth to cup? Oh you took public transit? Did you make the bus? Drive it?

Look at your world around you. Take time and actually write down all the different types of roles and functions it takes for our communities to functions. There is no such thing as a person better than another depending on their role in society, without the store clerks or the lawyer or the teachers or the janitors or the road workers or the artists, without any of these and more our world is poorer for their absence and less functional.

We just need to rewrite our meta-narrative of falsity into the true community narrative it is, for it is not just as the African Proverb says takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to raise a community.

What is your role in the world?

What fills you up? What is your passion? How can you make a living at it? Or what can you do for a living while you chase your passion? Take time to reflect on these, for these are the

important questions of life we do not spend enough time asking ourselves.

Among others are who is my family? Who are my friends? Where do I feel at home when I am not at home? Where do I find community? Where are my heart and soul places when I am there I truly feel the Holy Mystery within me renewed?

DRAFT

Churchdom needs a Sherwood Forest

Actually our world needs a Sherwood Forest. Anyone on Twitter can easily find the Robin Hood Tax movement, it seems so simple, yet this is a meta-narrative that time has forgot. Just enter any Disney store and try to find Robin Hood merchandise from their movies. The conspiracy theorist in me believes it is because the core of the Robin Hood story is a throwing off of the oppressive capitalistic practices of the time that lets the rich live lives of leisure and wealth on the backs of the poor.

Hmmm... Treasures on earth kind of stuff, sounds like another meta-narrative that a peasant labourer that was lynched would go back to time and again. It is not wealth on earth that is hoarded that matters. There is enough food and money that if leveraged and used properly for everyone to be fed and sheltered and cared for on this planet we call Earth.

This is something I would go back time and again to challenge students whether they were at a University talk, or coming through the Mustard Seed, Canada is a mixed economy. That means part government intervention part free market. Alberta is allegedly one of the wealthiest markets in this country yet with a huge epidemic of homelessness and poverty that in the mid 2000's saw the government declare states of emergency for the shelter system due to lack of space on blustery winter nights or scorching summer days. It is a market where many families and individuals are one or two missed pay cheques away from sleeping in a vehicle, under a bridge or on a shelter mat.

The question for reflection: What level of poverty should exist in Canada?? Essentially, ethically what level should the bottom be at for the non-wealthy, for the middle class, the working class, the labour class, and the underclass? Are cots in church basements appropriate for our children? Mats on floors appropriate for our veterans and seniors?

It is a challenge to realize that it is not just about housing, the community challenge is what level, what cost and how to ensure adequate and appropriate H-O-M-E-S are supplied for each and every Albertan and Canadian.

This is why the World and Churchdom need a Sherwood Forest. It was Sherwood Forest where all the classes fled that was caught in the oppressive sweep of Prince John's coup spearheaded by the Sheriff of Nottingham or Guy of Gisbourne (the Sir Hiss of Walt Disney's version) or both depending on the version of the tale you like.

Sherwood was an amazing place⁵ for it was a place of equality. Everyone participated as they were able. Everyone was housed and fed equally. Women, men and children coming together to live their lives interdependently. Elders were honoured for the wisdom they brought even if they could no longer provide for the heavy lifting. There was no designation of men or women's work, what work needed to be done was done. They were cast outside the law, outside society and the norms and traditions that strapped that society.

Religiously it was a mosaic, sure there were some Christian traditions, but also earth and indigenous traditions emerged as well. Let's be honest, the Robin Hood legends overlay in some regions the Celtic legends of Herne the Hunter and the Wild Hunt.

A utopia in some respects if you remove the constant hunting by the King's men wanting to execute them. Yet also a leveraging of local lore and fear of ghosts kept many invaders at bay.

The taking from the oppressor (rich) was essentially returning to the poor what was theirs to allow for daily survival. In BBC's recent Robin Hood series finale, it was a great ending with Robin dead, the people of Sherwood realizing and declaring "We are Robin Hood". It is true, Robin of Locksley was but one man, yet what his dream was opened up a reality of what could be. Whether you believe him a Pagan or a Christian, at the heart was L-O-V-E for neighbour, self and creator.

⁵ I love the updates in Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves and BBC's recent Robin Hood series that added Muslim characters to the mix, as most Robin Hood legends are placed during the crusades. Since Friar Tuck is a Franciscan, and it was St. Francis who met with Saladin to pray for peace between these religious nations, it was great to see the integration. So much so, when my daughter chose baptism on a Triumphal Entry Sunday at our Lutheran Church her bible was emblazoned with the name "Lady Jax" the adventuresome tom boy princess of the new lore (our Son's the previous year was emblazoned with Little John—the man who broke through the role of outlaw/outcast to become a hero).

A creator that was found in a panentheistic view of the world (and the one I am most comfortable with): everything is in the Holy Mystery, and the Holy Mystery is within everything. This is the source that drives the motif of Sherwood Forest and so upsets the establishment, for it is not a cut throat existence, it is not about amassing personal wealthy, or about independence.

Sherwood Forest is what the world needs today, simply because it is the antithesis of Western Culture currently. It about interdependence, ethical care of one another, honouring our shared histories; exists together in spite of our differences by finding the common threads. What common thread? We are created in love and live out and through that love.

Take some time to reflect on how you can be Robin Hood in your home, family, and community?

Social media is a useful tool for staying connected within our world; it can also be a trap because it means one will never need to actually make human contact. But that is a tale for another time. I have leveraged social media to ask friends and followers what stories they believe need to be reflected on in this tale of community, this comes from a friend and mentor I served with Deb Runnalls:

The Good Samaritan

²⁵ An expert in the Law of Moses stood up and asked Jesus a question to see what he would say. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to have eternal life?"

²⁶ Jesus answered, "What is written in the Scriptures? How do you understand them?"

²⁷ The man replied, "The Scriptures say, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.' They also say, 'Love your neighbors as much as you love yourself.'"

²⁸ Jesus said, "You have given the right answer. If you do this, you will have eternal life."

²⁹ But the man wanted to show that he knew what he was talking about. So he asked Jesus, "Who are my neighbors?"

³⁰ Jesus replied:

As a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, robbers attacked him and grabbed everything he had. They beat him up and ran off, leaving him half dead.

³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road. But when he saw the man, he walked by on the other side. ³² Later a temple helper^[1] came to the same place. But when he saw the man who had been beaten up, he also went by on the other side.

³³ A man from Samaria then came traveling along that road. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him ³⁴ and went over to him. He treated his wounds with olive oil and wine^[1] and bandaged them. Then he put him on his own donkey and took him

to an inn, where he took care of him. ³⁵ The next morning he gave the innkeeper two silver coins and said, "Please take care of the man. If you spend more than this on him, I will pay you when I return."

³⁶ Then Jesus asked, "Which one of these three people was a real neighbor to the man who was beaten up by robbers?"

³⁷ The teacher answered, "The one who showed pity."

Jesus said, "Go and do the same!"

-Luke 10:25-27, CEV

Ah a challenge is laid down in a great Jewish tradition of asking questions to seek wisdom. There was much wisdom here. First, let us reflect on what it means that the holy ones left this battered and bleeding man to die? A foreshadowing if you will of Nero fiddled while Rome burned. Think of the dying of neighbourhood and community while traditional models of community leaders via politics, business and religion play with sound bite leadership and not fully thinking out a plan for the betterment of all.

That was the priest and temple helpers are in this story. Those that have pat answers as to why they chose the "holy path" or the path of "fiscal prudence" yet there is still the pain, the battering, the cancer eating away at a segment of society, or a neighbour, friend or family neighbour. Rings hollow sentiments in the ear and heart doesn't it when you insert our world into this story.

Then there was the Samaritan, a half-breed if you will, a population created through inter-marriage with conquerors of Israel. Someone unclean, untouchable, not to be trusted and yet the one living out of the Love that is God. The one that throws off "prudence" or "holy paths", the one that sees the holy in the other laying near death and reaches out with the hand up.

We can be the Samaritan's of our own stories, in our own homes and communities. Reaching out to offer a change to reality, yes there is always the challenge the help will not be accepted, and that is the human drive of free will, but when

something disastrous has or is to happen, it simply takes one voice to begin the chorus. One hand to begin the chain of giving or one heart to begin the cascade of love and when this happens, you are loving God, self and neighbour fully and with an abandon that brings the community itself to a new level of being for labels vanish.

And a new reality begins to emerge.

Are we up to the challenge?

DRAFT

Let it Rain

Brad Paisley is a country singer that has levelled two songs worth contemplation in this journey around community. The first is off his new album, Shattered Glass, listen [here](#) and the other was off an experimental album of his dubbed "Wheelhouse" and was titled Accidental Racist, listen [here](#).

Like the Samaritan in Jesus' story above, there are labels that hold everyone back, these songs reflect those labels. The glass ceiling being shattered, it is the metaphor that holds back those that are not "old white male club" thinking of women is easy, but there are also minorities, young emerging leaders, and those who are differently abled. As these words and images dance in my heart I look at both my daughter, Justina, known as "typically" developing, and my son, Leland, blessed experiencing the world with Cerebral Palsy, and wonder what glass ceilings they will need to shatter through and let it rain down.

For within Churchdom as a family unit we experience the glass ceiling barring children and that which is new, or differently abled from fully actualizing and experiencing the Holy Mystery. Why? Fear of loss, fear of change, fear basically that the Holy as we saw in the story of Mary of Nazareth, that God does not care about our labels and rules when it comes to the Creator's children living their call.

And that is why this song is grouped with Accidental Racist, a song about misunderstanding, history, admitting of racism still existing but truly rooted in only knowing the caricature of the other and not knowing the other personally. What if we sat down with the other and actually talked, got to know each other. Looked beyond outdated symbology, hatreds we no longer understand why we hold. What if we threw out the labels and met one another without the baggage of our ancestors, and just as neighbour?

What Would Love Do? Then?

Take time to meet others simply for who they are, as your neighbour.

Politics of Belonging

Ah who knew ISIS in Iraq having a British sounding citizen behead a journalist could catapult thoughts around belonging, but it is true. I am happy to see many Imams speaking out that this group is not Islamic, but fearful that terrorist groups such as this will be able to recruit the young. Why?

International Terrorist groups; religious youth groups; youth gangs; political parties and even the Boy Scouts or Girl Guides (to name but a few) operate on the same fundamental principle: a place to belong.

It is truly what our world seeks, and when groups begin to wane and die due to attrition it is dubbed now as "natural life cycles"; but is this true? Is it a natural life cycle or is it simply an inability to create an open space where new members are accepted and embraced without complete conforming.

A journey into the political landscape can see this play out in Canada. I took this journey, was active in many political parties and reflecting back it was about learning, growing, finding mentors and discovering my own values. These parties provided a place of belonging, learning and some place to use my identified gifts and talents as a writer; speaker and instructor to be able to equip and aid many discover a public voice (as well as myself), activate voters, and I believe effect some change. Maybe not fully what was desired but moving the discussion along to a closer community outcome for that was the drive for me.

Through my work of spiritual formation with the Franciscans what emerged from the many things I did, it boiled down to a simple mantra: *Make my own corner of this world a little bit better of a place.*

Time for your own reflection: what are you being led to become active as a member in? How does it fit you? How will it help you grow? And finally, what is your date to join and begin?

Original Sin

Madeja look. No I am not speaking of the antiquated tribal ideal that we are oh so horrible because in the myth Eve ate a fig and in her nakedness convinced Adam to follow suit or that it was such a horrible transgression that our "Loving Father" had to butcher his son to ensure we could be forgiven and in his sight again. No, this was a Marvel Comics event storyline in 2014 (I will not bore you with the narrative details), but it revealed secrets of their heroes and the one of note for me is the two-parter in Daredevil around his mother.

Daredevil for the uninitiated was blinded as a child, and left orphaned when his father a boxer was killed. Not much was known about his mother other than she left them. Under a Frank Miller storyline, it was discovered she had become a nun (please note our devil hero is also a devout Roman Catholic). The nun had left, the big reveal of the two part story that originally left the reader believing that it was because Matt's dad was abusive, nope, the truth was his mother's post partum depression was burgeoning on the homicidal and she had left to protect her son, and found comfort and healing within the religious cloister of nuns.

Slow down a minute, a mental health issue in a comic book, a healing, religiosity, and yet it works. But let's reflect on spiritual communities and their take on mental health? Is it seen as satanic? Is it seen as only needing prayer to heal? Is it seen as simply a chemical imbalance in need of a prescription? Or is it simply not allowed to be seen?

Seeing someone you love, or a stranger lost in mental illness from uncared for mental health concerns can be a scary thing. I speak from my own battles with depression and anxiety, they at times in younger years burdened on suicidal impulse. Yes I have taken counselling, spiritual direction, and medication. I have found healthier activities; I know alcohol even in leisure exacerbates an inkling anxiety or depressive episode. And the kicker? This is something I experience life with because of a medication used to save my life as a child from convulsions, and you know what? It's all good.

But this is where the circle needs to be danced wider, where open and honest conversations need to happen, where a safe place needs to be created. A place where we do not let the mysteries of the mind scare us away from dialoguing about them in the mystery of the spirit. In fact, these are only two facets of the whole person, and if community is to be healthy, if a person is to be healthy, all aspects have to be taken care of at once, not in piece meal fashion.

Our Aboriginal family members show us that with their Medicine Wheel, and just how they are in life. So take the challenge, realize that all aspects of your life are connected and sitting with walls up are not going to help you grow in place, spread your wings and your love. The walls need to crash, the doors fly open, the gunk of the soul released, the physical and mental ailments cared for and if possible healed... but it comes from a point of release as a whole person, as who you are in name chosen or given or both: NOT IN A SOCIETAL CONSTRUCT A LABEL GIVEN TO YOU, you are not "depressed" or "crippled" or "schizophrenic" etc, these are aspects of you that the world needs to accept, you need to reconcile to and how to live within as health of way as possible. That means if needed medication and not feeling ashamed for that, if it means counselling then being proud that you are strong enough to seek out help, and if it means cutting certain people out of your life who have done irreparable harm, then so be it and to do it without remorse but knowing this is for your health in a community.

But honestly, it is where churchdom falls down, as too often they will not discuss the topic of reality, or they will spiritualize it to the point that if someone is to seek medical aid then they lack faith in God.

But as with anything, I challenge you dear reader on this one to spend time in true reflection of the heart for yourself and your community and to ask the question in the instance of those blessed with experiencing the world differently:

What Would Love Do?

Who is your Lightning Rod?

It is a unique question, now some people can journey through life and never discover the "one"; or never want to be with the "one". Yet our literature ancient and modern is filled with stories of love. From failed lovers in Romeo & Juliet, to Robin Hood and Maid Marian, Lancelot & Guinevere who ended paradise. The greatest mythology shaped in the modern world is the comic book, and in the Post-Crisis (1985-2011) era of DC Comics they took the original super hero's mythos to the next level with the Superman/Clark Kent/Lois Lane love triangle fully resolved, because simply Superman became the disguise for Clark Kent, and it was Clark that wooed Lois. In the DC New 52, they are borrowing from ancient mythology with their Superman/Wonder Woman romance (sky god/mother earth) yet there is still a root for the hero/heroine.

The clearest form though of defined love actually comes out of The Flash comics: where the "Speed Force", if a speedster goes fast enough, will merge with them unless they have their own lightning rod to humanity. This was clearly defined in the relationship of Flash III (Wally West) and Linda Park-West, who Wally stated was his one, his lightning rod that would always bring him back home and center him. This concept was then expanded with Flash I (Jay Garrick) and his wife, Joan... and definitely redefined when after a 23 year absence due to dying to save the universe in Crisis on Infinite Earth Flash II (Barry Allen) left the speed force due to the love he held for Iris.

So why the romantic turn? Well:

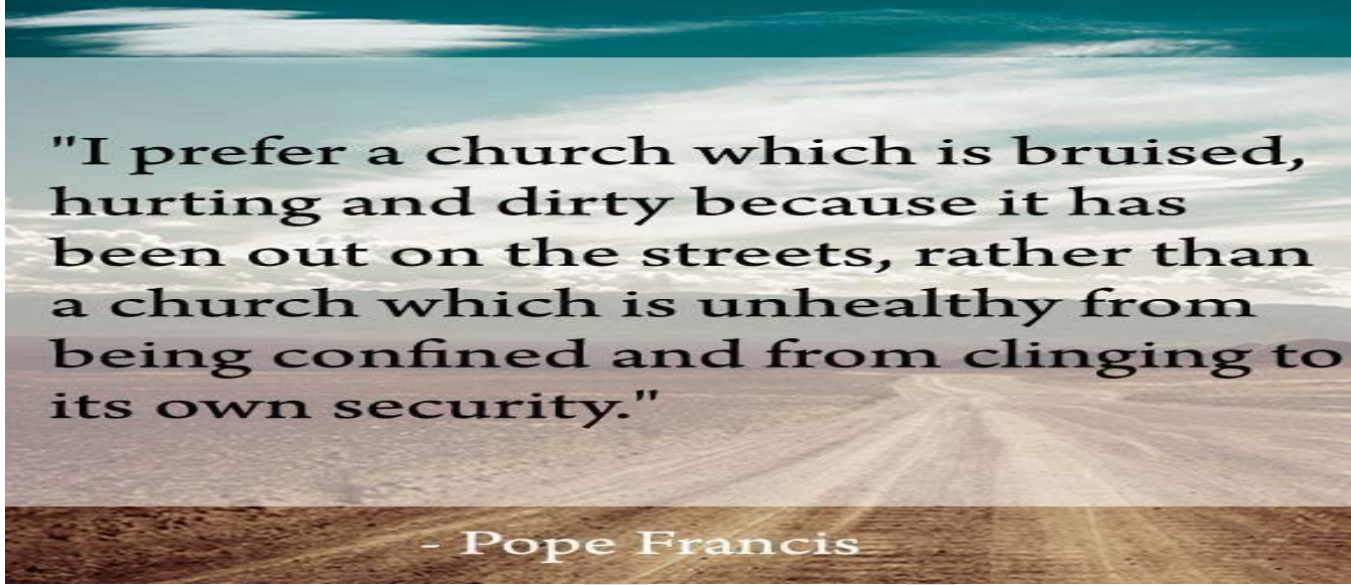
- a) I am a huge comic geek,
- b) I am a huge Robin Hood nerd, but...
- c) Mostly celebrating the greatest life choice with my family. Looking into the eyes of my soul mate, and realizing that the best term is more than just best friend, or even soul mate, she is quite literally, my lightning rod, the one that keeps me sane, centered, and brings me home regardless of how crazy life can become.

Thank you my beloved.

And that is what it is about, a deep crazy never going away love that is part of the journey throughout life of the great adventure. It is a love between consenting adults, in whatever formation that relationship take- opposite sex, same sex, polygamous, polyamorous, or even platonic companionship and whatever forms I may have missed. It is the source of all, bringing the souls together in a loving consenting relationship with or without the "official state/church" stamp of certificate, but the true celebration and recognition of said love by one's own community.

Reflect, do you or have you had a lightning rod? How did/do you know? How has it been affirmed in your journey? Have you ever thanked the person?

DRAFT



"I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security."

- Pope Francis

It appears a Jesuit channeling a Franciscan spirituality may actually be able to turn around the ship of Churchdom or not, but truly if one man can pull it off or not is not relevant for the individual within their own community. What is relevant to us though is that one man is inspiring others to take a second look at the ancient teachings we allegedly base our lives upon.

Those ancient teachings are what guided the son of a wealthy man, a truly failed "war hero" who spent more time injured or imprisoned than on the battlefields of the crusades, and who heard voices in broken churches, to radically change his life and the lives of those around him.

Francis of Assisi, sainted shortly after death "to appease the peasants" as it were, is a delicate vibrant soul that heeded a simple call from a cracked crucifix in a dilapidated chapel in San Damiano. The call, the vision of Jesus was simple, "rebuild my church". Francis showed a literalist mind set, and shows why we cannot take messages of God literally. For he sought out, stole from his father's company monies, to buy resources to literally rebuild three falling apart churches around his town. Jesus would return to him once more and point out, that yes these are fine effigies to the almighty and sound buildings but

completely irrelevant for the work of the Gospel⁶ for the church to be rebuilt was one of the interior of humanity's soul and the souls of the communities. The caring for the least of these, the poor, and the outcast, the one without voice in society and these became the ones the Francis and his followers came to and joined with.

How? His father did try to look him up for being insane, and dragged him before the magistrate of the town, where Francis doffed his clothes and completely naked walked out into the wilderness. This is where his order would track back to being of the open hand, understanding all material things are given to be used for G(o)od in the land.

As some came to join him Francis realized that not one type of living was called for. For the church to be truly rebuilt, there was a need for Friars and Sisters, but also for those called to live this type of life in families and having families. Think about that, a religious order acknowledging celibacy was but one path or a certain type of family life being of but one path.

His shocking ways would not end there. For Francis and his boys were works in progress at the deepest corners of their being. And the hardest part to crack was the in borne hatred towards one class of person, born of fear and revulsion, the Lepers.

For even with all their work with the poor and outcasts these poor souls were still untouchable, in fact Francis and his friends would still mock and frankly, bully them, but then one day when he started the taunts something changed. He met one man's eyes and there he saw it, what each soul beats with, the Cosmic Christ, the Holy Mystery, and God... that breath we are told about in our ancient legends from Genesis 1. Francis embraced this man and with a holy kiss, once used to betray Jesus, now to welcome Jesus truly to his community.

Spend time reflecting, who are the lepers in your community? How can you embrace them with the holy kiss?

⁶ Just an interesting historic aside, the word Gospel was used for political decrees of empires, this dates to the Emperors of Rome, quite a thing to realize this little upside down empire of equality would use such a strong declarative.

But it wasn't just a boys club or family club with Francis. There were also women, tenacious women. A truly loving-platonic relationship of soul twinning developed between Francis, and the foundress of the Poor Clares, Sister Clare. It was tenacious because once Francis had passed; the Popes of Clares' time would not accept a woman running their own cloister and writing their own rules to live by. Clare and the sisters stood their ground outlast three popes. The fourth sent a delegation of old men to finally silence Clare and the sisters as stories of their good works and healings reached the Vatican.

This had to be stopped by the old man regime, imagine women thinking freely and living out their calling within the holy mystery. This in the thirteenth century was unheard of and frankly scandalous (although Franciscans of all stripes are akin to scandal it is what happens when you put love first).

These decrypt old men reached Clare's community on Easter, they were welcomed in, the wolves in sheep's clothing all prepared to remove Clare under heresy and have her executed. Ah but that Spirit is a wily one. As the bread came, Clare prayed, within the bread emerged crosses on the hot buns (hot crossed buns, ah some origin stories are fun) and as these crosses emerged the old men had a Cosmic moment, for they were healed and not just physically the darkness sludge of the soul was released.

They could do nothing more but report back to the Pope that these women were not heretics, but were doing God's work, and begrudgingly the pope had to become a thirteenth century feminist by allowing Clare's writings and teachings to stand.

Spend some time reflecting on Clare's story, what dogmas/doctrines/traditions could or are holding you back in realizing love lived in the now of your life?

MEET THE NEIGHBOURS

Yes these are the neighbours next door; these are the neighbours in other towns and cities. I spend much of my twenties journeying around mainland Canada—from Alberta to Hull, QC and to Arizona in the U.S.A.

Why is travelling outside of your own block important? The Right Honourable Joe Clark former PM circa 1978 summed it up in his first book, for Canada to become a country of neighbours we first must have coffee with each other. He was pushing through his writing for a policy of cheaper travel in Canada so that a farmer in Alberta could have the experience of coffee with a fisherman in the Maritimes, a Quebecois lady could sip a beer with the Inuit in Nunavut.

We are a wealthy country because of the many cultures that make us up. We are unified in a common identifier of Canadian, and have a rich diversity there in. So yes in my travels I encountered Canadian history, I did outreach to those sleeping rough under bridges, I met friends and lost friends, I got the opportunity to preach, teach, write and speak, and was blessed to pray at inter-faith gatherings to our ONE Creator. It was a blessing, and it is the blessing of travel around one's own community, city, province, country and world that expands one's experience and acceptance.

This radical acceptance that shaped my family in opening our home as the Rainbow Chapel, out of our living room in Rundle, where we became a hub of love if you will. Where neighbours say no problem, and some still do, to knock on the door, many times where we would sit down for a meal and be throwing on extras because our door was a rotating experience of who was going to be at family dinner that night. Our kids made many friends and discovered many new aunts and uncles and being loved on from what some would say is the fringes.

But why?

Simple, our circle was drawn wide.

Who should draw your circle wide? Who are you comfortable with coming into your home and being friends with?

Is it a young adult recently out of prison attempting to turn their life around? Widowers? Seniors? A family whose loved one is in prison and needs support? A single teenage mother or father? That couple not married, but living together in a deeper love than most married couples? Differently abled persons? Those so spiritually abused they have no desire to know the loving God, until they come to a family and discover through the lives of others? Someone in the process of transitioning genders? An older gay couple struggling to adopt their first children? An older woman coming into her sexuality and love of women for the first time in her life? Someone throwing off the patriarchal shackles of their Christianity and learning to dance the circle of a loving God? Children gleefully playing and discovering together, teenagers seeking a safe space to be themselves and for many it simply is a place they do not have to be the label their school community has placed on them. New Canadians struggling with the immigration process, awaiting for years their family members, admitting they left to come here when their child was born and now their child back home is almost school age, sharing joy when word comes of the reunification. Watching language barriers melt away through the youngest members. It is letting the abused in, and not judging or pushing, but just giving a space they can exist and rediscover themselves. Someone struggling to be seen beyond their previous labels of addict, nerd, sex worker, pimp, criminal and just wanting to be their name for once....

That is what getting out and meeting the neighbours is all about, to change dynamics from stereotypical labels, to simply know one another by name.

When it comes to your journey of connecting with neighbours, where are you being led? What is love doing in you right now?

Kemosabe

"There comes a time when good guys must wear masks"

-Tonto

My family actually quite enjoys Walt Disney's Lone Ranger with Johnny Depp (Tonto) & Armie Hammer (John Reid/Lone Ranger). It is a fun movie that all can enjoy. But there are so many kernels for learning of community within this 2.5 hours as there is in the Lone Ranger and Tonto lore altogether.

Tonto within the movie essentially as a child was played by land speculators and it caused a massacre of his tribe. His mind is said to be fractured and he is journeying with what we would class today as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

John Reid is a child of the West, a family of Ranger's, who has gone East and been educated and is returning as a lawyer.

For those who know the legend, Dan Reid with his little brother John, and some other Rangers chase the Cavendish gang, betrayed they are gunned down and all appear killed. John survives and is nursed back to health by Tonto (who in the film version knowing what John must do, notes perhaps the wrong brother lived).

With his trusty steed Silver, the Lone Ranger battles evil, rights wrongs, and never kills. Quite a good thing, I am not here to ruin the movie so I will leave it to you to watch on your own (we always found at our place potluck and movie nights with neighbours and friends were quite fun).

But the partnership that emerges in the lore is intriguing. There is the dynamic of Dan's widow and son, which Dynamite Comics recent Lone Ranger comics, although making it look like romance was starting with John, switched horses (excuse the pun) and opened up a new world of label less love by having the widow and Tonto fall in love.

Within the movie, and there is strong glimmers in the original radio and television series (and it shines through in the newer novels, short stories and graphic novels) Tonto emerges through his pain and mental illness to be a spirit guide

not only for the Lone Ranger, but also for the Western towns. He is willing to kill, which the Lone Ranger is not, but it becomes an ethical pendulum for the duo on what to do. Sometimes the desire for vengeance wins out with Tonto and other times the process of Justice. Quite distinct differences, but easily confused, and it is this individual who in the movie it shows the shaping his spirituality does with the lawyer John Reid, even down to the mask.

Yet, given the time period being written about, given the time period of the stories began in, the fact that an Aboriginal character would be seen as a spiritual guide yet alone presented as such even in a superficial way shows the Spirit of Love bursting through. It also gives us in our own journey something to reflect upon, who is being shown to us as a spirit guide that we are ignoring because of our own prejudices or pre-conceived notions? Who is being shown to be our Tonto?

What's with the ring?

Have I mentioned how much I love my soul mate and kids? It can be pretty obvious that we naturally just enjoy family life together. Like Robin Hood lore, I have an affinity towards the Big Blue Boy Scout; Superman mythos is a hobby as well. My family honoured that with a ring that bears the s-shield that I wear in place of a wedding band. For my children, they are still of the age where Dad is Superman (ah how adolescences and the questioning to come). But it is also a symbol in the family of the simpler life.

A story of home, community, belonging, of the other and the outsider being accepted, of gifts being put to proper use, of self discovery, learning and living with one's neighbour. Who is Superman, Kal-El this orphan of Krypton? For the astute student of Supermanology (my own word by the by), he is Clark Kent, Smallville, Kansas farm boy come to the big city. See, the good Superman writers realize that Superman is the mask, Clark is the identity. A farm boy raised by good parents to use his gifts to make his world a better place, the true message of all good parents for their children as they grow into adulthood.⁷

We all carry gifts and can strive to make our world better. What gifts do you have that can be used to better yourself and others? How do you belong? What masks do you wear? Why do you wear them? What is your true identity?

So yes, the S-shield is a symbol of a set of beliefs, much like the tattoos that adorn my body, and any new ones that will be added to the collection. For it is within our symbols, rituals and stories that we reveal our stories and the stories of our families and communities.

⁷ So as you can see, in Supermanology for me, we are setting aside the travesty that was the newest movie, "Man of Steel" a great alien invasion movie, but not a Superman tale.

Of Playhouses and Parades

What child wouldn't want to be in a parade? That is a good question, for my two kids over the past two summers they have learned that being in parades is synonymous with raising money to help children in need. It is our family way of showing love and concern, and one of their Poppa's projects, the Playhouse Community Tour, the first summer it was Playin' 4 Keeps for the Alberta Children's Hospital, and now in the tour it is for Children's Wish.

So yes, is it fun to get together with family and take the kids out in parades and festivals to meet their neighbours throughout small town Alberta? You better believe it. And with the fun comes the by product of teaching them about helping others, about how there are those who need help, sometimes it might be them, other times it might be someone they may not know, but we as a people (humanity) are all in this together for the common good.

It is revitalizing the old fashioned sense of belonging, community, where all would pitch in to aid those in need and take knowledge in the fact that if/when their time came others would stand with them. Last year these summer trips coincided with journeys to visit Nana (my Mum) with the kids in her lodge room, and then extended care room while she was still good enough to go for minor outings. They created memories, with the mentoring and learning.

A balance of the life journey is learned in the parade route, for theirs joy, there is mystery, expectation, laughter and fun. Yet then it ends, and even though you were in the parade, you are still just a part of the community no higher or lower than anyone else. Which is the true gift of the parade, for that moment people see you and cheer, but afterwards you are just the neighbour having fun and playing.

Watching my children cheer and light up whether on the float of the rolling playhouse, or in the antique fire truck or the stage coach with bubble guns, they cheer along, play and the festivals afterwards, and know that they are doing good in their world and from a very young age learning the simple truth of the

answer of what would love do? Make your own corner of this world better.

And because of that I am a proud father of two blessed miracles who bring joy and laughter with their transformative love.

DRAFT

Breaking Bread

Our closing reflection as suggested by my own daughter, Justina, she has completed her Vacation Bible School for the summer at the same church I used to attend mine at when I was her age. One of her favourite stories to hear about is when Jesus feeds the masses, 5,000 men reportedly ate, and basic math would state with families we are bordering on 25-30,000 bellies filled. Is it a miracle from little or a miracle of sharing? Let your heart hear and decide:

6 After this, Jesus went across Lake Galilee (or, Lake Tiberias, as it is also called).² A large crowd followed him, because they had seen his miracles of healing the sick.³ Jesus went up a hill and sat down with his disciples. ⁴The time for the Passover Festival was near. ⁵Jesus looked around and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, so he asked Philip, "Where can we buy enough food to feed all these people?" (⁶He said this to test Philip; actually he already knew what he would do.)

⁷Philip answered, "For everyone to have even a little, it would take more than two hundred silver coins^[a] to buy enough bread."

⁸Another one of his disciples, Andrew, who was Simon Peter's brother, said, ⁹"There is a boy here who has five loaves of barley bread and two fish. But they will certainly not be enough for all these people."

¹⁰"Make the people sit down," Jesus told them. (There was a lot of grass there.) So all the people sat down; there were about five thousand men. ¹¹Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to God, and distributed it to the people who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, and they all had as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were all full, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces left over; let us not waste a bit." ¹³So they gathered them all and filled twelve baskets with the pieces left over from the five barley loaves which the people had eaten.

-John 6:1-13 (Good News Translation)

You have to love treasurers; Philip is screaming the sky is falling for the amount of money to care for everyone and how this gaggle needs to be turned back. Yet then you have the simple faith of a child offering up his lunch for what some

could see as a very Eucharistic (Communion) moment, a breaking of bread—a communal meal together way before the last supper but the evidence of the type of meal we are called to share in community. A sharing of our coffers, a willingness to give out of our plenty to ensure all our cared for: Holy Interdependence within our world.

The one who steps forward again is one that in the setting was not seen as a person, or having a voice. Yet one that Jesus on many occasions had pointed out should come as they were the closest to knowing the Holy, and this moment proves it. Was there no food available for all? Or was simple independence taking over so that not everyone could eat? Was it the child's willingness to step out and offer that which shook the others gathered to do likewise?

We may never know, and it is a heart question for you. But what is to be reflected on within this story is seeing it from Philip, Andrew, a person in the crowd and then the boy, rewrite it from their perspective. What have you learned about yourself? Your journey? What would you do in the same situation? What would love lead you to do?

When a Door Closes, a Window Opens

It has been a journey of life, and continues to be such. Some who journey with us have changed their locations physically or metaphysically. Here we stand as a family; here I stand as a sojourner. These words up until now are not a testament forever and ever amen. Rather they are a beginning to unlock what it means to step fully into a new reality of living life without limits.

The journey forward is about releasing that which holds one back from being truly apart of community each day of their lives within their own home wherever that is found to be. For it is realizing that which some think are deep and profound questions of faith, are not that deep and resounding for myself. What is left when building community, sacred space of living, is simply letting a question guide that is not as trite as it sounds?

What Would Love Do?

And as you answer that question, you will leave Churchdom because a new reality will be revealed that may or may not be comfortable for you, but in the end it will be one where love of God, self and neighbour will be at the forefront.

The journey is not at an end, the journey is rather at a crossroads where a choice can be made. The choice is not simple, but it is one that must choose this fork in the road, either Churchdom of the familiar, or the unknown mystery that comes through living love with no qualifiers.

Are you ready to come to the crossroads?

Are you ready to discover where Love will lead you?

-30-⁸

⁸ Old newspaper short hand, as at the end of the article typesetters needed to know so they could place others on the newsprint page. -30- was for article end, not the story's end.