

## Pride in Canada

First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto

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When Shawn asked me about doing the sermon for July 1, my first thought was, "Sure, no problem, I have a sermon ready called "Turmoil and the Temple" which is the reason the sermon is entitled as such in the recent newsletter.

I knew that July 1<sup>st</sup> is Canada Day, but I didn't think I had enough information on which to do a sermon, given that we have not yet been residents here for three years.

Then I harkened back to this time three years ago, just before we moved, when we were excitedly doing all the research we could to learn about Canada.

I remembered how we learned about poutine and toques and the letter zed, learned a lot more about hockey, and came to appreciate that items such as paint rollers, basketball, light bulbs, and Superman (to name a few) were invented by Canadians.

But more significant than these uniquely Canadian things, or the ingenuity of its citizens, was our developing appreciation of the *heart* of Canada, what this country *stands for*, which isn't uniquely Canadian, and can be found anywhere.

But most of the time what Canada stands for *isn't* found elsewhere.

As Americans, we come from a "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps/rugged individualism" mentality.

The more we learned about Canada, the more we understood that a Canadian would likely say, "It doesn't feel nearly so cool to be my rugged individual self, when you my neighbor, are for whatever reason struggling..."

So I'll hang back and help to ensure that *your* bootstrap works too,

before proceeding down my road.”

Some might look on these things as civil aspects of Canadian life, but they reflect a philosophical appreciation of justice that is soulful.

A professor in a seminary class concurred when she said, “ Ideas don’t become laws or policies w/o a foundation of spirit.”

Canada is one of the few nations in all of history that has never fought a war for territorial gain.

Historically, Canada fights for human principles, because possessing other people’s dirt is of no interest; war is waged for ideals.

Many of Canada’s ideals are mirrored in our UU principles.

Concepts of...

The inherent worth and dignity of every person,

Equity and compassion

Acceptance

Right of conscious

Community

Justice for all

Respect

Interdependence

As we heard from Gillian’s meditation reading, Unitarian Universalism affirms

That the blessings of life are available to everyone- not just the Chosen or the well off, or the educated, or the sexual majority.

That Creation itself is Holy -- including all people, regardless of gender or ethnicity.

That no one is saved until we All are saved, where All means the whole...

Canada strives to embody these principles.

I'm convinced that the founding mothers and fathers of this great nation were all either out or closet-ed Unitarians!

So, the more we learned as we conducted our research, the more it felt like we were coming home....home to a place where we'd never lived and hardly visited.

Since we've moved here, once in a while someone will say "You moved HERE from the States? You chose to live here instead of *Boston*??

At which time I say, with as much gentleness as possible, that perhaps they've lost sight of the fairness of this city and this country.

When we live in a place for an extensive period, aspects of that place become commonplace, a given.

Many Canadians, therefore, might be shocked to learn about the actual number of people in developed countries who don't have access to adequate health care...

... aghast to hear about the amount of money it takes to get an education.

The issue of gay rights might seem downright archaic.

But I assure you that if you're not so fortunate to have the arms of this inclusive country enfolding you, there is a very real difference.

Stray outside of these Canadian borders and the bank posters that feature same sex couples quickly disappear.

Stray further yet from these Canadian borders and homosexuality is not only invisible in the media, but is punishable by death.

You may recall a couple of years ago when the president of Iran asserted that "In Iran, we don't have homosexuals like in your

country.”

Most sobering about this comment was that he probably meant that homosexuality does not exist in Iran because that nation punishes those found “guilty of this crime” with a death sentence, similar to the treatment of homosexuals and Jewish people in the Holocaust.

Because of such atrocities, the United Nations created a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which contains a listing of categories that are specifically protected. Article 2 of reads:

*Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.*

I guess that gives the category of sexual orientation “other” status. Frankly, it has more of an invisible feel than I would have hoped for.

Invisibility is one of the most detrimental aspects of homosexuality.

Some who utilize invisibility to avoid internal and/or external conflict might disagree.

But the fact is, invisibility gives life to fear and perpetuates inauthenticity.

The issue of invisibility and homosexuality reminds me of a girl who was in my class in high school.

She seemed to move effortlessly in various social circles, with underclassmen and with her peers.

After she was crowned homecoming queen during grade 12 the superintendent of the school told her she was the most popular girl in the school.

All of this changed soon after rumors started to spread about her sexuality.

This part of her personhood was no longer invisible.

As a result the tires of her car were anonymously slashed in the high school parking lot. Socially things didn't become horrific, just pervasively cooler.

Her family didn't turn their backs on her, but she was sent to counseling to get "straightened out."

Several immediate family members believe to this day that she's going to hell for eternity, and none attended her wedding.

This girl I speak of is me.

Despite some of these bumps and bruises along the way, the discrimination and misunderstanding that I've experienced pales in comparison to the price others have paid to live, and sometimes to die, in order to be true to who they were created to be.

There are countless people who have suffered, some we've heard about, and a vast majority we have not.

When I read the famous Canadian war memorial poem "In Flanders Fields" I can't help but think about the multitudes of people who have gone before us and struggled not only for gay rights, but for human rights of all kinds.

Maybe if this poem *had* been written specifically in honor of those who have gone before us in the fight for gay rights, the poem would read something like this....

*Across these fields our spirits dwell  
Our tales of pain, some known well.*

*Others hidden in the wind  
Known only to us made to bend*

*and sometimes to break in our despair  
flames extinguished, once bright and fair.*

*Short days ago we knew no fight  
Yet lurking was the dark of night*

*We lived, felt dawn, saw sunsets swell,  
Loved and were loved,  
and now across these fields we dwell.*

*Take up this cause, then, with the foe  
To you, from failing hands, we throw*

*The torch: be yours to hold it high  
If you break faith with us who've cried,*

*We shall still weep,  
as across these fields our spirits dwell.*

The torch is indeed held high across these fields of Canada.

It's flame ever brighter because of gender-neutral marriage laws.

The flame brighter still from the illumination of colors in a flag that now graces the front of this, our place of worship.

Today we take Pride in Canada, for being a world leader in advocacy for gay rights, and human rights of all kinds.

But make no mistake, there is still much work to be done, across Canada, and certainly beyond.

Recognizing this, may we with purpose and resolve continue to raise our torches of commitment to and celebration of all who have suffered and worked so that the darkness of division may give way to a new dawn of understanding and unity.

And so may it be.