

**BECOMING YOU**  
Randall Tremba  
June 14, 2015  
11th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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**1 Samuel 15:34 - 16:13**

*The LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature for the LORD does not see as mortals see; mortals look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed David in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him from that day forward.*

**Mark 4:26-34**

*Jesus said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed."*

Which is to say, the Kingdom of God, like a small mustard seed, might not look like much at times but it's full of life and potential. And speaking of small things, a mustard seed type of miracle happened here last Sunday.

I'll get to that later, but first let me say that last Sunday was an historic day for us. Alex McNeil, an openly transgender person and moderator of More Light Presbyterians, preached from this pulpit. He talked about a contemporary movement of the Spirit echoing the words of the Apostle Paul from Romans:

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit. We groan inwardly while we wait for the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now if we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see?*

Alex told the story of our denomination's slow transition from officially denying ordination to openly gay and lesbian persons to officially redefining marriage in our Church's constitution as "between two persons," a change that takes effect officially next Sunday. At last, marriage equality has arrived in the Presbyterian Church, USA.

Forty years ago that seemed unthinkable. No one saw that coming. After all, the resistance embedded in church and culture was fierce.

Alex reiterated these words: *if we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see?*

Forty years ago, a small group of Presbyterians hung onto a little mustard seed of hope. They believed in something greater than themselves the way a seed believes in the power of the soil to resurrect its tiny body into something more glorious. The seed dies into the soil the way we die into Christ to become a new creation. The petty self dies so that the glorious whole self may arise.

Forty years ago it looked like things would never change. And then it happened. Our church transitioned. Our church transitioned from being stingy to being generous—affirming and welcoming of all people.

We were summoned by Christ to come out, to become a new creation.

As Alex noted: LGBT persons—all their lives it seems—have been called "an abomination unto the LORD." But no longer. At least not in this church. We came to see that as the devil's lie. LGBT persons like everyone else are God's beautiful and beloved children, made like everyone else in the image of God. And in case you hadn't heard: *God don't make no junk.* And that's the gospel truth.

We were summoned by Christ to become a new creation.

Whatever else the church may be, it is the Body of Christ formed around the heart of Jesus and thus it is meant to be gracious, generous, and radically compassionate—reaching out to the hungry, the sick, prisoners of various sorts, the friendless, and the excluded. But it takes time to discover what's hidden within. It takes time and it takes courage to overcome fears, to become what and who we really are.

And it takes faith, which is to trust. It takes trust to come out from hiding. And I don't only mean discovering and affirming one's sexual or gender identity—although that's part of it and at certain times in life it may be the most important part.

Whatever you think of Bruce Jenner's transition to Caitlyn, that process of self-discovery and affirmation is a parable or paradigm for each of us. Each of us has denied, repressed, hidden, or allowed aspects of ourselves to be deformed due to fear or social conditioning.

How many times have you been told you're not good enough? How many times have you been silenced? How many times have you been told to fear the other? How many times have you been warned what the neighbors will say or think? How many times have you been told to look out only for yourself, to maximize your pleasure and security at any cost because that's the way to happiness?

Well it isn't. And that too is the devil's lie.

Love is becoming you. And becoming you is a process. It's like evolution and it as stupefying as creation itself. But becoming you is not like the blossoming of a seed. It's not automatic. You have a say in it.

Whatever our sexual or gender identity, love is our identity, too. Learning how to express love bodily through practices is a life-long quest made up of many small, quiet choices. Love is becoming you.

By the way, sexuality and love are twins of a sort. Not identical but close. Each arises from the same source in God. Each is powerful and each longs for transcendental unity and wholeness with the other. And each has an urge to create or procreate community, an ever-expanding community of persons and things.

Love is our identity. And learning how to express it is a life-long quest made up of many small, quiet choices.

David was the runt of the family. No one expected much of him. And then Samuel saw him through the eyes of God. David was anointed king. But it took someone to see and believe in David.

We can't all be kings or queens. (That would not be a good thing!) But we are royalty nonetheless. You can find the royal power within yourself. Just make sure it reigns with humility, wisdom and grace. It's not automatic. We have choices.

What Samuel chose for David we can choose for our hidden selves and do the same for others. We can summons others to greatness, not greatness as success or domination, but greatness as Jesus defined it: serving others, which is, in part, what the Kingdom or Empire of God is all about. It's about freedom, compassion, and justice for others.

And it's about being there for others.

Last Sunday sitting in the congregation was a teenage girl. A friend had invited her in part because the girl was struggling with her gender identity. The girl's family—citing certain Bible verses—had rebuked and denounced her. Her quest and questions were squelched.

I didn't know any of this at the time.

Come with me, said the girl's friend. I know a church where you will be safe.

Neither the friend nor her guest knew that Alex McNeil was to be the preacher that morning. It was one of those things that happens now and then out of the blue. But there that young girl sat while Alex was proclaiming—not just in words, but by his very presence: *LGBT persons are the beautiful and beloved children of God just like everyone else.*

After the service I met the girl on the front porch. We shook hands and she walked down the steps. Her friend lingered behind.

Once the girl was out of range, the girl's friend said to me: *I know you don't know this, but my little friend there is really hurting inside.* Then she told me why her young friend was hurting and then said: *She's scared to death of what might be. But today while Alex preached I noticed tears rolling down her cheeks.*

I don't know for sure, but I'm pretty sure that young girl heard and felt words of grace, hope and love here last Sunday. She heard someone call her name for the first time. And if you're listening right now, you may hear your own name called.

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### **Anointed**

(1 Samuel 16.10-11)

God has chosen something in you,  
less recognized, hidden away,  
something you have put in a lowly place,  
or even denied.

It is a part of you  
in which God will do great things.

Bring all of yourself before God.  
Allow God to seek it out in you.  
Wait for God to see it, to name it. Wait.  
Behold God anoint it.

Come into this day knowing  
of this royal power within you,  
and see to it that it reigns  
with humility, wisdom and grace.

**Steve Garnaas-Holmes**