

A Day in Dachau

Seventy years ago a man stood on a field. It was probably bigger than a regulation soccer field and it was covered entirely in white gravel.

The man was not alone. His "team" at the time was all around him. 13,000 strong. If he reached out an arm in any direction, he could pat a teammate on the head.

Their uniforms were all identical. Gray, probably cotton, with dark vertical stripes. Their heads were shaved, their feet were wedged into ill-fitting leather shoes and they stood at attention like the ranks of some forgotten army.

The man does not have a name because one does not have names in this place. His uniform bore no number or team logo. There were no pads, no helmet, no cleats. No protection of any kind. The sameness of the men on that field was broken by one simple symbol on the chest: a yellow Star of David for most; for some, a pink triangle.

The year was 1942 and they were standing on the parade ground of the Dachau Concentration Camp.

Times have changed since then. The Jewish people have embraced these horrors and grown through them. Museums stand testament to the events and the German government acknowledges its complicity. Their Jewish faith continues to be strong.

So, too, the LGBT population. The pink triangle has been embraced as a defiant symbol of the movement. Pride events trumpet our strength and diversity and in-roads in civil rights have spurred far-ranging conversations that include gay marriage, adoption by LGBT parents and gender-identity issues. Even LGBT athletes benefit from the gay pride movement that grew from Stonewall. The You Can Play Project, Athlete Ally and projects at GLSEN reflect this change.

Times have surely changed . . . or so I thought.

Enter Charles L. Worley, pastor at Providence Road Baptist Church in Maiden, N.C. and not a friend of LGBT people. A "man of God," Mr. Worley seems to believe that the Nazis had a good idea. We should round up the gays and lesbians and put them behind an electrified fence. And leave them to die. He allows for the dropping of food from helicopters but doesn't explain this act of beneficence any further. Would there be fuel to cook it? Plates and forks with which to eat it? Heck, even the Nazis provided bowls for their gruel.

Some of his flock actually agrees with him. The blind apparently do lead the blind.





I have stood on that gravel field in Dachau. It was a scorching hot day in July; the kind of day that melts your forehead and wilts your resolve to move. There were no trees, and no respite from the heat.

Sometimes a man benefits from standing in the shoes of those who have walked before him. Frank and I toured the barracks and watched lovely families snapping pictures of their kids by the rows of empty bunks – beds that once held 8-10 people each. We saw the showers where Jew and Catholic, gypsy and handicapped – and the gay ones

– were gassed and the ovens where the dead burned.

I read the displays. I read about the 60% mortality rate of MY people, the homosexuals; how the gays were the lowest life form in the camp, persecuted by everyone else. And I read how, even as the camps were liberated, the gays were moved to prisons because they were STILL considered deviants.

A non-gay survivor shines a harsh light on the experience: "I saw quite a number of pink triangles. I don't know how they were eventually killed . . . one day, they were simply gone."



This appears to be Rev. Worley's vision. And this is what passes for a "man of God" these days? I'm left to wonder what Hitler would think of such Southern Baptists. He arrested Jews, Roman Catholics, Jehovah Witnesses and anyone else who he considered counter to the "ideal race." Would such bible thumping be tolerated, or would they be considered asocial and carted away?

I made it through about a third of the museum and to the parade ground before my urge to flee overpowered me. Even in the clear light of that July day, the evil of the place screamed at me. The ghosts of 100,000 dead bumped into me as I walked. It took a good Bavarian beer and distance from that place before I could even speak.

I stood on a field. My teammate – my partner of twenty years – was beside me. Our uniforms didn't match but it didn't matter because we were able to walk off that field and continue our life together. Our pink triangles are invisible, but they are there. And every time someone wants to put a fence around me, it burns as hot as a day in July.

Rev. Worley, I can say one thing to you that I'm sure is 100% true . . . you know not of which you speak.