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Contents

- And the Spirit Descended..... P 1
- Orlando..... P 2
- Dreams and Truth P 3
- Book Review..... P 3
- AIDS Memorial Grove..... P 4
- Flag Flying High P 5
- Memorable Quote..... P 6
- Affirming Bible Text P 7
- Allies in High Places P 8
- Striking Witness P 9



The Pride flags in the Castro district of San Francisco are a beacon for sexual and gender minority people. God is calling people of faith to be bright flags, to be bright symbols of hope to the powerless, to the vulnerable. Being a sign of hope is important, because at one time or another, everyone has been weak, powerless or vulnerable.

And the Spirit Descended like a Dove

by Gary Simpson

Mark 1:4-11 (KJV) John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

5 And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

6 And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

9 And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

I generally compose sermons on one of the texts in the liturgical cycle. This week, I chose to do something different. We are putting the normal liturgical cycle of readings to the side, because there is a Bible passage that seems more fitting for the events of January 27 to January 28.

A ban, placing temporary restrictions on people who are travelling to the United States with visas from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, was declared Friday.¹ Saturday, while nursing a headache, I watched the news roll across my Twitter feed. As I watched the Twitter feed, I found myself thinking, "Being a refugee was good enough for Jesus." Rev. Debra Haffner, a Unitarian

¹ Nate Raymond and Mica Rosenberg. "More US federal judges halt enforcement of Donald Trump travel ban." 28 January 2017. <globalnews.ca/news/3212057/federal-judge-halts-enforcement-of-donald-trump-travel-ban-after-following-court-petition/&/?>.

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Orlando

As I think about the tragedy of the terrorist attack in the Pulse night club in Orlando, Florida, I instinctively reach for my pulse pendant. The pendant was created from a ring that has an illustration of a pulse going around the entire outside of the ring. I have worn the pulse pendant many days since the gunman killed 49 people in a gay night club.

To a certain extent, Judaism is defined by tragedy and hate. Yearly, at Purim, Jews around the world reflect on the book of Esther and remember an attempt to kill all Jewish people.

In some respects the LGBTQ community is defined by acts of hate and violence? The pink triangle, a symbol the Nazis made homosexuals wear in the death camps, is almost universally seen as a symbol of sexual minority people.

While we define ourselves by the courage and resilience we have in the face of tragic events, we do not define ourselves as weak, helpless victims. Neither Haman's plot to exterminate Jews people nor the Holocaust, changed the value of Jewish people to God. Jews remain a chosen people. Sexual and gender minority people remain God's people, remain a called and chosen people in the face of prejudice, discrimination and hate.

"All is grace, and
grace is for all,"

James Moffatt

In Grace in the New Testament

Universalist minister tweeted, "Just saw billboard 'Jesus is alive.' I finished it in my head 'and being detained in a US airport.'" The incarnate God was a refugee from a despot who ordered the killing of all boys under two years of age living in the Bethlehem region.²

As I reflected on the Twitter comments Sunday morning, my mind went to Jesus' baptism. And the Spirit descended like a dove.

The dove is a symbol of both the Spirit of God and peace. In a weekend of fear for travellers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, the Spirit of God and peace descended. There were many examples of the Spirit and of peace descending. I can think of a few examples that caught my attention.

- Lawyers who reportedly went to airports and performed legal services pro bono.
- A group of people at the Denver airport who were reported to have stood in a circle around Muslims so the Muslims could pray.
- The thousands, who protested peacefully in airports around the United States, to show support for Muslims.
- A person in Toronto who volunteered to open the family home for the night to anyone diverted to Toronto.

Life is often uncertain and frightening. What does God call people of faith to do in the face of fearful times?

An answer might be in the story of Jesus' baptism. The Jordan river has a reputation of not being the cleanest and most sparkling river. Jesus entered the dirty river and came up ready to minister to a hurting world. As Christians, we are called to get dirty helping humanity and as we get dirty helping humanity, we are able to minister to hurting people. As we get dirty, the Spirit of God descends. And those around hear the voice of God. [Thou art my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.](#)

Allowing the Spirit to descend does not always require a lot of time, talent or energy. In some cases, it can be as simple as going to coffee or lunch with a person. Years ago, I got an educational leave and the leave came through about the same time that layoffs were planned to take place. I ended up hundreds of miles from home, attending class, while waiting to formally register in courses, until I knew if I had a job to return to or if I would need to leave graduate

² Matthew 2:13-23.

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Book Review: Tears We Cannot Stop

Title: *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*
 Author: Michael Dyson
 Publisher: St. Martin's Press, 2017.
 Length: 228 pages
 Available: amazon.com and amazon.ca

Michael Dyson is a prolific author. The book contains a list of close to twenty other books Dyson wrote.

This book caught my attention because of the shooting deaths of a few unarmed Black youth in the United States and the protests that resulted. The fact that some gay men indicate on dating apps that they do not want to date men of color concerns me. In Toronto, Canada the Black Lives Movement blocked the Pride Parade until some of their concerns were addressed. The Black Lives Matter insisted that no police be allowed wear uniforms if they are in the Parade. At times, relations between the Black and LGBT communities have been strained. My hope was to get insights into the lived experience of Black Americans.

Tears We Cannot Stop is divided into chapters that have titles that parallel the outline of a church service, including a call to worship, the sermon, the offering and the closing prayer.

Dyson is a powerful writer. The stories Dyson shares in *Tears We Cannot Stop* are moving and insightful. *Tears We Cannot Stop* is a valuable addition to the libraries of teachers, ministers, social workers, counsellors and anyone wanting deeper insights into the lived reality of Black Americans.



school and return home to look for a new job. A professor learned about the uncertainty and invited me to lunch. We each had a burrito at a fast food joint. I will cherish the memory for many more years.

In the face of change and fear, in the face of a world that looks less and less like the world we know and the world that is familiar, I challenge you to practice both random and planned acts of kindness, to plant memories of love, acceptance and inclusion, because love casts out fear. And so those around us will feel the touch of the dove's wings and can hear the voice of God say, **Thou art my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.**"

Dreams and Truth

by Dorothy Bellion

Dorothy Bellion is a trans woman who lives in Edmonton, and spends her free time writing stories and poetry, some of which can be found @ <http://bigclosetr.us/topshelf/book/18155/dorothy-colleen>.

It should be raining, Robert thought. It seemed like whenever there was a funeral in the movies or on TV, it was raining. But for a early November afternoon, it was sunny and warm. He found it hard to grieve for his mother. In one way, she had been gone for a while, lost in Alzheimer's.

He found it also ironic that she would be buried today, on November 11, Remembrance Day. She had been, after all, the daughter of a soldier, and a soldier's wife. For some reason the old poem came into his mind.

"In Flander's fields the poppies grow..."

She had been though a great deal in her life, enduring the Great Depression as a young child, then watched her father have to go to war in Germany during World War II.

She had married an Air Force officer, had three children, but only two survived to adulthood, and then struggled with that horrible disease, slowly becoming less and less aware until she died the day before.

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Devotions

National AIDS Memorial Grove



Color enhanced photos (above and below) are of The National AIDS Memorial Grove, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. Each photo has all of the colors found on the Pride flag.



He looked over at his brother Joe. He seemed isolated, with only his young daughter anywhere close to him. Once they had been very close, but somehow, they drifted away from each other. He hated that it had happened, but couldn't figure out why.

The service ended, and he watched as Joe took his family to their own place, and he knew that afterward, he would go back to the place he had shared with their mother, having taken the large part of the burden of taking care of her.

Robert and his wife left the grave site, and went home in silence. They got ready for bed, and he held her close, as he drifted off to sleep. Soon, he found himself dreaming and in his dream, the spirit of his mother came into the room.

She looked young, and strong, much like what he could barely remember from his early childhood. He was frightened for a moment, but she looked so kind, so loving, it made him relax.

"Come. I have much to show you, and not much time to do it."

She grabbed him by the arm, and seemed to pull his spirit right out his body.

He found himself floating above his sleeping form, and the spirit of his mother said to him, "come on. We haven't much time"

"Where are we going Mom?"

"You will see son. Come!"

They flew through the walls, outward and upward, until they were floating over the city. They hovered for a moment, and then she led him down again, moving at great speed.

"Nearly there"

Robert recognized the house they were approaching. It was his mother's house, and his brother was still there.

The two spirits went through the walls until they were in his bedroom. Robert was slightly shocked to see that his brother was dressed in a woman's nightgown as he lay sleeping.

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Flag Flying High



When I was a kid, a very popular chorus was a song that started with the words, "Love is a flag flying high from the castle of my heart." The words to the popular song come to my mind when I see the giant Pride flag flying over the Castro neighborhood of San Francisco.

The Pride flag is more than a symbol of the LGBT+ community. Many people who identify with the Pride flag have, after years of feeling shame about who they are, gotten to the stage where they are starting to treat themselves with respect and dignity. After experiencing prejudice, rejection and discrimination, they are starting to take pride in who they are. The heart-felt change is life transforming and is liberating, in a way that shows that the Spirit of the King of Kings resides in their hearts.

"I thought he gave up that stuff" Robert said.

"No. And when you got after him about it, he mistrusted you thereafter. But hush! It's about to begin."

The room was silent except for the ticking of a clock down the hall, and the slight snore coming from the man in the bed. Then he suddenly glowed, until it was so bright it hurt Robert's dream eyes, causing him to miss the emergence of a dream-self from his brother's body.

As soon as his eyes cleared he couldn't believe what he saw. The dream-self was female.

She reminded Robert of the spirit of his mother at his side. The nightgown she wore changed into a multi-coloured skirt and a blouse with a picture of a unicorn on the front.

Robert turned to the spirit of his mother and said, "He...he's dreaming he is a girl?"

"No dear. She is dreaming she is her true self."

"What?"

"Her name is Connie."

"Connie?"

"She told me years ago. It means "steadfast" . And doesn't my daughter look beautiful?"

"I remember he told me he struggled with his gender, but I told him he was just hiding from something"

"I know dear. But hush, she is going out."

The girl didn't seem to notice them, and floated beside her sleeping male form. Then the room around them changed.

First it became a mall, and Robert watched as his sibling window shopped. She seemed to revel in the simple act of being able to go

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Memorable Quote

Buzz Aldrin is a famous astronaut, but he is much more than an astronaut. Buzz Aldrin is an author, played roles in a number of films and has won many awards. He has a doctorate in astronautics from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Recently he tweeted that he applied twice to be a Rhodes Scholar and was turned down. He observes, "How different my life would have been. Sometimes failures lead to great success."

Buzz Aldrin makes an excellent point. There are times when our most crushing and discouraging rejections and defeats are a blessing. My life has numerous examples of the best things that never happened. Looking back over my life, I am no longer disappointed that four organizations that have a reputation for being homophobic did not hire me. Rumor has it that another organization that chose not to give me a job has a toxic work environment.

Your heterosexuality does not decree that you are morally superior or deserve more human rights.

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out and try stuff on, and she practically danced as she moved about.

Then, it became a nightclub. It had a dance floor, some tables and chairs for people to sit at.

The girl danced, laughed, gossiped, and seemed filled with such joy that even Robert's heart sang to see it.

"Who are these other people Mom?"

"They are woman, and yes, men, who are like my child. People trapped in the wrong gender, who can only be their true selves like this. In their dreams."

One thing Robert noticed. Although the girl gave a kiss in greeting to many of the others, there was nothing sexual happening.

"You are wondering where is the sex, aren't you son?"

"How did you know?"

"I was guilty of the same assumption before I saw this dream for the first time. In fact I assumed that your sibling only needed to admit that she was gay, and then she could give up dressing up like a girl. I guess we both misunderstood her, didn't we? But now I understand. Her need isn't for sex. It's for living the truth."

"You are saying you have seen this dream before?"

"Yes dear. A month ago, I was guided by your grandmother so I could understand my own child."

"How often does he.. she have this dream then?"

"Every lunar month, for three days straight"

"You mean..."

"Exactly. Just like the what her monthly cycle would be if she had been born a full girl."

Suddenly, the girl looked up, and shot up into the air. Robert and

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A Favorite Affirming Text

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

John 3:16 might be the most treasured and well known text in the Bible. There are excellent reasons why John 3:16 is loved by millions of people. The entire good news of the Bible can be condensed in these two verses. The core of the Gospel is that God does not condemn and that the Son came to the world to bring salvation, not condemnation. The Word is a condemnation free zone. Because God loves you and affirms you, your life is a condemnation free space.

Whosoever is an inclusive term, used for a God that created diversity and that values diversity. Nobody is excluded in the word whosoever. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why the LGBT Christian website whosoever.org is very popular. The website address resonates with people.

Whosoever means that God welcomes LGBTQ people in the same way that God welcomes straight and cisgender people.

his mother followed. They past the clouds, and Robert then saw beyond them was a the most remarkable thing.

A garden. A beautiful garden with soft grass, a waterfall that poured down to a slow moving river, trees laden with golden fruit, and multi-coloured birds that sang hymns to their creator from their branches.

Robert looked to the east, and noticed that there was a huge, impossibly high mountain range. It was a few minutes before dawn, and as the dream progressed, he noticed that time seemed to stand still.

“Is this Heaven?”

“Not quite. An author called it ‘The Valley of The Shadow of Life’ but keep watching”

The girl’s outfit turned into a beautiful white robe that went down to just above her bare feet. She was greeted with joy by others, some of whom Robert recognized, and with them, began to laugh, sing, and dance in honour of their Maker.

Robert was even more amazed when bright, shining angels came to meet the group, and one took the girl and lifted her up and gave her a hug, laughing.

“Who is that, Mom?”

“Her guardian, dear. You will get to meet yours, someday.”

“What about, you know, Him?”

“She will meet Him next.”

And then Robert had a vision of that meeting. He saw the sister he never knew he had, look toward the mountains as the sun came up. Then, he realized he was wrong. It wasn’t the sun, but the Son.

She ran to meet Him, with the passion of a woman who was meeting the love of her life, who had gone away to war and was now returning triumphant, and the innocent joy of a small child squealing with delight because Daddy was home.

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Allies in High Places



She seemed so happy Robert assumed she would leap into his arms, but when she got close, she stopped, and suddenly seemed shy. He nodded to her, and she fell at his feet.

After a moment, He raised her up, and spoke one word that resonated to the limits of Heaven: "Daughter"

He leaned close to her ear, and whispered something to her, and she wept, but nodded.

Robert asked his mother "What did he say?"

"That it is not her time to come home to stay, and she must return to the world"

With that, the garden faded, and was replaced with Joe's bedroom. Joe's female dream-self approached her male body, and for the first time, Robert saw just how much she wanted to be free of it.

But she looked up for a second, and Robert saw exactly what the dream had given her, even if she didn't consciously remember it. It was like the manna the Israelites received in the desert.

It gave her enough, perhaps just enough, to make it until she was "fed" again. She would carry this cross as long as she was called to, for Him who had carried the greater one for her. Even so, he never felt so much admiration for his sister.

Sister? Yes. For the first time, he believed it was the truth.

"I hope I can remember this when I wake up. I promise I will treat her differently if I do."

"I believe you will remember it dear. This was your gift, just as her visit to the Valley of the Shadow of Life was hers. Now, I have to go, my child, and you have to wake up."

"Will I see you again?"

"When it is your time to come home hon."

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Striking Witness



St. Nicholas Cathedral in San Francisco is a difficult church to overlook as you walk or drive past. The church stands as a vibrantly colored witness to the Christian faith.

“Thank you Mom, for this, and for everything.”

“Thank me by doing what you promised my dear”

“I will Mom.”

“I know you will sweetie. God will help you if you ask Him”

“That’s a good suggestion Mom, I will be sure to do that.”

With that, she faded, and Robert woke to find himself in his own bed. He thought about what he had seen as he laid in his bed, and began to pray silently. The next morning, he reached for the phone.

“Joe? It’s Robert. Can I come over? I have something I need to share with you...”

“What do you want Robert”

“I need to apologize. Something happened to me last night that showed me I haven’t been fair to you.”

“What do you mean?”

“You may not believe this. I ... I saw Mom. And she showed me the truth. Now I need to apologize but first, I want you to show me Her.”

“Her? Her who?”

“Connie”

“How... how did you know that?”

“Mom showed me.“

“Wow. You are going to have to tell me about that. You always told me I was just hiding.“

“I know. I was wrong, and I am sorry. But I want to apologize to my

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sister properly”

“Sister? You mean it?”

“Yes. Go get comfortable, so I can do this right.”

“All... all right. But she ... I am not really ‘finished’ yet”

“You will look fine.”

Joe disappeared into his room, and Robert waited anxiously. Soon, he came down in a rather pretty purple blouse and blue skirt, looking nervous.

“Hi. I am Connie.”

Robert smiled, and said, “Nice to meet you sis.”

Connie gave him a hug, and said, with tears in her eyes, “You don’t know how much it means to have you call me that.”

Robert held back tears of his own, hugged her back, and said, “Come on. We have a lot to catch up on”

