

REFLECTIONS

July 9, 2017

Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

Matthew 11

AN INVITATION

Jeananne Stine

In June I received an invitation to present a workshop at the Presbyterian Women of the Mid Atlantic Synod Summer Gathering. The workshop they requested was Building a Bridge to the LGBT Community. I was thrilled they were including this in their agenda and happy to do it. It was a good workshop and I can share it at another time if you're interested but I want to tell you about my room-mate.

I arrived Friday night and after we introduced ourselves she asked what I was doing the next day and I told her I was presenting the workshop on Building a Bridge to the LGBT Community. She said she was planning to come to my workshop and then she shared her story.

She is from a conservative town in Southern Virginia and 17 years ago she heard Jerry Falwell speak. Jerry Falwell is not a friend to the gay community and she believed everything he said. She didn't know any different. Now, it turns out that her daughter is a lesbian and they don't speak anymore. We talked a lot that night. She had so many questions and I talked about the work I've done with More Light for the past ten years and the people I know and about our welcoming church here. She came to the workshop the next day and she heard more stories. I asked what she thought afterward and she said she thought she was the most reticent one there. Then we said good-bye and I came home.

The next day, she Facebook friended me and I accepted her friendship request. As one does, I went to her facebook page to see what was on it and the first thing I saw was a post with a rainbow background and in big, white letters, she had written: "LGBTQ's, I was wrong, I am sorry."

Blew me away but, reminded me again that hearts and minds can be changed.

She will go back to her community and share her new beliefs and she will need support. Any of us here at SPC could help her and others in the changing of hearts and minds. The PCUSA needs us to help her and the other churches that are new to the open welcome that is so much a part of what SPC does.

My invitation to you.

Shenandoah Presbytery needs our help. They are craving it. They want change but they need guidance. We are a thriving church that welcomes all and we could help them.

I've been going to the Shenandoah Presbytery meetings for the past three years and here's what I've seen: When they were discussing the marriage bill, they had two ministers, one supportive and one not. Whenever the supportive guy would speak, heads were nodding.

When the vote for the marriage amendment came up, they supported it 77 to 55, not a squeaker.

We broke into small groups to discuss the weakness in the Shenandoah Presbytery. I told them one problem was that they don't welcome gay people and people agreed. They are scared and

bullied into silence but their numbers far outweigh the other guys. They just don't know how to proceed.

They need our help

So, please consider attending a Presbytery meeting. Come to the next conference or other event that is held.

We are teachers in our school of love. We can change hearts and minds

Let's spread our light, More Light!

And may it be so.

Matthew, 11:28-29

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

This is what I always thought about church. A place to rest and be still and find comfort in community and hear about Jesus and love.

ABIDE IN THE LIGHT

Lynn Coddington

Good morning and welcome to this More Light Sunday.

In our lesson today from Matthew eleven Jesus says *Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is Light.*

Jesus says his yoke is easy and the burden will be light. But if one reads the Bible literally isn't a yoke a heavy piece of equipment? Just think about it. Isn't a wooden yoke heavy when it's placed on the necks of oxen to plow the fields? How can this lighten the load? And in the time of Jesus I've read that the yoke was also a symbol of oppression, that a yoke was placed on the necks of prisoners who were made to submit to their Roman rulers. Couldn't a yoke also be an unfortunate symbol for the oppression many people in our country feel at this time?

In the meaning of today's lesson in Matthew, however, yoking ourselves to Jesus can be understood much differently than in the literal sense — for Jesus is the light and the love and to be tied to him is to be connected to the kingdom of justice and mercy and compassion.

As I began writing my reflection for this special Sunday – this More Light Morning – I thought about the time when as a teenager I sat quietly and alone in the sanctuary of the Presbyterian church of my childhood in Michigan.

It was after choir practice one afternoon about dusk. For some reason I really felt compelled to sit in the peaceful silence of the sanctuary before going home. As I sat there, quietly, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the belief that I wasn't alone, that there was something much bigger and more powerful gathering around me – a nearly tangible spiritual presence. I'll never, ever forget that moment because it was then that I knew there must be God.

The minister of that church was also someone who I truly believed in, especially when he preached about God being compassionate and loving. After many years and many sermons, though, there came a time when that beloved minister moved on just as Randy has now. That church called a new pastor and then several more, but I had moved on as well, to college and then afterwards to Maryland to live and to work.

It was there that I began to explore more fully who I was and who I was trying to be. I'd had a girlfriend in high school, male and female lovers in college, and now I was in love and living with a woman. I could no longer deny who I loved and would continue to love.

Let me digress for a minute. A few weeks ago during our service as the children gathered for First Pew we sang *This little light of mine I'm going to let it shine*.

Well, back then, I decided it was time to let my little light shine after so many years of hiding. So, as a young adult I determined that I'd come out to my parents. With a certain amount of fear but hopeful of the outcome here's what I decided my bold coming out statement to my parents would be – *"I don't think I'm going to get married"*! Whoa! Now that's a real declaration!

And it's also an act of commitment to another that recently has been turned completely on its head by the work of our More Light Presbyterian community as well as by the U.S Supreme Court.

But back to that coming out moment. With very little hesitation my mother responded: "Are you two lovers?" I was stunned by her words – it said to me that Mom had been doing some reading. Mom had known. Probably both my parents had known for a long time that I was going to disappoint. One of those very, very painful coming out conversations you often hear about followed and I came back home to Maryland feeling – unheard, hurt, and even ashamed.

But there was an even worse moment awaiting me. A short time later my parent's new minister surprised me with a call one afternoon. He said that my Mom had called him to talk about me and that he wanted me to know how hard it was for my parents to deal with my news. Then he asked me would I like to talk about it with him? It was hard for my parents, I thought? Who was this minister? He didn't know me!

Who understands my pain? Where is Jesus the light and the love of the world in those words of his?

I was furious. I shot back at him 'well it's hard for me too.' I told him that I didn't want to talk to him, and that he didn't need to call me again. I told him that I loved my parents. And I hung up on him.

I didn't attend a church for many years after that. I felt even more alienated and driven away when the national Presbyterian Church specifically excluded gay and lesbian members from serving in leadership and in the ministry and continued the debate for years without reversing positions. If the Presbyterian Church of the day didn't want me, I didn't want it.

But as Rabbi Rami Shapiro says "we are loved by an unending love. We are embraced by arms that find us, even when we are hidden from ourselves."

The light of that unending love of God was lit in me a long, long time ago, as I sat quietly in the sanctuary of my church.

Rabbi Shapiro also says, "We are touched by fingers that soothe us even when we are too proud for soothing. We are counseled by voices that guide us even when we are too embittered to hear."

What voices broke through to me? After so many years what place have I found where my weariness and burdens are lifted and made lighter? Not only mine but that of my partner of nearly 33 years, Pat Hamilton? It turns out to be – here – among you in the loving compassionate community that is SPC.

Again in the words of the Rabbi, "I was supported by hands that uplifted me, even in the midst of a fall, I was urged on by eyes that met me, even when too weak for a meeting."

The first light was lit by Bonnie Miller. Then the flame was fanned by Randy who told me on several Sundays when I first began coming here that if I'd just fill out one of those little visitor cards, he'd be sure to remember me, and to call me by my name.

My way was also lit by other members of this church who knew Pat and me, Nancy Wilson and Carol Wood, Bill Howard and now by so many others.

This Welcome – this fundamental Radical Hospitality of SPC is rooted in the belief that everyone and every part of us is included in the circle of God's love. SPC not only welcomes lesbians and gays, bi and transgender and queer persons, but also racial and ethnic minorities, and people of different religious backgrounds or no religious backgrounds.

The trunk of our core value is rooted deep in the earth going back thousands of years to Abraham and Sarah but it is lighting the way forward even brighter now.

So as we celebrate this More Light morning, let's continue together as a transformational community. Let's practice Radical Hospitality and shine a beacon for others, including a new pastor, to come with us on our way in the light and love of God as Jesus has taught us.

So take my yoke upon you and learn from me, I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For our yoke is now easier and our burdens lighter.