

Pride Havdalah Sermon - Cantor Cheryl Wunch, June 12, 2021

It has been said that all clergy people have one sermon that they deliver over and over in different disguises. It is also said that all clergy people deliver sermons that they themselves need to hear the most... so keeping that in mind, I hope that in the months and years to come, you're all prepared to hear many many sermons, in many different disguises, about how it's okay not to be perfect. How we must learn to accept and embrace our flaws, because they are what makes us so beautifully human.

Our Torah is filled with deeply flawed characters – and yet they are the ones we are supposed to admire and learn from, look up to and emulate. In fact, it is often not their righteous acts that give us the deepest lessons, although of course it's great to be righteous, but it is their missteps, their flawed actions that help us learn the most. In our Torah portion this morning, *Parshat Korach*, we are reminded of the chosen-ness, the anointed-ness of Moses and Aaron as the leaders of the people of Israel. Korach and his followers try to stand up to Moses, they try to lead a rebellion against him, and they are punished in a most gruesome way. It seems that we are supposed to understand that Moses and Aaron are these infallible, unchallengeable figures... and yet, in next week's portion, *Parshat Chukkat* – the portion for the week that officially begins tonight, Moses makes his biggest mistake yet – he is impatient, he is angry, he is frightened, he hits a rock in an attempt to coax water out of it and thus he is barred from ever entering the land of Israel. One day we are taught that Moses is the supreme standard of leadership, and the next we see him break down, and then have to deal with the consequences.

But... here's the thing... all of these character traits, these behaviours that we have so often been taught to think of as flaws that must be overcome, they are nothing more and nothing less than what makes Moses human. Relatable. Worthy of our admiration and of our compassion. Moses was not a perfect person, Aaron was not a perfect person, Miriam was not a perfect person... because the concept of perfection is not real. I will never claim that any one of us is perfect, and yet I will also never claim that any of us is imperfect either.... Perfection and imperfection are false constructs, because what we are, like Moses was, is beautiful and complex, challenging and resilient, holy and whole. During Pride we celebrate that wholeness, and we affirm that those things that once were seen as flaws are nothing more and nothing less than our humanness – our brilliance, our shining beauty, and our strength as a community.

In a few moments we will be marking the ritual of Havdalah – the transition between Shabbat and the rest of the week. The word “Havdalah” – *l'havdil* – means to separate, to differentiate, and yet the ceremony itself is not quite so stark. We don't end Shabbat, change the channel, and start the week – rather we transition – slowly, gently, with care and with grace. We look at the candle, we smell the spices, we taste the wine all in an attempt to bring some of the light, the joy, the sweetness of Shabbat with us into the new week.

It's just like at a mikvah – we don't walk into the waters as one type of person and emerge completely changed, rather we are told that we must bring some of the water from our pre-mikvah shower with us into the living waters, so that the water droplets from our past can mingle with the water droplets of our future. We must always remember who we are, while in the process of becoming who we are going to be – and so it is with Havdalah. We must remember the holiness of Shabbat and bring it with us into our week, not leave it behind when the day ends.

It is for this reason that I feel so blessed to be with all of you, to work so closely with you, Rabbi Goldberg, and with Paula, and Daniela, our board of directors, and all of you who have reached out to welcome me and teach me about this community. I look forward to meeting more of you and learning from you. We are not closing one book and starting a new one. We are not beginning fresh as a congregation. We are bringing all that makes Shir Libeynu holy and beautiful with us into this new week. None of us are perfect, and none of us are imperfect either. May we hold tightly to the uniqueness, the perfect imperfections of this community that you have built, and bring it with us joyfully, gently, with some trepidation and a lot of love as we walk together on our journey.