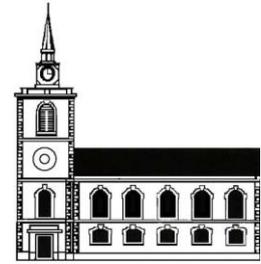


Two Addresses given at St James's Piccadilly London as part of our Celebrating LGBT Pride 26 June 2016

Part 1 by Charlotte Crawley

Part 2 by The Revd Lindsay Meader



Charlotte Crawley:

Imagine a world where who you love –

- determines whether you are a criminal or not
- determines how you are treated at school or at work
- determines whether you can walk the streets without fear

Imagine a world where because you do not conform to society's stereotypes, you are excluded, not taken seriously, bullied and harassed.

Imagine a world where to fit in and succeed, you spend 40 years hiding who you are from the people you love most...

My name is Charlotte Crawley and I am transgender. Since my earliest memories at around the age of 5 or 6, when I started to become self-aware, I knew I was different. I did not know that I was transgender but I knew as a "boy" I felt different to the other boys around me.

Of course all the while I did not understand those feelings, I just carried on and those feelings became normal and unremarkable. As my self-awareness developed, I became confused, I could not understand why I did not like the things that other boys liked, why I was more comfortable and relaxed in the company of girls and why I really wanted to be like them.

Growing up in Apartheid South Africa, being different or not conforming would attract attention and harsh treatment since Racism, Homophobia, and Chauvinism were the order of the day.

This made me fearful, I became secretive about how I felt and never shared my feelings with anyone, not even my family or my most dear friend. The pattern of my life became one of fear, secrecy, denial and near obsessive over-compensation where I undertook to be the most masculine example of a bloke as was possible, in an effort to deny myself and ensure that my inner most feelings were never suspected by others. Imagine deceiving your mother and father, brothers, friends and colleagues for over 40 years. Imagine the effort that goes into maintaining that deception. Imagine a deception so deep and prolonged that in the end you do not even know who you are!

I grew up in a family where faith was irrelevant and church was a scary unknown entity, which according to me as I got older was packed full of hypocrites who I had no desire to join. Five years ago I discovered Gods Love, his Mercy and Grace.

Why would he fetch me from the wilderness that was my broken, sinful, irrelevant life? I came to faith not through seeking, but through chance. At least I thought it was chance but have since discovered that nothing in my life is by chance.

My marriage 20 years ago, my friendships, coming to faith and finding St James's Piccadilly, none of these have happened by chance.

Psalm 139 lends itself to the notion that chance has nothing to do with events of my life, but that I am what God intended and

that he has a plan for me, a plan that amongst many other things, united me with my wife, blessed us with a beautiful daughter and has brought me to this place today as you see me.

Psalm 139 V 15 and 16 read as follows: *“My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me, were written in your book before one of them came to be”*

I came out as transgender in my previous church and shocked many. It was not long before I was approached by the vicar and was informed that what I was undertaking did not represent God’s best, and that I would not be permitted to hold any position of leadership within the church in future. The place I thought I would be safest had become a nightmare, over the following three years many people grew to understand and love me for who I am, and many refused to honour who I was, which led to growing levels of anxiety.

My excitement and love for Jesus became overshadowed by growing anxiety and despair. What an amazing coincidence

**The Revd Lindsay Meader:
Coming Out**

Trinity 5/Pride /Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-end;

Charlotte, thank you so much. Every year I’m moved not only by the deeply personal stories that are shared in this service, but also the courage shown by those who share them. We’re delighted you’ve found us and hope that anyone who is here – especially through Pride – for the first time today, will feel equally welcome.

Well, what a momentous week’s it’s been. A real emotional rollercoaster. The speed which with events have developed has been breath-taking, especially here in

then, that after sharing my story at a Christian Aid event in February this year, I was approached by a person from St James who invited me to come and experience an LGBT inclusive church. I do not believe for one second that this was a coincidence, this was God’s manifest Love and Grace, he brought me from a place of anxiety and despair, he has allowed my flame for Jesus to reignite and has shown me people here at St James who love the way that Jesus loves, in spite of our differences and in all of our brokenness.

I am blessed to live in a country where I am able to be myself without fear. Yesterday I participated in the London Pride march alongside my wife and daughter, and was struck by the immense out-poring of love, the unity and the beautiful diversity that makes our London one of the greatest cities on earth. I am especially grateful to the leadership, and you the congregation here at St James, for choosing to be inclusive and welcoming, you have created a safe place for me to be close to God and worship without anxiety and despair threatening to cloud that experience. I feel very honoured to have had this opportunity to share my story with you today.

Westminster. Within the space of seven days I’ve seen people moved to tears with both hope and despair.

Here in this place, last Sunday evening, we co-hosted our interfaith iftar along with our friends from the Muslim organisation City Circle. Over 370 people came along to hear our special guest and keynote speaker, Sadiq Khan – the new Mayor of London – and Christian, Muslim and Jewish panellists share their experiences of working together on the Winter Shelter before breaking the

Ramadan fast and sharing together in the iftar (or evening meal). It was a deeply joyous, inspiring and moving evening. The atmosphere was literally positively charged, as people with open hearts and minds from all three Abrahamic faiths came together following the horrific Orlando shootings and the murder of MP Jo Cox, in solidarity against violence, hatred and intolerance in an act of friendship, hope and hospitality. I've lost count of the number of Muslims who thanked us so genuinely and sincerely, many of whom had never set foot in a church before and couldn't quite believe we were happy to host the iftar. Someone even described the mood as "euphoric". It was one of those extraordinary, 'shining' evenings – the kind that will stay with me for many years, when I felt especially proud to be part of St James's.

On Wednesday there were extraordinary scenes in Trafalgar Square when thousands gathered to celebrate the life of murdered MP Jo Cox on what would have been her 42nd birthday, to affirm her own belief that "we have more in common than that which divides us" and to pledge to "Love like Jo."

Who would have imagined that less than a week later, we would be faced with the reality of 'Brexit'? Not it seems, even the politicians at the helm of the Vote Leave campaign, many of whom have seemed as incredulous as most Londoners and have since gone surprisingly quiet. In the last 72 hours so many of the people I have encountered have been genuinely and sincerely staggered and in equal measure, moved to the point of tears by anger or despair. There can be no denying that one of the foremost focuses of the EU Referendum was immigration and a lot of ugly and deeply divisive things were said during the course of the campaigns. Many have been simply dumbfounded and have shared emotions akin to a bereavement, perhaps only to be expected in a city where

the overwhelming majority voted to Remain.

It struck me yesterday, that this year's Pride parade couldn't have come at a better time. Once more the West End became a sea of colour bedecked in the now familiar rainbow flags, banners and balloons as our streets were filled with happy, smiling people coming together in a fantastically diverse and harmonious multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-faith celebration of love. The joy and goodwill was infectious. Just as last Sunday I felt proud to be part of this church, so yesterday I felt proud to be a Londoner.

This morning, as the political fallout continues to unfold, as a city and a country we still find ourselves adrift in a sea of uncertainty facing an unknown future. We recognise a deep need for healing and reconciliation, and as Christians, this is our calling. Usually we focus on our Gospel reading but today, I am particularly drawn to, and grateful for, the words of St Paul: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

Today we celebrate that as people of faith, we worship a God who is beyond borders. We recognise ultimately there is no longer Jew or Greek, no longer Christian or Muslim, no longer slave or free, no longer male or female, no longer straight or gay, no longer Leave or Remain, for in all our diversity, we are Abraham's offspring and children of God together.

May we continue to build on the love, pride and unity exemplified in our interfaith iftar, in the celebration of Jo Cox's life and in yesterday's Pride parade, and remember our calling to be people of hope and agents of reconciliation. And so I close today with a

prayer written and issued by the Church of
England in the light of the Referendum:

*Eternal God, Light of the nations,
in Christ you make all things new:
guide our nation in the coming days through
the inspiration of your Spirit,
that understanding may put an end to
discord and all bitterness.
Give us grace to rebuild bonds of trust
that together we may work for the dignity
and flourishing of all;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*