

For the column *Speaking of Faith* - 7/19/19 (for publication the week of July 22)

Although June has come and gone, the energy of Pride Month remains in brilliant rainbows; in the lingering controversy over the Drag Queen Story Hour movement; and in remembering faith leaders, from different traditions, together blessing Pride Week at a North Conway church.

I recall elsewhere, as the festivities came to a close, a sermon about love, which delighted many but whose language, alas, caused pain for an LGBTQ minority. With the best of intentions, we can “other” people, so caught up in our own worlds that we miss what our neighbor is experiencing.

You may be moved to tell your story of LGBTQ people in your life – and how amazing or beautiful, surprising or painful their journey has been for you – but wait a moment. Tempting as that is, let us instead lift up those who actually are out or are coming out, people who are transitioning or questioning, those who are suffering or perhaps praying for a fair shake in looking for a home or a job. We must center LGBTQ voices – so that everyone hears their truth, their pain, their pride.

How can we do this well? Love has an answer.

“I will not speak of ‘tolerance,’ writes UU minister Victoria Safford, ‘with its courteous clenched teeth and bitter resignation. I will not speak about ‘acceptance,’ of ‘other’ people....I can only look in laughing wonder at human life in all its incarnations....I cannot think of being anybody else’s ‘ally,’ even, because even that implies some degree of separation—some degree of safety for some of us, not all. We are ‘allied’ with no one and with nothing but love—the larger Love transcending all our understanding, within which all the different, differing, gorgeously various, variant, beautifully deviant aspects of ourselves are bound in elegant unity.”

My hope is that the Pride Month celebrations and headlines helped raise awareness and that more folks now understand realities they may not have seen before. With luck and effort and grace, the richness of our common humanity can bring us closer together. Maybe someday we’ll see one another free from labels – free even from “we” and “they.”

Imagine that. Seeing one another freshly, simply as a fellow human.

At a recent national gathering of Unitarian Universalists, poet Richard Blanco suggested we borrow a page from the Zulu culture. Instead of “Hi, how are you?” and “Fine,” Zulus say hello by looking into each other’s eyes and saying, “I see you.” The response is, “I’m here to be seen, and I see you.”

Blanco writes in his poem, “Declaration of Interdependence”: “We hold these truths to be self-evident.... We’re the cure for hatred caused by despair. We’re the good morning of a bus driver who remembers our name, the tattooed man who gives up his seat on the subway. We’re every door held open with a smile when we look into each other’s eyes the way we behold the moon. We’re the moon. We’re the promise of one people, one breath declaring to one another: *I see you. I need you. I am you.*”

May we so live.

Rev. Betsy Mead Tabor serves the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes (UUFES) in Tamworth Village, a congregation known for its diversity and inclusion. All are welcome, all Sundays, at 10 a.m.