

Sermon: Who Is Lazarus today??

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Creator who loves us deeply. Amen.

The sermon today was written by Rev. Lorna King, retired minister who worships at Heritage and the other churches in the collaboration. She served in ministry in small towns around Saskatchewan. In the early 1980s when there was first discussion about welcoming Lesbian and Gay people as ministers, she didn't struggle with that acceptance. Some of her colleagues and friends, whose ministry she valued, had trusted her enough to share their sexual orientation. She knew them as wonderful ministers and stood behind the church's decision to openly welcome Gay and Lesbian people into the church and into ministry.

Years later the question about welcoming LGBTQ+ individuals into the church became real for her. Her nephew's first child came out to their family and teachers as Transgender female. It was a very difficult journey for them, but they are living in a community in British Columbia that welcomes and accepts them. Years later her nephew's second child came out to family as Transgender male. They are living in rural Alberta where there is little welcome and support for transgender people. In the midst of a provincial government like ours, bringing in policy that prevents children and youth from being able to safely declare their orientation and receive the medical care that they need to become fully the person there were meant to be. So being part of an Affirming Ministry is important to her.

As they were preparing for the service, she turned to on-line resources with Affirming Connections and found a service shared by Rev. Ken DeLisle. Lorna knew Ken from when he was in ministry in Saskatchewan, one of first openly gay ministers.

As Ken was working on a service, he thought about scriptures which show that Jesus, in his relationships with people around him was Public, Intentional and Explicit. He came up with several examples: Jesus feeding the 5000 – food for everyone in the crowd, Jesus inviting himself and his disciples to Zacchaeus' home – Zacchaeus the tax collector for the Romans – a persona non grata in the day. These are some examples of Jesus' unquestioning welcome of each person into the circle surrounding him.

Ken chose to rewrite this story of the rising of Lazarus into a contemporary setting. Our first scripture this morning was from a children's Bible, of Jesus raising Lazarus from death into life.

### **Ken's Story: Who Is Lazarus Today?**

I want to start by telling you a story. I think we all like stories and Jesus certainly used them to teach. This is a true story. I don't know if it really happened this way, but it **is** a true story.

Many years ago, in a small town, there was a young boy who lived with his parents and sisters. He was well liked and admired, and people thought he would go far in the family business.

While he was still young, his parents died. At first, people felt sorry for him and understood why he was still living with his sisters – they needed to be

taken care of. But years went by. Many women were interested in this young man and tried to entice him into marriage. He never did marry. Nor did his sisters.

Rumours started in the town. What kind of a man was this? Real men married and had children, especially sons. How could he be a real man if he never had sons to work for him, to carry on his name?

The rumours became worse. Wealthy business competitors, who were jealous of his wealth, started to tell stories that the man wasn't interested in women at all. He wasn't "normal". He was "one of those people".

Word spread and friends and customers started to avoid him. Some began to point out that the laws of the church and the laws of the country did not approve of his supposed behaviour. He needed to be punished. Although the law said he should be killed, the people were reluctant to shed blood and began a campaign to shun him, to declare him dead.

His sisters, hearing the stories, warned their brother but he refused to bow to such foolish comments. The sisters sent word to their close friend, who was a preacher that the citizens of the town knew and admired. They told their friend that their brother was "dying", being shunned, and ignored by the townspeople. They begged their friend, the preacher, to come and speak some sense to the people.

Their friend was delayed and by the time he arrived the whole town had declared the man to be dead and that everyone was to shun him. Bowing to the pressure, he had left everything with his sisters and had gone to live in a cave.

When the friend arrived and heard what had happened, he wept. He knew that the people had failed to understand his preaching on love and justice. They failed to accept the fact that God created out of love and so all were loved equally by the creator.

He asked the sisters to take him to where their brother was buried so that he could be brought back to the life of the town. The sisters understood but were worried. Surely if their brother came back, the townspeople would become angry and raise a stink about his being accepted again as a full living, loving human being!

The friend insisted. The sisters took their friend to the cave. By now, most of the town had heard that the preacher was back and knew what he was planning on doing and followed them to the cave.

The preacher spoke again about how powerful God's love was. That God, the source of all love and life, wanted all humans to live in a community of love and justice and equality. The town, in the way it had treated his friend, had failed to show God's love. But God can forgive and give them all a new chance. God's love is so powerful that life could be given back to the dead.

The preacher turned toward the cave in a loud voice cried, "Lazarus, come out!"

So, who is Lazarus today? Who is shunned and excluded, shamed and attacked? Who is being dragged into the punishing **so-called** "Conversion Therapy" – treatment that seeks to destroy the transgenerness of an individual? Who is prevented from being that beloved person who was

created in God's image and loved by God for being the person that they know themselves to be?

Last month, in Tumbler Ridge, B.C. there was a school mass shooting perpetrated by a young woman. To the public, it seemed incredible at the time that someone so young, with their life ahead of them, would do such a thing. The lack of credible information around the shooting fueled speculation in the community and around the world. People began to speculate. What had happened to this young woman that made her go out and shoot 9 people, mostly children? Had she been bullied at school? Was her home life not all it should have been? Had she been radicalized?

As police continued their investigation, information was incrementally revealed to the press as some of the facts came to light. She had killed her mother and younger brother. Well, that certainly indicated an unhappy home-life, and a lack of empathy. She had walked all the way from her home to the school and that indicated intent. There had been encounters with social services; later, it was revealed that an on-line chat group had removed her account from their platform because of the violent nature of her posts.

But the thing that set the world on fire was the revelation that Jesse van Rootselaar was transgender. For many on the political and religious far right, this was a red flag to a bull. "See, this is what happens when children are allowed to change gender." Rumours began to circulate that her transition from male to female was at the root of her violent nature. Was it the mix of male and female hormones raging in her body that caused her to

commit a violent act? Or that after her transition, she now regrets her choice to change gender?

Now social media is filled with misinformation about transgender people – claiming that violent acts by transgender people are rapidly increasing. We recognize that rates of all acts of violence in the States are higher than here in Canada. The Walrus is a reliable news source and here is what they report about violence and transgender: of 5,748 mass shootings in the United States between 2013 and 2025, just five, or 0.1 percent, were carried out by transgender people. The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, as reported in the Walrus, also says there is no evidence of increasing radicalization or violence from transgender people.

Who Is Lazarus Today? Like the town in Ken's story, social media is ramping up the shunning and the hatred toward people who are transgender. Governments are removing the support systems and the medical care for transgender individuals.

Lorna prays for a community, a province, a country where her nephew's children, an adult and a pre-teen, may be surrounded by the kind of love and acceptance that Jesus provided to each person that he met.

May we work to provide a welcome to all individuals in our worship and in our communities. Becoming Affirming Ministries at St. James and Heritage was about becoming communities that are Public, Intentional and Explicit in our welcome and inclusion for all of God's children, whatever their sexual orientation, whatever their faith group, whatever their ethnic group. May we extend a welcome to everyone we meet, each one created in God's image, each one a beloved child of God. Amen

