Braving the Wilderness: True Belonging and Standing Alone
Week 2: “People are hard to hate close up. Move in.”

Inviting you to join Blue Ocean Faith for 2018. One year/renew- approach: Join by filling out member letter on welcome table or thru online link. Sign up to serve as you are able, and let us know how much you hope to give. Here’s why I’d like you to join us:

Not being grandiose to say world needs more churches like ours.
Not that common for a church to be in a position to be part of changing the landscape for a group of ignored-mistreated people.

As Jesus followers about more than LGBTQ inclusion—but God has given us a big opportunity to change faith landscape to reduce suffering of LGBTQ people. We don’t choose our change-the-land- scape-opportunities. History throws ‘em at us and we either take a swing at ‘em or stand there like the house by the side of the road.

Current landscape: Four largest faith traditions in U.S: RC, Evangelical, Mainline Protestant, Historically African-American Churches, in that order. Catholic & Evangelical actively discriminate against LGBTQ people. As do vast majority of Black churches. Leaves mainline. Largest mainline (UMC) opposes equality. Episcopal, PCUSA, ELCA, UCC have national policies to support, but it’s not happening in most parishes.

Typical story: Julia-I spoke at Episcopal church recently. National policies? Great. But our session was first time parish addressed the issue openly since they voted (unanimously) to condemn installation of a gay bishop in 2003. Before that, the long-gone priest publically outing his assistant from pulpit. Things like this leave a long-term memory and send a chilling message.

Most inclusive churches are not good at spreading it. We’re late to party, but pretty good at spreading the party. Next year plans to lead a cohort of PCUSA pastors who want to go for it. Emily is in constant contact with people around country on this. Andy in seminary will multiply. Steve Gray connections in Namibia, now group cheering us on and working for inclusion in faith communities there. Many of you tell friends/family about our church, opening eyes and helping people change hearts.

So we are sitting here with a huge field of opportunity before us. Without apology: if this is in your heart, lend a hand. Join us. Be part of the change. None of this happens without a healthy church
Braving the Wilderness: True Belonging and Standing Alone. Last week: what wilderness is like, how we get there. In the wilderness Jesus wrestled with his demons listened for the Spirit and that wrestling gave him what he needed to stand alone.

Begin with a story from Corey, a supporter since we started.

How many of you have close family who like Corey’s grandpa see the world in ways that distress you? That’s the wilderness.

Corey’s story is the message, let me offer some commentary.
In Jewish tradition would be called a prophetic moment. Corey wasn’t planning this conversation with his grandpa—but he’d been stewing on the concern for a while. As Hebrew prophets stewed on things. Then Spirit moved through Corey.

Spirit is depicted in the Bible as Fire & Dove. Both at work here. Fire is obvious: he was angry at what Grandpa’s Media Diet was doing to this man he loved. Love erupted in form of anger. Anger can often channel hate, but it can also channel love. (True of Hebrew prophets: their anger often channeled love, as did Jesus’)

Spirit speaks to us in our own language. When Corey took the wraps off, he was actually speaking his Grandpa’s language. Later, Corey called his Grandpa to apologize for raising his voice--Corey respecting his grandpa dignity as an image bearer of God. Corey planted the seed with anger, watered it with humility—and it grew in Grandpa’s heart.

Corey’s interaction also set a healthy boundary: his way of saying “I’m not down with this Grandpa—don’t serve it up to me and expect me to just roll with it.” Grandpa respected that boundary.

“Maintaining the courage to stand alone when necessary in the midst of family or community or angry strangers feels like an untamed wilderness” (Brené Brown)

Chapter four introduces the first of four practices forged in the wilderness. Titled, “People are hard to hate close up. Move in.”

Thing 1: The importance of setting good boundaries. “Move in” doesn’t mean get close to those who violate your boundaries. But you can move in, if you are willing to set the boundaries.

First, a long-ish preface: As majority people, like Corey, it’s our job to have the stand alone conversations with grandpa.
Minority people have to deal with this all the time. It’s up to the rest of us to have these stand-alone conversations with Grandpa.

We’re a little frosty right now—10% of us are POC. For a person of color it’s not about a majority person having enlightened views.

When I gave paper proposing full inclusion to my denominational peeps. At lunch a prominent national board member says to me: “I’m afraid that our denomination is on the wrong side of history on this one.” A year later he supports denomination insisting that I fire Emily. A lot of good his enlightened awareness did for me!

It’s what we do in our own families that counts. “If you’re ashamed of me with your father and mother and brothers and sisters, I’ll be ashamed of you before my Father.” [vulnerable]

Brown says people who are good at moving in are also good at setting boundaries. Better boundaries = more empathy, not less.

My imprint pastor in Detroit was Dick Beiber. He used to say, “Thick skin, tender heart, that’s what we need.”

“Thick skin” means two things. First, it means we’re not so “sensitive” that our feelings get hurt and we run away from disagreement. But it also means we lay out our non-negotiables.

Skin is literally, a boundary, right? We disagree about all sorts of things, have our differing views—I’ll try to hear you as I would want to be heard and not be working on my rebuttal while you’re talking...that’s all part of “moving in”

But so is setting a boundary like, “Look, if my spouse is not welcome here, I’m not welcome here.” Or “When you talk in ways that hurt people I love, I won’t just smile and nod.”

Thick skins allows us to have a tender heart.

Thing 2: **Draw the boundary at dehumanizing words & behavior.**

Brown cites a book called *Less than Human: Why we Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate others.* TED talk David Livingstone Smith
Catch that subtitle: Enslave and Exterminate others are horrors. But these horrors grow in the soil of something we often tolerate: demeaning others. Failing to respect their human dignity.

At the time the Bible was written, the Jews had experienced enslavement and extermination at the hands of the Babylonian armies. And their sacred texts offered a gift to humanity—an understanding that human beings are “in the image of God.”

Common in surrounding-culture worship for priests to bear image of the god into temple. (Why sacrilege for Romans to bring their eagle image into Jewish temple. Jews banned graven images for worship because the image of the true God is a human being.)

Humans are the image of God. Humans are the priests of creation bearing image of God in the Temple, which is whole earth. .

Every human being regardless of their physical, intellectual, spiritual or moral condition carries the image of God.

This is seed in Bible behind every Spirit-led reform of movement. The seed of the kingdom of God is buried in the field of the Bible. First book, first chapter: “In the image of God, God made them.”

This revelation is fueling the work of the Spirit to extend the circle of compassion and love and equality to everyone.

When POTUS alluded to Colin Kaepernick and said, “Someone should fire those sons of [and then he used the word that refers to a female dog]...and the crowd went wild...that was the demonic power of dehumanization being conjured up and that is what leads, unchecked to enslavement and extermination.

Calling undocumented workers illegal aliens is dehumanizing.

Brown includes liberal examples: Calling people “monsters” is to truck in it. HRC’s “basket of deplorables” not her shining moment.

We say ignorant, unfair-unjustified, wrong-headed, mean spirited things about other people all the time. That’s just people being people. Dehumanization is another order altogether.
“Successful dehumanizing...creates moral exclusion. Groups targeted based on their identity—gender, ideology, skin color, ethnicity, religion, age—are depicted as “less than” or criminal or even evil. The targeted group eventually falls out of the scope of who is naturally protected by our moral code. This is moral exclusion, and dehumanization is at its core.” (Brown, p. 73)

My gammy born 13 years after end of civil war. She lived thru Jim Crow laws in Dearborn when black people not allowed in city parks. Mom born year after 30,000 Klansmen marched in D.C. to acclaim of Washington Post “greatest demonstration ever seen!”—after President had shown “Birth of a Nation”—a KKK Movie in the aptly named White House. This is extreme dehumanization at the highest levels of our society.

Of course, we are still dealing with racism & White Supremacy. We never made amends, never gave back what we stole. Ending slavery was cutting off a cancerous limb, but there was no follow up chemo. And cancer is a metastatic disease.

The fact that Black Lives Matter is regarded as controversial shows how far we have to go. Black Lives Matter is the simple assertion of the full dignity of African-Americans in a society in which that dignity is inarguably under assault.

Thing 1: Set good boundaries. Thing 2: Thing 2: Draw a firm boundary at dehumanizing words and behavior.

This isn’t just for the sphere of public policy...in a democracy we all have a responsibility to tune in and weigh in. But this is also for the social sphere, it’s for how we are in our families.

And that’s why Corey’s interaction with his Grandpa was such a blessed moment and so instructive for us all.

From last week. Jesus in the wilderness was learning to discern between voice of accusation (personified in a being by that name) and voice of Spirit—consoler-defender against accusation.....

“You are my beloved child, in whom my soul delights”—that’s the voice Jesus that gave Jesus the power to resist the Satan in the wilderness. That gave Jesus the power to stand alone.

His ability to resist Satan was tied to his learning the voice of the Spirit and letting that voice have its way in his heart and head.
Here’s something you might not know about Corey. Corey is a charismatic Christian. That means he’s been interested in connected with God through the Spirit. I’m sure he can share some hair-raising Pentecostal stories with you. But the treasure in that field is inviting the Spirit to get close. Listening for voice of Spirit.

Here’s the deal: **In the language of Scripture dehumanization is the work of Satan among humans.**

If we well-meaning white people think that we can rid ourselves and our society of dehumanization with what our people of Color friends call, disparagingly, **white liberal guilt**...we are utterly fooling ourselves. WE might as well try to fly by flapping our arms as to resist dehumanization with white liberal guilt.

Jesus didn’t get away from the noise to go listen to Satan talk to him. He was spending time in silence, listening for, opening to, absorbing the Spirit.