

# CREATED GAY

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## Bullying in the Bible?

**Isaiah 51:7-8** (GNB) **Do not be afraid when people taunt and insult you; they will vanish like moth-eaten clothing!**

Interesting verse. In all of the times that I have read Isaiah, this verse slipped by without catching my attention. Is this Isaiah's way of being part of the It Gets Better movement?

This text in Isaiah certainly sounds like bullying. Taunting and insulting people is a form of bullying. The advice given is not to fear the bullies, because eventually go away.

I know that bullying is an ugly gift that can continue to hurt people many years after the bullying stopped. I do not discount the hurt by saying it is going to get better. As a middle-aged gay man, I have the advantage of being able to look back and put the pain in perspective.

In school, the school-yard bully can terrorize, humiliate and make life miserable. But there is a tendency for school-yard bullies to cease to be a factor in your life after you leave school. I have not seen a single person who bullied me when I was in either high school or college since I graduated. I now have the liberty to look back at the bullies and to realize that they were small people, doing small people things, because they were not able to deal with the issues in their lives. Insults, threats and violence were all they had in their hearts. I choose to no longer let the opinions they expressed determine my value, my worth, my future and my identity. I am a God carrier and that trumps everything else.

The July to September edition of Created Gay, the magazine, contains a response to the shooting in Orlando, Florida and two Pride reflections. At first thought, two Pride sermons might seem like too much material about Pride. In the light of the Orlando shooting, Created Gay believes there is even more reason for gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer and Trans people to celebrate who they are.

## Blood Cries to God! (Orlando Shooting Response) by Gary Simpson

The ancient Biblical story relates how Cain, the farmer, killed his brother, Abel, the sheep herder. And then Cain tries to act like nothing happened. When questioned by God, about where Abel is, Cain replies that he is not his "brother's keeper." And then we hear the powerful line from God.

**Genesis 4:10** (NIV) **The Lord, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries to me from the ground."**

This was not just any murder. The murder is unique for two reasons; it is the first murder recorded in the Bible and it is the first murder over religion. Cain was angry, because God liked Abel's offering more than God liked Cain's offering. Abel's murder shows religion gone bad, religion gone toxic.

A man goes to Pulse, a gay club in Orlando, Florida and starts shooting people. As a result of his homophobic shooting spree, 49 people are dead, over 50 people are injured, thousands mourn and

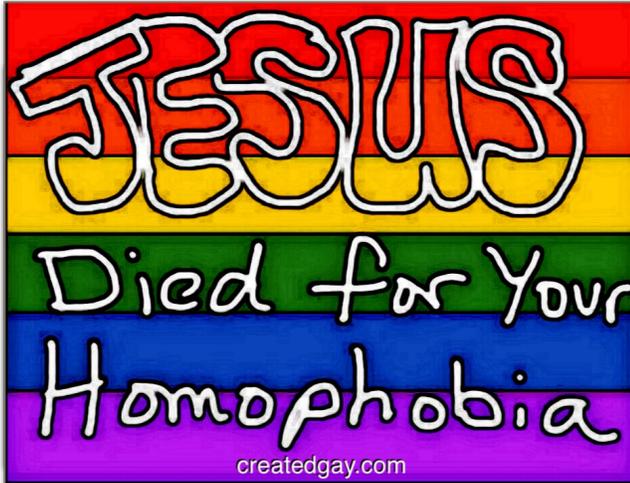
thousands are terrorized. June is Pride month in many communities. Never would I dream that I would be discussing a hate crime, of this magnitude, targeting the LGBT community during Pride.

The murders in Orlando did not take place in a vacuum. The larger societal climate helped create an environment where shooting people at a gay bar made sense to the murderer. We cannot write off the Orlando shooting as an isolated incident of violence against queer and Trans people. Sexual minority students are more likely to be the target of physical bullying in school. Gay bashings are much more common than anybody in the LGBT community really wants to think about. And as I think of the

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Orlando shooting, Genesis 4:10 keeps running through my mind. "What have you done? . . . blood cries to me from the ground."



The blood of Orlando cries out.

- Parents disown their children and kick them out of their homes, just for the supposed crime of being gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual or Trans. And the Lord asks, "What have you done? . . . blood cries to me from the ground."

- Sexual minority youth make up a disproportionately high percentage of homeless youth. And the Lord asks, "What have you done? . . . blood cries to me from the ground."

- The word fag is a commonly heard insult in the schools of our land and the word gay is frequently used as a term of disapproval. And the Lord asks,

"What have you done? . . . blood cries to me from the ground."

- Churches vilify and excommunicate LGBT congregants. And the Lord asks, "What have you done? . . . blood cries to me from the ground."
- The United States military, until relatively recently, fired people when the military learned that they were gay or lesbian. And the Lord asks, "What have you done? . . . blood cries to me from the ground."
- Some people of faith rally against protecting queer people from discrimination in the workplace and from protection in hate crimes legislation. And the Lord asks, "What have you done? . . . blood cries to me from the ground."
- Some people of faith lobby for the ability to refuse to serve queer people in their businesses, lobby for the ability to refuse to provide LGBT people medical treatment and lobby for the ability to refuse to provide sexual minority people any counselling and psychotherapy. And the Lord asks, "What have you done? . . . blood cries to me from the ground."
- Some people oppose Gay Straight Alliances in schools. And the Lord asks, "What have you done? . . . blood cries to me from the ground."
- Bills are introduced in legislative assemblies that restrict the access of Trans people to bathrooms, painting Trans people as dangerous to children. And the Lord asks, "What have you done? . . . blood cries to me from the ground."
- Some religious leaders say they are praying for Orlando, without mentioning that they are praying for queer people, their loved ones and their allies. And the Lord asks, "What have you done? . . . blood cries to me from the ground."
- In some countries loving a person of the same gender can result in a prison sentence or in execution. There are regions of the world where executions of gay people are public and are

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intended to instill terror. And the Lord asks, "What have you done? . . . blood cries to me from the ground."

- The Lord looks at a systemically homophobic and transphobic society. And the Lord asks, "What have you done? The blood of those in whom I take pleasure cries to me from the ground."

The cry of Orlando blood calls on us, individually, and as family, school, religious, corporate and political groups to search our hearts, to find and to root out homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. So we can ensure our communities are safe for queer and Trans people.

The fact that God hears the cry of the blood of those murdered due to religious hatred speaks volumes. God is with those oppressed by religious hate and God values those who experience religious hate



## Surprise, Surprise!

(Pride Reflection)

by Gary Simpson

**Luke 7:1-10** (KJV) Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.

3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another,

Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

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**Galatians 1:1-12** (KJV) Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia: Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

10 For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

My grandmother had a neat box of toys. Because almost every type of small toy imaginable

Some bishops, priests, pastors and lay people think that they can kick LGBT people out of church. Theology check. LGBT people cannot be kicked out of the church, because LGBT people are the church. At Pride you can be as proud of yourself as God is.

was in the box, opening the box was a source of pleasant surprises, no matter how many times you looked in the toy box. Being able to open the box and play with the toys was an experience. Opening the box of toys opened my imagination, making grandma's toy box a highlight of every trip to grandma's house.

One theme caught my attention when I read the Gospel and Epistle readings for the week, surprise. Buried in the Word are amazing surprises, from a God of surprises, the kind of surprises that make opening the Word a highlight of our weekly spiritual trip. This week we are surprised by the Centurion, by grace and by God.

In Roman law, slaves were treated more like property, like production machines than like people. Slaves could be mistreated, "even killed" by their master.<sup>1</sup> A slave who was past a slave's prime could be "thrown out to die."<sup>2</sup> But the Centurion does the unexpected and goes to significant lengths for his slave. The position of Roman centurion could be compared with a "regimental sergeant-major".<sup>3</sup> Perhaps, this is just one reason why commentator



<sup>1</sup> William Barclay. *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), ebook.

<sup>2</sup> Barclay. *Luke*, ebook.

<sup>3</sup> Barclay. *Luke*, ebook.

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William Barclay notes that the Centurion ". . . had a completely unusual attitude to his slave."<sup>4</sup> I realize that to many members of the LGBT community, this is no surprise. But to sexual minority people who have hated themselves for not being straight, the response from Christ might be a surprise. The Centurion's servant was healed.

For Paul's contemporaries, sexuality and religion were linked. *The Quest Study Bible* observes Paul was not opposed to circumcision as a "cultural practice" but that he was opposed to circumcision as a way to "earn salvation."<sup>5</sup> Circumcision was at the cultural heart of Judaism, not at the heart of God. And for devout Jews, this was a stunning surprise. God is calling us, as the faithful, to review our views of gender and sexuality to ensure our culture does

not drown out the voice of God's grace. And the voice of God asks us not to let our culture drown out God's grace in our own lives.

The Kingdom of God is full of surprises. You thought you were not good enough for the Kingdom of God? Surprise! You thought you were not skilled enough, gifted enough, fit enough or bright enough for the Kingdom of God? Surprise! You thought that you were not straight enough for the Kingdom of God? Surprise!

Dive into Pride! Dive into the surprise of God, by surprising both yourself and surprising others with a grace that transcends and transforms culture.

## Jesus on the Wrong Side of the Tracks

### Pride Sermon

by Gary Simpson

**Luke 7:36 - 7:50** (KJV) And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five

<sup>4</sup> Barclay. *Luke*, ebook.

<sup>5</sup> Marshall Shelley, et. al., eds. *The Quest Study Bible*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Pub., 1994), 1609.

hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most.

And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.



There is a lot that I would like to know about the story. I am very curious about the pharisee's motives. Was the pharisee trying to get Jesus to say something that could get Jesus in trouble with the religious leaders? A few common social conventions were not followed by the pharisee. Traditionally, in the ancient Middle East the host arranged for a guest's feet to be washed with cool water and to either burn a pleasant smelling incense or to place a drop of rose oil, which could act like a perfume, on the guest's head. Commentator William Barclay states that the pharisee did not practice "good manners."<sup>6</sup> And the lack of traditional

hospitality makes me question the pharisee's motives. We may never know the pharisee's motives, but the story gives us the sense that the pharisee was informally judging to see if Jesus was a prophet. We have a window into the pharisee's thoughts. . . **If he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.**

Ever been caught on the wrong side of the tracks? A place where you do not know what is expected and where you do not fit in?

Talk about out of place. She clearly does not know the social expectations in a pharisee's home or she probably would not have been there. In Jesus' time, among very conservative religious leaders, the lady is "notoriously bad," a sex trade worker.<sup>7</sup> She was not likely invited, but the story might have taken

<sup>6</sup> William Barclay. *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke*. Vol. 1. (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 2001), ebook.

<sup>7</sup> Barclay. *Luke* (2001, ebook).



place in a courtyard where people were relatively free to come in uninvited.<sup>8</sup> The lady is balling, while pouring expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. Between the crying and the smell of the perfume, she was difficult to ignore.

Jesus' reaction takes a direction that is not expected by the Pharisee and is probably not expected by anyone else in the home. Jesus takes the pharisee to task for not following conventions of hospitality and failing to welcome Jesus like the lady who is anointing His feet. I am not sure if the pharisee quite caught the implication of Jesus' comments. In the room that day, perhaps the pharisee was the one on the wrong side of the tracks, on the wrong side of the heavenly tracks.

Liz Carter-Morgan made a powerful and a thought-provoking comment about the story of the prodigal son, the lost son. She commented about the tendency for people to see LGBT individuals as the prodigal son, needing to return to the church, and seeing the church as the parent. She suggested that

the reality is more that the church is the prodigal son and the LGBT community is the father.<sup>9</sup> I would love to have heard more on the topic, but she only left us with the seed for reflection.

I doubt that Liz Carter Morgan would take that kernel of thought the direction I am going to take it today.

In some cases, the members of the LGBT community kept their faith in the deep grace and love of God, while the church was left trying to comprehend the depth and breadth of God's love. And members of the queer community sit looking out the window of their homes, as they listen to news about angry, graceless comments attributed to religious leaders and they long for the day they will see the prodigal church, the lost church return. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year they wait, longing for the church they love to return. But the church was on the wrong side of the heavenly tracks.

I wish that it was only members of the queer community who feel that the church left them. Young people, senior citizens, less abled people, less formally educated people, women, individuals of color and indigenous peoples have lived out the faith of Jesus Christ while waiting for the prodigal church, the lost church to return, to get on the right side of the heavenly tracks. People of color look to the largely White churches, wondering why they are so lost from the roots of Christianity to not carry signs that read "#Black lives matter," "#women's lives matter" or "#Indigenous lives matter." And they wait and wait for us to show that God's priorities are our priorities.

And how do we, the prodigal church of Jesus Christ, get our sense of spiritual direction and return home, to the heavenly side of the tracks? We follow Jesus' example.

<sup>8</sup> Barclay. *Luke* (2001), ebook.

<sup>9</sup> Liz Morgan Carter. Camrose United Church Affirming Celebration. (Camrose United Church, Camrose, Alberta: March 6, 2016).

Naaman, the commander who came to Elisha to be healed from leprosy, was not happy when Elisha told him to bathe in the Jordan River. He had reasons for not wanting to bathe in the Jordan, one of which may have been the Jordan River itself. You see, the Jordan River does not have a reputation for being a beautiful, clean river. The Jordan was muddy.<sup>10</sup> One commentator describes the Jordan as a "muddy little stream."<sup>11</sup>

According to Christian tradition, Jesus was perfect, without sin. In the Gospel narratives, we are told that Jesus went to the river Jordan to be baptized. So according to Christian narrative and tradition, the perfect, the sinless, the white as snow, Jesus descends into the filthy dirty murk of the river to be baptized. And when Jesus arose from the baptism in the filthy water, he was fit for service.

By following the example of Jesus, the church becomes qualified to serve. It is only when the church of Jesus Christ chooses to go into the deep murky river, only when the church chooses to go into the very places where they do not feel comfortable, where they do not know the road, that the church becomes qualified to serve.

Jewish people around the time of Christ only used baptism for converts from other faiths. They had no real sense that they, "the chosen people, the children of Abraham, assured of God's salvation, could ever need baptism."<sup>12</sup> When Jesus was baptized, Jesus "identified himself with those he came to save . . ."<sup>13</sup> After Jesus was baptized, Jesus received God's approval. [And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.](#)<sup>14</sup> And Jesus' ministry changed the world, because Jesus was on the right side of the heavenly tracks.

Want to change the world? Check to see which side of the heavenly tracks you are on.

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<sup>10</sup> Jean M. Alley, et. al., eds. *The Open Bible*. (Nashville: Nelson Pub., 1998 ), 494.

<sup>11</sup> J. Vernon McGee. *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*. Vol. 2 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1982), 313.

<sup>12</sup> William Barclay. *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew*. Vol. 1. (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 2001), ebook.

<sup>13</sup> Barclay. *Matthew*. (2001), ebook.

<sup>14</sup> Mark 1:11(KJV).