

THE CRITERIA
[written in oral form]

John 15:9-17; Acts 10:44-48
Easter 6 B

May 9, 2021
Gordon Allaby

Back before there were pandemic restrictions, three people were walking down the street when they came upon a cozy bar.

A progressive Mennonite minister, a priest and a rabbi go into a bar.
The rabbi enquires, "Is there supposed to be a joke here?"

The menno shrugs and asks, "Why, we are just three clergies entering a bar?"

The priest said, "Well obviously we are not lawyers.....
..... we did not **pass** the bar."
~~~~~

There were not many people inside. They went to a table with only two chairs, and noticed the disheveled, older man sitting at the next table with an extra chair.

He was wearing a tattered flannel shirt and legitimately worn out jeans. He was carefully drinking a cup of coffee.  
The ruffled man glanced at them and then stood up and said, "Hi, it looks like you need a chair. Take this one."

They did and sat down.  
Before the waiter came, the rabbi asked, "Who's buying?"  
The Menno quickly inserted, "I did not bring my wallet."  
The priest sighed, "Okay, as usual, it's on me." He then added, "You two are more similar than you realize."

The two rendered a modest, satisfied smirk.  
~~~~~

After a couple of sips, the Menno confesses, "I have a problem, maybe you can help me."

She continues, ...oh yeah, if you assumed a man, then alter your mental image. The Mennonite minister was a woman.

She continued, "About a week ago, this young man came to my office. He told me that he had a 'Spiritual experience.'

He was very excited, and enthusiastically proclaimed that God had spoken to him and told him to be a minister.

He admitted that he has never attended a church.

He mentioned that he once knew a Mennonite and often drove by my church, so he checked out our website. Then, he did a lot of research about Anabaptists. He liked what he read, so that was why he came to me.

He wants to be a Mennonite minister."

The rabbi asked, "So, what is the problem,.... aside from the man claiming God talked to him?"

The Menno answered, "The problem is it just not that simple to join the church and become a minister. Moreover, he is a combat veteran. We are a peace church.

His theology would be so different.

And,..... he's not well educated.

I do not think he would fit in."

The priest pompously said, "Tell him to be Catholic, we accept anyone. After all, we are the 'universal' church.

He continued, "It is simple. He would need a little training and go through the 'Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. He would then make his confession. We would confirm him and baptize him -- Simple. We are a very welcoming inclusive church."

The Menno asked, "Oh, so can I have communion at your Catholic church this Sunday?"

The priest mumbled, "Well..... no, you are not Catholic."

The Menno smiled and said, "Seems like you have a conditional welcome.

Oh,.....I think I forgot to mention that this guy is married.

Does that prevent him for him becoming a priest?"

There was no response.

~~~~~

The Mennonite minister went on, "This problem is really tormenting me because the text for Sunday is Acts 10:44-48.

In that story, Peter was preaching and God's Spirit touched all who heard the Gospel, even the outsiders--the Gentiles.

The Jewish followers were amazed that God included the outsiders, those who are different. Peter then proclaimed that they dare not exclude anyone who God had anointed with God's Spirit.

So, those outsiders were baptized and accepted in.

They didn't have to take classes or jump through hoops.

But,.... but.... things are more complicated these days."

The rabbi pointed out, "Hey, see how accepting the Jews were? They accepted the outsiders."

The rabbi went on to say, "Although we do not evangelize or think much about proselytizing, we are welcoming. If a person wants to become Jewish, then we merely make sure that the interest is sincere and that they have a respectful desire to learn about our ways and beliefs. It's simple and easy."

The Menno replied, "A man who is required to be circumcised may not find it so simple and easy."

The rabbi shot back, "Reform Judaism usually does not demand that."

With one eyebrow raised, the Menno injected, "You would wave that requirement if my wannabe-clergy-stranger asks to be a rabbi?"

~~~~~

The rabbi gestured silently with submissive hands. []

~~~~~

In a more passive tone, the Menno confessed, "We Mennonites emphasize the Gospel message and following the way of Jesus.

With that inspiration, we truly, truly want to be inclusive.

Yet, community is very important to us. That is a blessing and a curse. You know the saying, 'Birds of a feather flock together.'  
We have differing opinions, yet we are mostly a homogeneous group.

We are trying to be a safe place for the LGBTQ community; however, my church is mostly white.

We are not doing well welcoming Black, indigenous or people of colour."

~~~~~

The rabbi consoled, "Your passion and desire is commendable. We do not try to reach out, but I maybe I can help with some advice.

You do not have the pain of the BIPOC community. You need to understand that. AND, You need to learn their pain.

You need to understand the pain.

We Jews understand the pain of prejudice and persecution."

The Menno answered, "That experience is in our narrative, but it was so long ago. Yes,... we are comfortable and content."

She then turned to the priest and asked, "Your narrative is quite the opposite, yet how is it that your church is so diverse?"

The priest replied, "We emphasize / we require confession.

That means we petition and acknowledge the pain.

Moreover, our unity is based on the church and sacraments.

Still," the priest continued, "Faith communities need to uphold their tradition and doctrine. That is who we are."

The rabbi nodded in agreement.

The Menno replied, "So, I should tell this man to simply attend for now and to better learn our ways and theology?
Then, we could invite him **in** to become a member."

The priest gave the rhetorical question, "It is good to be welcoming, but how can he be a Mennonite if he does not know what that means?"

~~~~~  
The rabbi added, "Anybody can join our faith traditions if they respect our values and practices."

The three seemed satisfied with their assessment, and all took a sip from their drinks.

~~~~~

The old man shifted his chair around so he could face them.
The three seemed a bit surprised.

He then addressed them, "You are wise and honourable people. Your mission statements are noble, but your practice reveal flawed criteria."

He paused and gazed into the distance, and said, "My wife was a Cree woman. A few years ago I called a cab to take her to the E.R. because she apparently was having a stroke. I could not drive because we just had a couple drinks.
They assumed she was drunk and did not treat her.
And, that was that.

Hospitals claim they provide service for everyone.
But, that one's hidden criterion filtered for acceptability."

~~~~~  
All were deeply moved and were contemplating words of condolence.

Before they could speak, he looked at them and continued,  
"Do you recall John 15? Jesus was passing the torch to his disciples. He was preparing them to continue his ministry.

Jesus told them to abide in his love and reminded them to follow his commandment.  
That commandment was to love one another as Jesus loved them.  
Do you also remember how Jesus trusted God?"

~~~~~

The three nodded in agreement.
The rabbi was familiar with this episode, too.
Yet, the three were puzzled. They did not get his point.

~~~~~

The man looked at the Mennonite minister and asked,  
"Why did Peter recommend receiving those outsiders?"

"Because they had received God's Spirit", she answered.

"There you go", he said. "There is your criterion!"  
He leaned back and opened his arms [ ], and continued.

"Your faith traditions need not compete with each other.  
Moreover, you really do not have to filter.

**Receive**, in love, those who have accepted God's love.

Trust God that God knows what God is doing.

Simple.

You do not need to make Catholics, Mennonites or Jews.

Instead, celebrate the love. Celebrate God's love.

Rejoice and receive those in God's love,... and guide the seekers to find that love.

The best way to do that is to live exciting lives trusting in God.

~~~~~

There was a long pause. No one knew what to say.

The Old man stood up and declared, "This is my bar and I am here for you.

Enjoy your drinks. They are my treat."

~~~~~