



# ST ALBANS

## **A New Normal**

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October 3, 2021, 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

A few weeks ago, a very long knife was found in our garbage cage here at the church. It was a long hunting knife, with a sheath. Lorraine took a photo of it and picked it up with a cloth. She carefully placed it inside a grocery bag. We stowed it somewhere safe until I could call the police to find out what to do with it.

After consulting with our community safety officer, I phoned the non-emergency police service line, and spoke with either an officer or a dispatcher, I'm not sure. He asked: "Was the knife used as a weapon, like, is there blood on it?" I said, ummm, I'm not sure, I didn't want to take the sheath off, it's kind of a scary knife. He said: "oh, for sure, that's understandable. Well, if it doesn't clearly have blood on it, you can just throw it out, it'll be safe for the garbage guys because it's in its sheath. That's what the officers would do anyway if they came." I said, oh, okay, thank you, and hung up.

Something happened in that interaction, between me and the dispatcher. For me, finding and reporting a giant weapon to police was not normal. For him, receiving a call about finding and reporting a giant weapon was completely normal. I really hope that finding and reporting giant weapons does not become my new normal.

I often find that these moments of intersection between normal and a new normal happen when talking to my daughters. Isabelle is 14 and Evelyne is 11. They both attend schools in the French Catholic Board. I often ask them about the priests who visits their schools on special occasions. What did they do, was there a liturgy, what was their message?

During one of these conversations, I realized as we were talking that they did not realize that the Roman Catholic church does not allow priests to be married or to have children. So I told them. They looked at me, completely gobsmacked. And then I said, yeah, and get this, people who identify as female aren't allowed to be



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priests, either. The look on their faces. They could not believe it. You could see, they just couldn't process it. All they could say was: "What? Why? But that makes no sense, how is that even allowed?" They could not have been more incredulous if I'd told them the moon was made of cheese. Their normal was that people are people, full stop. This new normal of realizing that people who identify as female can't be ordained Catholic priests was just too much.

"[The religious authorities] said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce [his wife]." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you." PAUSE. Jesus came to change the way we live. He came to bring about the Kingdom. He came to bring a new normal.

At first reading, Jesus' teaching on divorce that we heard this morning seems harsh. It seems like he's moving us towards a new normal that's in the wrong direction, like he's regressing. How is preventing a person from ending a marriage be consistent with bringing about a new way of life? A kingdom of peace, justice, love? It doesn't seem to make sense.

But when we understand the context, we can see that Jesus is actually moving us towards a new normal that's entirely consistent with the Kingdom he's been preaching about all along. In Jesus' time, women and children were considered property. The only person with decision-making power was the husband. Divorcing a woman meant her financial and social ruin. She was entirely vulnerable. Jesus is talking about loving one another here. Jesus is not talking about staying in abusive and unhealthy relationships here. Jesus is talking about protecting and caring for the most vulnerable. It's kind of his thing. Over and over again.

The Hebrews reading we heard this morning is also getting at the same thing. The writer is trying to express what exactly this new normal is: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days [God] has spoken to us by a Son".



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Just like my discovering that I'm just supposed to throw out a giant hunting weapon knife, and just like my daughters discovering that those identifying as women can't be Roman Catholic priests, a new normal can be jarring. I can be jarring even when it's in a positive direction.

On Thursday a number of us attended the Remember Me event on Parliament Hill. It was a day of remembrance for the victims and families of residential schools. The morning was peaceful, somber, joyful, and hopeful, all at once. What marked me most was that the day was woman-led. Most of the speakers were women, and many used female and birth imagery in their remarks. One speaker said something to the effect of: "we need to go back to Mother Earth's breast". This image was so striking to me. As a nursing mother myself, I never encounter this kind of language. My experience, though universal, is never named in public. That's why I so loved the image of mother Mary nursing her child that I shared with you a few weeks back.

The women organizing and speaking at the event are creating a new normal, just as Jesus did in his time. They are fuelled by anger at the injustice perpetrated on the most vulnerable, just as Jesus was in his time. They are unafraid to confront authority in order to speak out for what is right, just as Jesus was in his time.

Speaking with Isabelle and Evelyne always brings me joy. They teach me what's important. Today's generation has a willingness to learn, change, grow. But Jesus knew that all along, didn't he? "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." Amen.

Question for Open Space: What "new normal" is the Spirit calling us to in community here at St Albans?