

3 Easter 2021

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

Barbie turns 62 this year. She has been made in 50 Nationalities and has had over 100 careers. 58 million Barbies are sold each year in more than 150 countries. But this was not always the case.

I admit that I have not paid much attention to what has been happening to Barbie in many years. What I mostly remember are the controversies that occurred concerning the ideal body image that was presented to young girls.

According to Wikipedia, “In 1997, Barbie's body mould was redesigned and given a wider waist, with Mattel saying that this would make the doll better suited to contemporary fashion designs. In 2016, Mattel introduced a range of new body types: 'tall', 'petite', and 'curvy'. 'Curvy Barbie' received a great deal of media attention and even made the cover of Time magazine with the headline 'Now Can We Stop Talking About My Body?'. Despite the curvy doll's body shape being equivalent to a US size 4 in clothing, many children regard her as 'fat'”.

Even though Barbie did show girls the possibility that they could pursue multiple occupations in life, it was years before Barbies of color appeared. Black Barbie first hit the shelves in 1980 – but with the same white features shared by many of the dolls preceding her.

Starting in 2007, Cinco De Mayo Barbie came out followed by Spanish Barbie, Peruvian Barbie, Mexican Barbie, and Puerto Rican Barbie.

Over the years, many anti-Barbies were developed to combat the body image issue since many women are not a size 4.

In 1998, *Feral Cheryl* came along.

Cheryl is named for the green extremists of the rain-forest region of Australia known as the "Ferals." She is a "natural doll" who wears her alternative lifestyle with pride. She goes barefoot, wears rainbow colored clothes, has body piercings and even tattoos. You can still find her on her Facebook page, and she has a twitter account. Each Feral Cheryl is individually made and no two are alike.

In 2005, a line of mixed-race dolls designed to represent a variety of ethnicities and cultures were developed in Canada. Mixis dolls "better reflect the reality of a growing number of children sharing two or more distinct racial backgrounds," according to founder Debbie Goodland. One is Latina and Jewish. One is Black, Native American, and Japanese. Each, the company says in a press summary, has "a naturally proportioned body."

More recently, Nickolay Lamm who was frustrated by the lack of options for kids who want to play with dolls that look like healthy human beings, is launching a crowdfunding site to make his own line of dolls, based on his "Normal Barbie" project. His creation, Lammily is a 10.7-inch doll with athletic build, minimal makeup, and clothes that look more suited to running around in the park than strutting down the runway.

Interesting stuff for sure.

My friends, I know full well that your hearts are all atwitter as you try to figure out what any of this has to do with today's readings. John says this morning:

“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

2Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed”.

None of us would deny that we are children of God. But what does that look like? Can others see it? John is talking about those who know God through Jesus Christ. Following that premise, one would assume that all Christians would see themselves as equal in God’s eyes and act accordingly. Sadly, we know that this has not been the case in this country. We know all too well the subjugation of people that has taken place in the name of Christianity.

Red Jacket, an Iroquois leader, well known for his eloquence of speech, responded in 1828 to Mr. Cram of the Boston Missionary Society, who had come seeking permission to open a mission among the Iroquois in northern New York state. It is a well written letter, and is too long to read in its entirety this morning. In part he states:

“Brother, you say there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit; if there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the book?

Brother, we do not understand these things. We are told that your religion was given to your forefathers, and has been handed down from father to son. We also have a religion which was given to our forefathers, and has been handed down to us their children. We worship that way. It teaches us to be thankful for all the favors we receive; to love each other, and to be united. We never quarrel about religion.

Brother, the Great Spirit has made us all; but he has made a great difference between his white and red children; he has given us a different complexion, and different customs; to

you he has given the arts; to these he has not opened our eyes; we know these things to be true. Since he has made so great a difference between us in other things, why may we not conclude that he has given us a different religion according to our understanding.

The Great Spirit does right; he knows what is best for his children; we are satisfied.

Brother, we do not wish to destroy your religion, or take it from you; we only want to enjoy our own.....

Brother, we are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place.

These people are our neighbors; we are acquainted with them; we will wait, a little while, and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again what you have said.

Brother, you have now heard our answer to your talk, and this is all we have to say at present. As we are going to part, we will come and take you by the hand, and hope the Great Spirit will protect you on your journey, and return you safe to your friends”.

Source: Daniel Drake, *Lives of Celebrated American Indians*, Boston, Bradbury, Soden & Co. 1843), 283–87.

As I said, very wise words, to the point, and without hate or animosity.

Christians today look back and point out that this was the 1800s after all. We didn't have anything to do with what happened to the Indigenous people. Surely things got better, or not. In the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Native American boarding schools, also known as Indian Residential Schools, were established in the United States with a primary objective of "civilizing" or assimilating Native American children and youth into Euro-American culture, while destroying and vilifying Native American culture. Many of

these were started by Christian missionaries on reservations. I heard these stories, first hand, by members of our congregation, when I was at Good Shepherd Episcopal Mission in Idaho. The Elders had grown up in these schools and the schoolhouse was now the parish hall. The spirit of Christianity, in general, was long gone on the reservation if it had ever been present in the first place. There is so much anger still present to this very day among the Native American people when these schools are mentioned. My white privilege was on full display as I just knew how grateful they must have been that I was there to bring the holy sacraments to them.

We are very familiar with the similar treatment of Black slaves in the name of Christianity and the treatment of our Black, Latino, Asian, and LGBTQ sisters and brothers today.

By now, we should all know that not all children of God look alike, each being made in God's image. Not even all Christians look alike. For many years, all Barbies had the exact same bodies and facial features. The outward appearance of clothing changed but the essence did not. Those of us who profess to be followers of Jesus, should act as Jesus did, **should love as Jesus did**. Most of us are not of middle eastern descent and do not look like Jesus. We can be fairly certain of that. Although admittedly, the Bible does **not tell us** what Jesus looked like. Jesus was not white, yet so many have trouble getting past this.

In June of last year, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said the following:

“Jesus was Middle Eastern, not white. It's important we remember this.

But the God we worship in Christ is universal, and the hope he offers is good news for us all". In an interview with BBC Radio 4's Today programme, he said that in many churches around the world Jesus is not depicted as white.

"You see a black Jesus, a Chinese Jesus, a Middle-Eastern Jesus - which is of course the most accurate - you see a Fijian Jesus," Archbishop Justin said.

"Jesus is portrayed in as many ways as there are cultures, languages and understandings. He continues:

"And I don't think that throwing out everything we've got in the past is the way to do it, but I do think saying: 'That's not the Jesus who exists, that's not who we worship,' it is a reminder of the universality of the God who became fully human." End quote

Believe it or not, this statement elicited great anger from some people.

Yes, we are made in the image of God, but that does not make God white, elderly, or necessarily male. Those assertions leave so many people, out of the mix. It is not fair and is harmful.

As children of God, we have such a long way to go and many obstacles to overcome.

As our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, has said; The way of love is essential for addressing the seemingly insurmountable challenges facing the world today: poverty, racism, selfishness, deep ideological divisions, competing claims to speak for God.

God is the source of all-encompassing love for every single one of us and as a result, we will be so much more than a cookie-cutter Barbie.

Amen