

Chapel Talk
Ann McTaggart
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When Mr. Hutchinson asked me to talk about the Laramie Project the Wednesday of tech week, I looked at him as if he were crazy because that is one of my most hectic weeks of the year. Yet, I could not say “no” because after reading and reading, researching and preparing this play, it had struck my heart in a very profound way.

Tomorrow night we will hold the dress rehearsal for the most controversial, vulgar and violent play ever produced on the ST. Andrew’s stage.

It will be an example of Theatre at its best and most purposeful –and I urge every person in this room to attend – not to see my work or see the biggest and oddest angel wings you have ever seen ...

Because you need to hear this – you need a glimpse of Matt Shepard’s world because it is our world.

I Challenge all of you to come and listen – to investigate the opinions you agree with –to gauge comfort level with these issues–

And it is my deep hope that you will be shocked, angered and repulsed by what you hear– some of you will be shocked and angered at me for producing this play– In fact, I expect a few Cold looks as people leave the theatre –

I say “bring it on “–I look forward to it because theatre at its most powerful provokes thought, ignites controversy and drives change.

It can be a mirror into our deepest thoughts and fears.

Yet, while I invite reactions of all sorts, I feel the need to clarify a few things and to make one plea.

I have asked a few actors of the actors to help me by performing a scene for you from the play. All of the characters they will portray are religious figures.

As you listen, be mindful that sometimes the man/human must be separated from his faith.

Faith can be the most powerful and nurturing force in your life – human beings can be just plain weak.

SCENES

It is easy to jump to the conclusion that Moises Kauffman and the members of The Tectonic theatre project – creators of the play–like to make fun of Mormons, dislike Baptists or blame religion for the mistreatment of homosexual people.

Dig deeper – look at the man and not simply the religion.

one of the things done well in this play is the presentation of facts and opinions – all sorts –

some of these opinions I find chilling such as this said by the Baptist minister.

ERIC

Chilling – does that mean I don't like Baptists – NO!

I Believe in power of all organized religions to do good and create community.

In Laramie, it was the Catholic priest – the man – not the Catholic church that stepped up to the plate and filled the spiritual need in the town.

Again this play shows us the individual. It exposes sympathy, empathy, caring and love in the individual. It also exposes hate and underneath much hate is fear. Man is not infallible. We experience fear.

FEAR can Lead us down dark paths – Hitler fed off fear – built armies with it – people like Hitler exist today.

One of them is in this play – he hides behind the Bible and takes advantage of its teachings to spread his own personal hate and his own fear.

His name is Fred Phelps and he hosts a website called *Godhatesfags.com* – he also calls himself a minister.

Fred Phelps brought his group to Laramie for Matthew's funeral. He picketed outside the church with the ugliest and most offensive signs you can imagine. Micah will now share will us a brief excerpt heard from Fred during this visit.

MICAH

If we let this hatred live – I ask you – how long before you yourself becomes one of the persecuted?

How long before something you stand for becomes a sin or is interpreted as evil – suddenly you become the victim – you are the one destined for hell and you are the one some are happy to see dead.

I honestly do not think that fear and hatred are the emotions God, Maharishi, Yogi Bajan, Budda or Jesus Christ want us to live by.

And unlike Eric's character in this play, I think God *was* with Matthew when he died whether Matthew repented or not.

May we all have such a friend at our side – whatever God means to you, may he always be with you, providing you a quiet, inner strength - you are going to need it.

May we live to nurture one another and resist the urge to hurt and betray others to fit our personal agendas.

May the spirit of Matthew be with us this weekend and help us to face our fears of difference, diversity and that which we do not understand.

In the play Rulon Stacey says that he never understood the magnitude with which some people hate.

Most of us don't understand - and we need to -

Yet, I know that there *are* People in this room who do understand the magnitude with which some people hate – they have either felt the hatred themselves, perhaps been brought up with it or been terrorized by it in others.

Look around – because these people are your friends, your teachers and your colleagues – And if our friends and our teachers and our colleagues are fearful as they sit among us then we must ask ourselves

What kind of friends are we? What kind of people?

There are expressions of love and there are expressions of hate. Some expressions of hate I do find to be sinful.

Expressions of love – be they from parent to child man to woman, woman to woman or man to man – I, personally, do *not* find sinful.

We are all children of God and any parent in this room will tell you that nothing can stop you from loving your child – NOTHING.