

Sermon “Not Normal” by Virginia Voigt

I was inspired to write this sermon by Reverend Dana Warsnop’s sermon entitled “Way Beyond Normal”. While reading her sermon I had a recollection of being with family and having some of my friends come over to visit. After they left a family member made the comment, “They are not normal” in a judgmental way. I didn’t say it at the time, but I thought afterwards that if my friends fit this characterization, it was good to be not normal. I think the family member was referring to my friends behaving in a rather chaotic and dramatic way. The family member didn’t know them very well and discounted the fact that they, along with another couple, were responsible for introducing me and my husband. They had been particularly supportive to him before and during our early relationship. They became dear friends to both of us, always being there for us, especially during crises. I thought to myself if people who have hearts of gold are not normal, I’m a fan of people who are not normal. Of course people’s behavior can go too far afield and become abnormally heartless and destructive, which I do not approve of. In fact there was a stand up comedy special on Netflix by Wanda Sykes after the 2016 election called “Not Normal” which made fun of the myriad of ways that the behavior of the president was not normal, meaning that his behavior was so outrageous, surprising, and unexpected. It was good to laugh to relieve the ominous feeling that the times would be changing in a negative direction. In “Way Beyond Normal”, Reverend Warsnop tells the story of a statistician named Adolphe Quetelet who invented the idea of the Average Man which he interpreted to be the Perfect Man. He considered deviations in behavior from the Average Man errors. The way he came up with the Average Man was by measuring and averaging all sorts of parts of the human body. Average was seen as normal and it became a template. Since he was measuring Western European men, which obviously does not apply to many other people including women and those from outside Western Europe, his faulty concept of average became the basis for the template for what was normal. Not only is the basis for the concept of normal flawed, but it sets up an expectation that people should aspire to be normal. Since normal is a social construct and the range and scope vary greatly, its definition becomes arbitrary and can be used to deem behavior “out of range” as abnormal with all of the judgment and social disapproval that comes with it. It sets up people to be anxious if they think they are too far off what is defined as normal. Take the example of normal development in children. How many parents have worried unnecessarily about their children not meeting developmental milestones on time, and thinking that there was something wrong with their child. It turns out that neurodiversity can engender imagination and genius in a child. Think about Albert Einstein, speculated to have been on the autism spectrum who did not do well in school, but invented the Theory of Relativity as an adult. Rev Warsnop points out that although transgender individuals are a small percentage of the population, they still represent millions of people. They have been vilified as abnormal in some circles, but some indigenous cultures refer to the

transgender people as People of Two Spirits who have their own beauty and wisdom. Rev Warsnop says,

“Let’s all give it up and be free.

Let’s live Way Beyond Normal.

Let’s live into a wider scope of human expression for all”.