

The pair of animal eyes glowed in the light of the campfire in Algonquin Park as the couple sat relaxing after a day of canoeing and swimming. Musing by the fire, in the dark of the evening, they noticed the visitor watching them from the bushy perimeter of the campsite.

After several minutes surveillance the animal slowly walked out of the gloom and into the circle of firelight. It was a wolf. It looked the couple in the eye, then walked around them and out the other side of the camp.

This extraordinary visitor claimed the focus of the conversation until the fire died down and it was bedtime. Was it a tame wolf? How come it was alone in the campground among humans? What was it looking for? It appeared healthy and fit. It appeared to appreciate our presence and friendliness.

The next day the camp grapevine said there was a wolf sighted in the campground by several campers. Some were alarmed, a few were curious.

The man spoke with one of the park wardens and learned that sometimes a wolf pack will reject one of its members and not allow it to be part of the pack again. He thought this was the case here. The wolf was lonely and seeking companionship. It wanted to be part of a community. As the wolf was showing no hostility or other threatening actions the warden said

to treat it as a wild animal, not attempt to feed it or threaten it, and no harm should take place.

Several days later a man and a boy and a dog set up camp. They had met the first couple before and welcomed the reunion. The boy was excited that the man recognized his dog, even his name, Blackie.

In their conversation the couple told the newcomers about the friendly wolf. The man explained that wolves and dogs will look each other in the eye, then if either wishes friendship they rub noses. To hold the stare is a challenge to fight.

The next morning the boy and Blackie came rushing to the couple's camp to tell them that the evening before the wolf had appeared at their camp. The wolf and Blackie confronted each other, each staring into the other's eyes. Then the wolf leaned forward and rubbed noses with the dog. The wolf and the dog played with each other a little and the wolf disappeared.

It was just like you said, the boy exclaimed, and his dog and the wolf became friends.

The wolf whose own community had made him an outsider was obviously looking for companionship. Living on the edge of the campground the wolf was showing his need of community and acceptance.

The end of the story is that a few days later the wolf wandered into a nearby group camp where a gathering

(Outsider, cont'd)

of intellectually challenged young people were camping. A girl sitting at the back of the campfire circle had a hotdog in her hand when the wolf approached her. Frightened the girl screamed and flung her arms about. The wolf took alarm and in the ensuing disturbance nipped the girl's hand.

Because of this the park wardens were compelled by regulations to protect them from lawsuits to shoot the wolf.

So the wolf died - an outsider.

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"...Jesus was a man in his time, preoccupied by matters which for the most part would seem insignificant or incomprehensible to those of other times or other cultures. The figure of a helpless and apparently innocent man on trial for his life before the Roman governor is, however, an icon to which any member of the human race could respond. It is precisely because we know so little of the trivial things in the story that we can respond so powerfully to the larger things - to his silences, to his apparent forgiveness of his captors, to his loneliness, and to his suffering."

(from "Jesus, A Life", by A.N. Wilson, W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., New York, 1992, page 229.)

"That virility and humaneness of the prophets and that capacity for growth which stir our enthusiasm were largely due to the breadth and inclusiveness of the biblical prophets' religious sympathy and faith. All the world was God's field; all the affairs of the nation were the affairs of religion. Every great event in history taught them a lesson in theology...religion became legal, fixed, monotonous, a thing by itself, shut off from the spontaneity and

naturalness of the general life. The prophetic voice was hushed and the prophetic fire died out. The scribe now sat where the prophet had stood, and the sacred book took the place of the living Voice."

(from "Christianity and the Social Crisis", by Walter Rauschenbusch, Hodder & Stoughton Press, 1907, Pages 27 to 31.)

"...we live in a corporatist society with soft pretensions to democracy. More power is slipping every day over towards the groups. That is the meaning of the marketplace ideology and of our passive acceptance of whatever form globalization happens to take."

(from "The Unconscious Civilization", by John Ralston Saul, House of Anansi Press, 1995, page 32.)

"Criticism is perhaps the citizen's primary weapon in the exercise of her legitimacy. That is why in this corporatist society, conformism, loyalty and silence are so admired and rewarded; why criticism is so punished or marginalized."

(Ibid, page 165).

"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" And he said, "Go...."

(Isaiah 7:8,9).

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Parable of the Insider

- Read St. Luke 15:11-32.

When the older brother of the Prodigal Son heard the joyful music and dancing in the house, he refused to go in, even after his father had invited him to share in the celebration of his younger brother's return. Angry, he sulkily commented that it was his loyalty and faithfulness which should be acclaimed.

This well-known story by Jesus might have ended with the joyful return of the younger son but, the story is dampened by the older brother's rejection. The story describes the wonderful love which welcomes the outsider home, but is aware of those who do not care whether the outsider comes home or not. In fact such a person prefers that the outsider stay away, out of sight and mind, and take the consequences of his actions.

The insider sets himself apart from the rest of humanity by his virtue rather than vice, his works rather than empathy. So he repudiates the family relationship and is angry and intolerant. He looked upon love and justice as something to be earned. What justice is there in treating the unsuccessful person more generously than the profitable person he wrongly argues? He exudes his feelings of moral superiority.

We are reminded of a phrase of Sir Thomas Browne in the 17th century, "He who discommendeth others obliquely commendeth himself." To feel moral superiority is never a sign of love. Yet, it is love which is the cohesive element of society.

Proud intolerance is a terrible sin. It leads to perceiving others as lazy, worthless, less than competent, living a lifestyle to be jealous of but one you are afraid to try.

The insider can afford to be ill-tempered, superior, unforgiving, elitist. They express a repulsive

coldness toward the poor, the homeless, the unemployed, the prisoner.

In Jesus' story the outsider successfully came inside for the celebration and reception. The insider was too unfeeling to share in the celebration of life and remains outside, alone, and in the dark.

Most church members today are insiders by their very religiosity. In an essay on "Holy Worldliness", Dr. Alec Vidler wrote: "Certainly there will be great risks in a Christianity of genuine worldliness, for it means living in the open air, it means living with people and serving them in all areas where Christ is never named though they belong to him, or where he is named only to be misunderstood or reviled."

To be a secular Christian today means you will feel, you will care, you will hurt, you will have your heart broken. You will understand and appreciate the outsider and join with them in celebration of life together.

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The Invisible Boundaries

from "God Hates Religion" by Christopher Levan, principal of St. Stephen's College, University of Alberta, Edmonton, The United Church Publishing House, Etobicoke, Ontario, page 90.

"Besides the obvious boundaries of insider/outsider, there are layers of divisions that keep people away from church. Take gainful employment as a case in point, and reflect on the position of an unemployed person. Unlike the Mediterranean world in which Jesus lived, our world assigns honour and shame according to ones

(BOUNDARIES, cont'd)

capacity to produce. Whereas the people of Palestine linked ones relative importance to family connections, our culture reserves its highest honours for the "doers," the "achievers." We are a "can do" society, and those who can't do, who can't produce anything worth some form of remuneration, are disowned. It's such an obvious standard that we hardly give it a second thought. Long-term unemployed persons are considered to be lazy, unwilling to try hard enough to create their own labour - social leeches. It is not a coincidence that people living on welfare are also the first to be scapegoated when economic trends decline.

Of course, the church never bars its doors to welfare recipients or unemployed workers. On the contrary, we make plenty of sympathetic noises about caring for them, but they are always "them." Listen to our weekly announcements. When matters turn to issues of charity, preachers often assume that food aid or benevolent money are for those outside the church community. Consequently, we never explain aid in a way that would make it clear to the worshipping community that they could use it should they ever be in trouble. The unspoken message is clear. Unemployed people aren't expected to be part of the church family.

....In a mercantile culture like ours, economic boundaries are the most distinctive and overtly oppressive. Money confers respectability, while poverty engenders ignobility. But there are other boundaries, ones of a strictly religious nature, that also exercise influence in the church family. Those who have broken the moral code, young single mothers for instance, can feel the invisible

walls that dissect a church sanctuary. They are on the business end of an unfortunate assumption that if you are not within the social norms, you must have done something "wrong." Such people are not actively solicited as our prospective members. Rather, we keep a wary eye on them or give them a wide berth. Their lives are tainted. Would they be good believers? (P.92)

....A final boundary, one which exists as firmly today as it did in the days of Jesus of Nazareth, is propriety or deference to the holy. Those who wish to be admitted to the inner sanctum must show themselves worthy. Having a polite and appropriately penitent deportment was and is essential. Faith is equivalent to propriety, to respect for the way things are, to not pushing too hard at the edges. The reign of heaven is not open to the vulgar or to those who use foul language or lack the necessary etiquette."

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#### PARAPHRASES OF MATTHEW 25

I was hungry and you formed a humanities club and discussed my hunger.

I was imprisoned and you crept off quietly to your chapel and prayed for my release.

I was naked and in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance.

I was sick and you knelt and thanked God for your health.

I was homeless, and you preached to me the spiritual shelter of the love of God.

I was lonely and you left me alone to pray for me.

You seem so holy, so close to God; but I'm still Hungry, and Lonely, and Cold.

- David Farrell