

## What Are You Staring At – Coming Again

Genealogists are people who essentially people who study and create charts for a living. They are obsessively following charts and lines more than the most avid follower of the zodiac. Their quest to follow lineage is an endless pursuit. Once online of brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers is completed with locations, dates and cemetery plots they find another line to explore.

Both my grandmother was, and my mother is currently one of these ancestry sleuths. There is now a whole industry dedicated to Ancestry that both cater to understanding DNA and to tracing one's own personal history.

I remember dragged along as a child to the Nebraska State Historical Society with my mother. There were still card catalogues, bound books, Micro-film and Microfiche.

I would sit reading my own books, not worrying much about the details of such an intricate study. I only cared about the stories that came from this research.

From the earliest age my mother let me know that my Grandmother's research was incomplete and on the unscientifically faulty premise that one should overlook, delete, and gloss over the more scandalous parts of one's relatives.

My mother however reveled in telling the nitty gritty stories that had been beautified for public consumption.

“You know that picture of your great-great grandfather that has him with that long flowing beard? He had to have a beard because he was a deserter from the Civil War that hid in Nebraska.”

“That Great Grandmother’s name is unknown, the story goes that she was Native-American and they hid because the family threatened to kill her.”

“Oh, she was accused of being a witch for the death of a neighbor’s cow. She was saved from burning at the stake by William Penn himself!”

“He got in trouble with Governor Winthrop for public drunkenness and had to wear a Scarlet ‘D’ for a year around Salem.”

She always ends a salacious family story with the phrase, “Can you imagine?!” and then let out a belly laugh.

It is perhaps one of the favorite aspects of my mother. It is a devious propensity to dig a little deeper to find the outlaws, drunks, carny workers, and near do wells. They are always the more fascinating stories.

We are bound by the stories we tell. Our memories are pregnant with the stories of the past. When we clean out the bad, we aren’t left with a very interesting story.

You have met the troubling people who have no negativity in their lives. Everything is always going fine. Rosy, rosy, rosy. Always turning a tragedy into some sing-song thin illusion for reality. I have

two simple words for those type of people “Dishonest” and “Psychotic.” Although I could be a bit harsh.

Life is messy, life is complicated, life is full of unscheduled layovers. Life will give you joys immeasurable, and grief unsuspected. To be a full human we must tell our whole story, from stern to stem, about who we are in this world. We are messy, complicated, and contain multitudes.

This time in the church is messy, complicated, unknown, and unknowable time of absence. We are away from our sanctuary, not singing in the choir, keeping away from the office, sermons given to phone cameras, meetings on zoom, cancellation of VBS, Bedtime stories in costume, and trivia night. This is anything but a normal time in the history of the church.

We could all be selfish and demand the church to be what we are comfortable with. Our perfect vision of what the church should be, cherished, and scrubbed to an unreal sheen. We could stamp our feet, demand that the dust be put back on the windowsills, but with a pandemic those worst self-centered tendencies of faith have exited out the door.

With a pandemic those worst self-centered tendencies of faith have exited out the door. This will not be the church of your mother, father. It won't even be the church that makes you comfortable, traditional, remind you of yesterday's illusionary perfections. It will be imperfect, like all of our stories. Yet, it will still be the church.

We could stand, like the disciples, staring at the soles of Jesus' feet disappearing into the clouds. Stay in stunned silence feeling sorry for ourselves, griping, complaining, projecting our anger at how unfair things are or listen to the two men in white robes.

“What are you staring at? He is coming again.”

Or as I like to think was implied, there is nothing to see here. You are now left with the Spirit of Christ to be Church. This building today is an empty vessel, a repository for gathering in and sending out. We are in a period of separation, absence. Being the church is now being simplified to its very core. We are stripped of physical presence and buildings but are left with faith. Love, mercy, peace, grace, and joy have not abandoned us in the midst of sickness.

God loves our story, the complete unabridged document. There is no part of our story that God does not love and will not redeem. Keep being the church, no matter if we cannot be in our worship space together. Keep creating the story of Jesus Christ in our world.