

When I was 13 years old the Hippy Dippy Weatherman had a regular spot on the Kraft Summer Music Hall Variety Show on Saturday nights. I just loved the humour of this comedian. Eventually I came to know him as George Carlin. He was famous for social commentary, stereotype jokes and racial impersonations that only he could get away with.

We were all more than amazed when through a Church youth group Christmas gift exchange; my younger brother received a George Carlin album titled the Seven Words You Can't Say on TV. The whole family gathered around the record player and my mother was soon shocked out of her mind. Of course I memorized the whole sketch. Love him or hate him, there was something so honest and non-judgemental about this 5-time Grammy award winner's wit and insight about the human condition. There was a pretence or protest of bewildered innocence that cut through all the cultural crap.

At the end of the 1060's George Carlin asked a rhetorical question in one of his routines that I never forgot.

“Remember when long hair was a sin, until there was one in every family?”

That insight of shifting cultural norms and changing moral outlooks opened my eyes. You see I was one of those brush-cut kids: Butch wax and buzz cut. So when the Beatles showed up with long hair, I soon began my long and tempestuous struggle to join the new cool, with long hair. Sin or not, I wanted to grow my hair out. It took years to get there, but I fought all the way and finally sported hair down to my shoulders by the time I was going off to University. Along the way I noticed that Jesus had long hair but that insight didn't go over well with my parents.

The same or similar rhetorical question comes to mind with our scripture reading today.

“Remember when divorce was a sin, until there was one in every family?”

I did a little pastoral review and from what I can tell there is at least one and often two or three divorces in every extended family in our church. As you know, my family of origin is right in there with everyone else. **Sin or not, divorce is now the new normal.**

Now, I'm not suggesting that **Jesus** was somehow in favour of divorce back then. Even though it was an accepted aspect of Jewish life, we have four independent sources that claim **Jesus** was against divorce. We have recited two of them today.

But the problem is each source offers a different reasoning or definition of the infraction. Each source is coming out of a different cultural context offering different approaches or rationales to the prohibition. So we don't know **Jesus'** exact reasoning or interpretation, but we have to say, he was against it. However, it is also clear that he envisioned a life together where divorce wasn't needed or necessary.

Now, the most recent new normal has to do with Sexual Orientation. **Jesus** said nothing about that subject and nothing directly about same sex marriage either. But the Old Testament certainly set sharp limits on sexual orientation rejecting the present day application.

These and earlier shifting cultural norms and changing moral outlooks reflect a deeper issue.

From where does our authority in life come? Does it come from the Bible, *Sola Scriptura*; that is scripture alone? Or from our life together informed by biblical values and the contributions of science? For the last 150 years the scripture alone approach of the Protestant Reformation has been giving way to a newer approach. From the Abolition of Slavery, to Women's Rights, to Divorce and now Sexual Orientation, the bible as rulebook has given way to the bible as moral roadmap. Instead of the dos and don'ts of scripture, the question of Micah comes to the fore. ***"What does the Lord require of you?"*** And the answer is not a rule but rather

"to seek justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God."

To connect this with the New Testament we find ourselves falling back on the **Jesus Creed**; ***"Love God and love your neighbour as you love self."***

One of the things I have noticed is when someone we love winds up on the other side of a cultural norm or a moral line drawn from scripture, we soon find a way to get around it. Love causes us to look at things differently. Love causes us to include what was previously excluded.

Love breaks the rules we find in the scriptures today just the way **Jesus** broke the rules of the holiness code of his day. Why? Because the rules are not the faith! Rules are not hitching posts but guidepost. The rules are not our life together. Justice, love, kindness and humility are! Compassion, inclusion and acceptance are!

So what has all this to do with World Communion Sunday?

Well, World Communion begins to feel a little restrictive as we realize that there is a far larger, more inclusive communion needed for our world today. The big

challenge that we must face today is the growing recognition that all religious traditions participate in the **Mystery** in the midst of life. In the midst of growing sectarian strife we must transcend our differences and learn to respect different approaches and insights.

The spiritual aspect and best practices of other traditions are helpful for all who seek the deeper dimensions of life and living together. No religion has the corner on the truth. Not even ours! What's more, we need these different faiths to inform, challenge and improve our own practice. Theology is not what saves us. Duelling theologies are so over. Being right isn't the point. Rather, compassion brings us into **God's** presence. Again, love of neighbour, love of justice, loving kindness and the humility to walk together with **God** will be central to this looming adaptation for a meaningful religious future.

Application for Today

When we put love, kindness, humility and justice ahead of cultural convention, or narrow claims, we are always on the right track. Amen.