

"The only way I will rest in peace is if one day people aren't treated the way I was, [if] they're treated like humans, with valid feelings and human rights. My death needs to mean something. My death needs to be counted in the number of transgender people who commit suicide this year. ... Fix society. Please."

Imagine being trapped in a career that you absolutely hated or a relationship that you knew was entirely absent of love. Would you just stay there? Should you just stay there? And forever? Now possibly imagine that you were trapped in a body that felt entirely wrong. Such that every fiber of your core-being was universally opposed to the gender which society had ascribed and the sex that DNA had determined. For every waking day, from the first years of consciousness and memory, right up until the very present. Day after day, hour after hour, situation after endless situation. It's virtually impossible I think, to imagine that kind of reality, unless you yourself of course have lived it. And I would guess that only a few here ever truly have.

What a terrible weight then it must have been for poor Leelah Alcorn to carry... and to do so, in the end, all alone. Now, in the beginning she had a different name and that name was with her even though it wasn't her. Born Josh Alcorn, Leelah just never felt right as a boy. Not just in "phases" or in that "Tom-boy" way that some people and books tend to classify it as. She just simply never felt like Josh. More, she never felt as authentic or as human as Josh. And so after many years, after many questions and self-reflections, she finally realized and accepted that she wasn't in fact Josh. But that she was Leelah. And so she became Leelah. And yet her very own -- her mom and dad -- accepted her not.

Over the last several months, her parents went as far as blocking Leelah from her social networks and her friends, indeed her very support system, because they viewed each as bad influences. And so behind closed doors, in their very own home, they neglected and shunned their child. They alone rejected their child, and under the weight of such judgment Leelah's soul faded away into oblivion.

A 2011 study by the National Center for Transgender Equality found that 41% of 6,450 responding transgender and gender nonconforming people had attempted suicide. **41%**. On December 28th, just three days after this past Christmas, Leelah Alcorn attempted, and, committed suicide. Three days after we held our very own pageant and candle-light service; three days after our world celebrated the birth a child who would later serve and minister to the outcast.

What is it about our society that we seemingly only want to parent smaller versions of ourselves? And to such extremes that we often experience a ridiculous amount of discord and angst when confronted by the differences posed by our children? And not just in the big things either, but even in the minutiae of how they dress or carry their weight; in how they achieve or fail at certain sports; in how they follow or ignore particular dreams? Is the sole purpose of creating life merely to clone our own DNA, to perpetrate already-lived experiences and to predetermine already-achieved outcomes, all so we can score our endless fix, namely, the scrutiny of ourselves from the perspective of another? Perhaps then Ecclesiastes was right after all – everything in the end is merely vanity.

But maybe, out of an ignorance of the unknown, seeing as I have no children, I've over-simplified it. In fact, I probably have. After all, I can recognize that this transgender-sexual topic is a little bit more complex than how I've presented it. And in talking to some of you about it, even as recently as just two weeks ago, I have heard your confusion, and your discomfort, in trying to accept this modern form of liberalism seemingly taken too far.

And in a way, I get that. After all, I am frequently up here preaching to accept yourselves and your limitations and yet persevere nonetheless. I am frequently teaching our children to not take for granted what they've been given and to be gracious to both their parents and their society for the good fortune which has been so obscenely lavished upon a great many of them. So yeah, I can get why defending a person who wants to so radically alter their very name and appearance, and even their chemical makeup, might feel like a paradoxical if not hypocritical position for me to take.

But having allowed that, there is just something different to this issue of transgender. For if someone is not hurting others, but only dehumanizing him or herself by remaining trapped within a body they had no initial say over, than I can only deem it reasonable, if not moral, for them to explore an alternative being and lifestyle. Moreover, I believe our sympathy, support and love (especially as the Christian community) ought to be freely and generously extended to this person... this fellow human being who can't sleep at night without personal disquiet, who can't awake in the morning without the dread of facing the mirror in their bathroom or their parents next door, or society at its largest. Honestly then, I see nothing sinful or wrong in the transgendered. To me, Leelah Alcorn was a child of God and she should have been accepted and acknowledged as such, and especially before it was all too late...

Now maybe these simple sentiments haven't convinced you. Perhaps for some of you, similar to Carla Alcorn (Leelah's mom) Leelah was merely an abomination against her very self and God her creator. And even though Carla personally maintains that she loved her child Josh, she still cannot accept that she had a blossoming child named Leelah (she only uses masculine pronouns when talking about her child). For as she herself put it in a recent interview, her religious beliefs, namely Christianity, simply wouldn't allow for it, as her child's actions were condemnable by scripture.

So let us turn here then and examine the veracity behind those beliefs, at least within the context of our scripture lesson this morning. *He was in the world, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, he gave power to become children of God (John 1:10-12).*

Rather immediately then, it would appear that the historical Jesus might have more in common with Leelah as opposed to her parents and their said Christian beliefs. Moreover, it appears that Jesus has given us all the potential to become children of God, which is really, quite remarkable in its own right. The verb here for “become” arrives from the Greek word, **γίνομαι**, which perhaps not too surprisingly is the same verb employed when connoting an act of creation. It is also the same verb used in John 1:3 where we heard it said earlier this morning that all things came into being/were created through the Word.

Additionally, **γενέσθαι**, here in verse 12 is the 2nd Aorist Infinitive form of **γίνομαι** which, like its English translation suggests, carries future implications. So, if you’re still with me, this power “to become” implies something truly extraordinary: for not only have we been afforded a designation as sons and daughters of God, but we also are in possession of an innate ability to recreate ourselves within the span of our mortal lives. Not just becoming something then along a linear trajectory, but redesigning ourselves entirely into something radically more.

Completing the thread, what if then, God, through this mysterious power of the Incarnation, truly ordained for Josh to eventually become Leelah? What if she was always meant to be Leelah, and that it was only because of the imperfections of the flesh that governed her first mortal birth (the X/Y chromosomes, sperm/eggs, mutations, and things of that nature) that she was ever conceived of as Josh at all? Perhaps this is why Leelah and so many people like her say that they have simply never felt like the girl or boy they were originally labeled or dressed as; that they had seemingly always known that their truer essence was something undefined by their sex. And so just maybe then, here through the gnostic-leaning Gospel of John, Leelah was in fact justified in her quest to rebrand herself as something uniquely new and yet more authentic to her substance.

Now admitting that might be too far out there for some of you, consider this: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived amongst us (John 1:1;14).* Even the ETERNAL WORD of God went through a change in orientation! From the timeless to the constrained; from the flawless to the flawed; from immortality to mere finitude. As a recent professor of mine at Lutheran Theological Seminary famously quipped, God was our first trans-being!

And so it was that Jesus, who was once at the right-hand of the Triune throne, entered this fallen world through the mortal flesh of an ordinary woman. He was conceived in a small and insignificant manger and grew up as the son of an artisan which was basically of no greater regard than that of a lowly slave. And after probably twenty-something years working as a Mediterranean day-worker, he went to the River Jordan, and there got baptized with doves descending and voices thundering from Heaven, and henceforth became known as who he was always meant to be – the Messiah.

And so it was from this Son of Man that we eventually received this teaching: that we too should become more than that from whence we started; that we should evolve, and grow, and ever recreate and perfect ourselves, so that one day we too might be called the very offspring of the eternal God. An offspring, mind you, that does not just do for ourselves, but also, as it’s later asked of us in John 13: to love as we have been loved, for it is by that love, and that love alone for our other, that we are marked as Christ’s own.

Friends, all are welcomed at this table. For this is a community of grace upon grace. By what Christian belief then are we to deny anyone? For there is no condemnation. *It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who then will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:34-39)*

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Amen.