

Free to Be Me

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My sermon today is called free to be me. And it's very much in line with some of the other remarkable testimonies that we've heard today from other people, in the beautiful singing, and I'm just utterly delighted. I know some of you. I work with some of you, and some of you I'm meeting for the first time, and I wish I could meet you in person. But such is the world we live in now.



Some of the scriptural passages that I'll be drawing from and some of the religious connotations and imagery that I'll be drawing from is from the Christian tradition, as I am a Quaker. At the same time obviously all the principles that I'm bringing forward today are completely universal and individual. And so, free to be me, free to be me.

When you were younger, Jesus says, you dressed yourself and go where you want, but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hand, and someone else would lead you where you do not want to go. Uniformity. Conformity. The clothes make the man. Dress for Success. Cover yourself, dress appropriately, dress code. Go home and change. Are you wearing that? You're asking for it, dressed like that.

Vestments. Adorn the vestments God gave to the other sex and be an abomination.

Leviticus.

Romans. A transgressor, a transvestite, an alien, an outsider, a Samaritan. A sinner.

I am 4, 5, 6, 7 years old, standing in the closet, two rows of clothing hang on the bar.

One row is for my sister. The other, standing in the walk-in wardrobe. My hand shakes. I stretch up on tiptoes, reaching for the metal hanger, my hand touches a girls dress I pull it quickly over my head and yank it down. My heart hammers, I taste metal. I stand up straight and close my own.

I wish I could just.

I wish I could just.

I wish I could just be a transgressor, a transvestite, an alien, an outsider, a sinner.

They too, those indigenous children, four, five and six, when they were taken by gunpoint from their communities, their heads shorn, long hair is not for boys, take off their clothes, burn them and put them all in uniform, make them all uniform, make them all conform. In non-industrial cultures the uniformity was based on the needs of the small community, not of the state, or the factory owner or the school Master, not of the 1%, be they Emperor, priest or CEO. Centuries ago, here on Turtle Island, those who looked like boys but cared nothing for hunting were left to work with the girls. And those girls who showed acumen for hunting were taken on the hunt.

When they were young, a Jewish girl in the 1990s from the Midwest shows up to be a falconer in Mongolia, who meets a group of men, part of a long lineage of Mongolian bird tenders, always men. They shun her and laugh. But over time, she demonstrates. She's going nowhere. And eventually, on allowing her to show the learning that she has achieved on her own, she is embraced. And is now one of that falconer tribe.

And certainly, when one finds their tribe they must arrive as a stranger, be accepted as a guest, and through trust, and if you are lucky, you are free to be you amongst a new tribe, amongst fellow travelers.

Now a tribe may not accept you. And that is fine.

But what is not fine is for others to decide for you or for them.

As a transgender person I was born to a diaspora. Nowhere in the world is there a dominant transgender society. Everywhere I go, I am the ward of a cisgender, hetero-normative state which defines and completely controls, my exposure, and my access to my own self-determination. I am free to be me, but only in a limited way. And I hope one day through education and understanding the damage caused by misogyny, the bitter bar, from which all the branches of sexual and gender bias stretch, tangle and strangle, will be run from the world.

And the first step in this transformation is to drop our patina of goodness and good intentions. The intentions of conversion therapy, serve the torturer, not the victim. The intentions of residential re-education camps serve the ideologues not the students who were and are victims of systemic cultural genocide.

But I am not fire and brimstone though my sword and tongue are sharp. I want to teach. And I want to learn. And I want you today to do one small thing for me. Sometime this week in your comings and goings. And even if you're sheltering safely at home, as we've been asked to do, find one small vestment. One small item of clothing or accessory, or some combination of clothing. Some pin or button or bow, that takes you out of your comfort zone, but gives you a thrill to put on, and wear it and put it on, and wear it and show it off. Be you, even briefly. Go bold with your look. Be gender, and socially creative, but with no intention to defend and then let us know afterwards, how you felt, let me know. I'm on Facebook. 24/7. People that know me know that. Send me a

picture, but just, just for this week, think on this lesson and think on this meditation that try for one little first to be yourself.

I'll close with a story, and this is what I'm going to wear this week. This was given to me by a community member. And I've worn it before, but I'm going to wear it this week, because I love it. And because the kids love it. I don't know if you can see it, but it's a Hello Kitty hat. And some people say that a 58-year-old woman shouldn't wear a Hello Kitty hat, but I'm going to wear it this week. I'm going to lead by example. But I want to close with a story that I think really sums this up and how powerful it is, no matter how small you are, to assert yourself and be yourself.

I worked in an evacuation shelter when there was an ice storm last year, and all the people from the indigenous communities were brought in, and we were hosting about 600 of them at the convention center and many people came with, with the shirts on their back and some people came with no shirts on their back, because they didn't have a shirt to begin with. And so we began this huge campaign of gathering and materials and donations and we had these huge rooms. Giant rooms full of clothing that people could select, and the young family came. A mother and a father and a little boy and a little girl, and they were looking for winter coats. And I found the coat right away for the little girl, and she just adored it. And then as I was looking for the coat for the little boy. There was one coat that was clearly a boy's coat, but it was far too big. And then there was a coat that probably was a girl's coat, but also was quite a nice coat and a very warm coat. And to some degree a unisex coat.

So I said to the father, I said try this one on, because I think it fits much better and much warmer. And so the little boy put it on, and it looks great. And he just walked in and his father was furious. And he said he's not wearing that. And he gave the poor child, this much larger coat, a grubby coat that didn't look very good and didn't look like it was going to keep him very warm but seemed to

satisfy the father and whatever he had in his head of who he thought his son should be. And so after they both got their coats and I felt a little bit of sadness for the little boy and a little connection to that little reminder of what I was like as a child.

They were all allowed to select a toy. And so we had this huge bucket of toys and the little girl, jumped into the bucket, and she reached down and she's pulling and throwing and finally she finds a little bear stuffed animal that she likes and she takes out for herself and then the little boy jumps in and he's going and going and going and going. And then finally at the bottom, larger almost than him, a giant rainbow unicorn. And he says, I want this, and his father's face falls, and his eyes are aflame with anger, but he's already spent his card, and he can't say shit. And the little boy takes that rainbow unicorn, and carries that with them all day, signaling his uniqueness and his difference to everybody, and nobody notices the gender of the coat.

That's our lesson for today.

And may you be yourself in the myriad, beautiful ways that we all can be us.

Bless you all and have a good one.