

I had the opportunity to go to the Wild Goose Festival this past week.

This festival is—in their own words:

*“... a transformational community grounded in faith-inspired social justice. Wherever we come together ...we learn and grow by ... engaging in a wide variety of robust, respectful conversations with each other and with... leaders and artists from other communities. We refuse to be enemies with anyone.”*

Before I got there I thought, cynically, that’s quite a statement.

Now, when I first got there, I felt like one of the oldest people there. I quickly found that wasn’t true—it’s just that this particular religious festival draws a much younger crowd. I was hardly the oldest there. But I wasn’t in the majority either.

I have to say, that felt great.

The second thing I noticed was that I was surrounded by colorful clothes, body art, face painting, T-shirts that said things! I saw words emblazoned on shirts that made me wince with their honesty, words that made me smile, words that made me laugh out loud. You could tell when you’re in a large gathering of people who build their lives around justice for everyone, their art, and their spiritual journeys— because their clothes, hairstyles and color choices reflect what infused their lives.

But I saw no pointing, or disapproval or judgement.

It made me remember when I used to dress more like the bohemian artist I was when I was younger, and I wondered what it said about me that I now often wear black- even when I’m not “on the job”. Black shirt, black pants, black shoes. It’s almost like I’ve become a walking black hole. I’ve decided I miss dressing more individually—and with more color.

The third thing I noticed was this *radical welcome* by everyone I saw. It’s been my experience that when there is a gathering of any kind—there is a moment when you kind of “size up” the people you come in contact with. I’m sure this is part of our predator DNA, and I’ve gotten so used to it I hardly notice it anymore. So—it kind of took me by surprise when I never felt “sized up” by a single soul at this gathering.

No one seemed to notice—or care—that those who come to Wild Goose are diverse in sexuality, gender expression, race and viewpoints. Everyone was truly welcomed with big smiles, and words of welcome. I was surprised how many people said hello, introduced themselves, and made me feel included. The whole point of this festival was to find ways to spread God’s love *to*, and advocate *for* all people. I found myself feeling safe, and seen, and loved.

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Everywhere Jesus went he met with people that society dismissed or actively hated. Jesus insisted on radical welcoming. He never “sized up” people to see if they were worthy of being helped. He just helped them. When his followers expressed dismay about some of the people he interacted with: the women, the

poor, the sick, the outcast, the *unusual*—Jesus patiently taught them that all people were God’s children. All people were worthy.

But the authorities, both religious and secular, have never liked that message. Society and religion have spent thousands of years doing all that judging that Jesus taught against.

So: in the gospel reading this morning, Jesus is beginning to tell the disciples what the future will probably hold. His behavior has made him a threat to the community. Radical welcome and radical love threatens many people. Many powerful people. And Jesus tells them that it will probably cost him his life.

Peter rebukes Jesus. He probably has asked Jesus to just *ratchet down* the welcome/ love rhetoric, the rule-breaking-- for awhile. Peter wants him to stop upsetting those in control--lay low for now—and this Jesus movement might survive.

Jesus says: “Get behind me, you tempter.” If what I preach is real—it’s real all the time—not just when it’s convenient. I can’t believe you are really saying that I stop doing what I’m here for in order to calm down the authorities.

Jesus tells them-- if they are more willing to sacrifice the poor and the outcast and the unusual just to be safe and comfortable, perhaps they shouldn’t follow him.

“For what will it profit you,” Jesus asks them, “ to gain the whole world – the esteem of everyone, respect and honor-- and forfeit your life?”

Were they ashamed of what—and who—he stood with, he asked them?

At the Wild Goose Festival I felt what it was like to stand with those who had been hurt by the church, but came back for Jesus. I heard stories of people who returned to this festival year after year-- like geese return to the same nesting sites year after year--because it renewed their hope in a faith that feels the need for justice, love and the worth of every single person-- and then works for it.

But mostly, I felt the radical welcome for all of God’s people, no judgements, no “sizing up”, no decisions about who fits and who doesn’t fit. I wished all the followers of Jesus would experience this, so they might see how important it is. I can honestly say I have rarely felt that kind of welcome anywhere.

Now I’m home again, in our beloved community of Jesus, glad to see you all again, and looking forward to discussing more ways *we* can extend Jesus’ radical welcome to every person that comes in these doors, so they might feel safe, and seen, and loved.