

In John 14 verse 27 Jesus said: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”*. And that must be true for all departures and changes in life. In my own studies I liken transgender people to immigrants or emigrants who cross this gender divide. And the abuse of any invitation on this journey is as harmful as it's denial. For some, this journey may be seen to be an attack on the binary notions of gender and sex. But for transgender, lesbian, gay and bisexual people, it can be seen as one of coming home to be themselves. And with uncertainties and differences as great as these it is essential that all views are considered. And when experiences with intersex people and others show that imposing gender reassignment on those who do not need it, can be as harmful as denying it to those who do, it is even more essential to get the diagnoses correct.

Two things struck me at the recent Sibyls Purley Chase Weekend. The first was on the Friday evening when we each described the experiences of these journeys. The heartache and rejection by churches, friends, the rejection by close family members and others was evident in many of these stories and the trauma still remained to cut like a knife. Yet on the Sunday morning a different story was often recounted. Many spoke very highly of the acceptance and fulfilment they has found in the churches

and organisations they now belonged to and how life felt complete. Yet not everyone considers this to be a legitimate journey. Like traditional conservative Christian approaches, gender-critical groups try to impose a gender complementarity whereby gender identity and the behaviours and allegiances which go to create it must always be congruent with biological sex. Many gender-critical groups do claim to welcome transgender people, provided they do not call themselves women, but that takes them to a different place where male-to-female transgender people in particular are considered to pose, a great a threat, if not a potentially greater threat to women's safety as well as attacking their sex-base rights. That is expressed in the determination to enforce a definition of men and women as being biological females and allowing no other. However, that contradicts the views of the feminist pioneers, including Simone De Beauvoir, Judith Butler and other who distinguished men from women through the performance of gender and the ways we all interact with society. And that is the definition which we, as transgender people use. This is hardly surprising given the horrendous male discrimination, coercion and abuse, which women for centuries have faced. And when, for the great majority of people, who are unaware of the trials that gender incongruence creates, it is natural to presume that gender identity should always be congruent with biological sex, however great the

abuses and allegations that are made against us, we must always treat these concerns, however unfounded they may be, with respect.

How did Jesus handle this? The story of the Centurion and slave in the Bible is the description of how two people made that journey of love and affection across this gender divide, where permission to express that love and affection in any physical act is never denied. The story about eunuchs is also a story of people who make the equivalent journey across the gender divide, where the only qualification is that people live according to the ideals of the Gospel message, and the permission for those who make that journey to engage in any physical act to make this journey more complete is never denied. That same inclusion is expressed both by Paul and Thomas in their attitudes to the requirement for circumcision. Both argued that circumcision in the spirit transcends every physical act. So, Paul's condemnation, and the absolute Jewish condemnation contained in Leviticus, and in the Jewish Law, was not intended for the purpose of condemning the act: it was about condemning the abuses of power and the abuses of sex.

Jesus also considers this in his teaching in the New Covenant, where in place of the strict condemnations of Jewish Law, all judgements should be made on virtue and

love and intention of the acts. Some modern translations of the bible describe Paul's prohibition as that of homosexuality, and so create a totally false impression of the meaning of these bible texts. Today that inclusion and acceptance of the legitimacies of these journeys is absent in many societies. Roman Catholic Bishops in the United States are increasingly demanding that transgender people who seek transition repent for their actions and present them as threats to women's identities, safety and sex-based rights in almost exactly the same way as gender-critical groups. In many countries transgender people in particular are coming under increasing attack, and in other countries especially in Africa very severe legal penalties, in some cases including the death penalty are increasingly being imposed. Despite the actions of our Present United Kingdom Government, in this country we are lucky because transgender people are relatively well accepted in society. However secure and safe we may feel in the cocoons of the acceptance we encounter we must remember that this is not the same for others, and that even in our own journeys that peace, contentment and acceptance has come at a price. That is why we must continue to work for the full inclusion of all people, in all parts of the world, in the Love of Christ. And for all of us to make this journey complete.

