

“Prophet Eye for the Royal Guy”

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2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

Ephesians 4:1-16

When I worked at the Presbyterian United Nations Office right out of college, I just loved the chapel at the UN Church Center where my office was based. What stood out to me most was not the 1960’s modernist architecture. It wasn’t even the banners of the major world religions hanging from the ceiling. What stood out to me most was the stained glass window. The window is a brilliant, multi-colored mosaic of glass designed in the shape of an eye, pointed directly at the United Nations. It represents God’s eye, and it also represents the eye of people of faith, watching the nations and bringing the angle of our perspectives into the shaping of global peace and politics.

There is a TV show that has been resurrected recently-- reboots do tend to be popular. The first version, which ran from 2003-2007, was called *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. In it, a group of men called “The Fab Five” would pick a straight man whom they determined was too much of a schlep and needed their help. Each of the Fab Five has a role: grooming, style, decorating, culture, and food and wine, and they would clean up their client’s life, sort of like a sassy fairy godmother. Part of the joy of the show was watching the Fab-Five shame the object of their attentions--the straight guy-- with their cutting remarks while they remodeled his life. In a way, it showed a bit of a reversal of privilege and authority.

However, I like the Netflix reboot much better. It is simply called “Queer Eye.” The title in and of itself suggests that the existence of the Fab Five is not centered around making a straight man’s life better. Rather, they as

queer people can stand on their own and offer a vision that the world actually needs to hear. Their clients are not just straight men anymore. And while they do function as lifestyle coaches, what they *really* work on changing goes so much deeper than that. And, they no longer diminish their clients with shaming comments.

What their queer eye offers is a way of living that is not governed by what our toxic culture demands. On one recent episode, we meet a man who has lied about the important aspects of his life because he is ashamed of telling his loved ones about what a loser he is. The Fab Five enter his home and help him confront himself with honesty and compassion. They allow him to enter a space of vulnerability instead of hyper-competitiveness, so that he can work on the transformation that had seemed so impossible to him. Sure, there was some sass and a fashion makeover, but what was really transformed was so much deeper.

As cultural critic writer Laurie Penny writes, “Give a man a makeover and you fix him for a day; teach a man that masculinity under late capitalism is a toxic pyramid scheme that is slowly killing him just like it’s killing the world, and you might just fix a [gaping] hole in the future.”

The LGBT community has adopted the word “queer” favorably. The word queer gets defined as “strange” or “odd” and while for many years in this country it was a slur, LGBT people have been able to say, “Yes, we do come at things from a strange or odd angle, and that’s not such a bad thing.”

Prophets also look at things from a strange or odd angle. The leaders they critiqued may have found them threateningly queer-- not in the sense of their sexual attractions, but in the sense that they upset the status quo.

Nathan the prophet offered a queer eye on David’s situation. Nathan tells of a poor man and a rich man, the rich man the owner of a multitude of

sheep and cattle, and the poor man just one small ewe lamb. Indeed, the poor man is not simply the owner of this lamb; the lamb is *his daughter*; it grew up alongside him and his children; they shared the same food and she even drank from his cup. They slept entangled.

A traveler came to visit the rich man. Now, according to the traditions of hospitality for that time and place, the rich man was obligated to throw a feast for this traveler. However, instead of picking from his abundance of livestock, he steals the poor man's ewe lamb-- his daughter-- and offers it as the welcome meal to the visitor.

Of course, David is enraged when he hears this story! In fact, he calls the rich man a dead man and says he must pay back the poor man four times over. Nathan's response shackles David in conviction: "YOU are that man!"

At that point, David is filled with regret. Accountability fills him as he realizes what he has done. Of course, he knew what he was doing all along when he took Bathsheba, and then had her husband Uriah murdered so that David would not be caught making another man's wife pregnant. David's power has grown toxic on him. A generation before, the prophet Samuel had warned the Israelites that this sort of thing would happen if they relied on a king rather than on God-- but the people were not yet ready for a prophet's eye, so they demanded their king.

The David Nathan encounters here is no longer the David we saw in the first book of Samuel. When the young boy David confronted the giant Goliath, he made an intentional choice not to wear the armor of empire; when Saul clothed David with a bronze helmet, a coat of armor, and strapped him with a heavy sword, the boy removed the burdensome protection and instead walked to the wadi, pulled out five smooth stones, and stood before Goliath with nothing but God between them.

But the David we see today is not the same boy. This David *is* Goliath, and he is preying on the vulnerable to amass his power. And while he knows what he has done, he does not see how wrong it is. His successes as a king do not help him see. Even in his devotion to God, he does not see. It is not until he hears this story from the prophet Nathan that he can finally see. David immediately recognizes his sin and then moves toward repentance-- but the blueprint had already been set for a family that turns violently on each other and a divided kingdom.

Audre Lorde, who was a famous poet from my country, once said “You cannot use the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house.” As a black woman, her voice emerges out of my country’s history of slavery and racism. When we use the tools that were once used to dominate us-- whether violence, sexism, racism-- we become like our oppressors, just as David became like Goliath.

Like the mosaic, stained glass window at the United Nations, we Christians can come together, in all our differences, and offer a lens through which to see our world, and a vision to invite our world to grow into. Sometimes, there will be the chance for the prophet’s scorn. But ultimately, our goal is, as Ephesians describes, to build one another up in love. Our tools will not be the tools of the master’s house. They will not be the tools of domination, or of greed, or of trickery. Instead, we will bring the tools of humility and gentleness, of patience, love, maturity and peace. Each of us will be called to something important. We are not the Fab Five, but among us there will be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, and all of us saints in Christ’s ministry.

Although, in our tradition, we do have a food and wine expert among us, and he in fact can transform our lives and our world. Amen.