

Philly Trio (2009)

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner, WLRH Radio Huntsville, AL USA

Philadelphia: my annual hegira to visit my progeny, this weekend to beloved Christopher. He set me up with three of the most disparate events and sites you can imagine, linked by a single common theme. The three were:

a. The Masonic Temple, an 1868 Philadelphia architectural icon, which aimed to dominate the downtown skyline, found itself outdone by the building of City Hall right across the street. But still a whopper.

b. The Sunday morning choral high mass at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, the highest form of Anglican Sunday-go-to-meeting behavior I've ever even imagined.

c. OutFest, Philadelphia's street celebration of gay and lesbian expression, freedom, and personality.

Those are three pretty different sorts of experiences, all right: but what they have in common, what's so clear it shouted at me above the loud speaker from the flatbed trailer on which the dancers were holding forth from the middle of the street-throng: the powerful, inborn driving need of humankind to relate to one other, to belong, to be someone, to have a place in the universe, and to connect with other similar beings. Fellowship, companionship, company, belonging. The need to be in affects even those who declare themselves out.

There were other peripheral commonalities as well: costume and regalia, as evident on the jam-packed crowded four square blocks of "National Coming Out Day" as in the smoke-daubed century-and-a-half old vaulted ceilings of St. Mark's and the every-square-inch gold-leaf decorated ritual meeting rooms of the Free Masons. More: there's officers, structure, hierarchy, organizational pyramids, expectations, rules. How we do things, what comes next, how we recognize one another by gestures and passwords. How we talk and walk and what we call ourselves: get the terminology right so we can identify ourselves. On and on, down the line of features that resemble one another, in fraternal meetinghall, church, streetcorner throng.

We need to belong. A solitary human being is an anomaly; and we sure do put together some colorful and interesting organizations to meet our need for togetherness. What do you belong to, and how does it mark you?
