

UNICORNS AT THE EDGE

Third Space as Transformative Encounter

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The Unicorn

A symbol that could hold together many of the questions that have occupied me in priesthood, chaplaincy, theology, mental health/ recovery, spirituality, and human relationships.

Questions about encounter.

Questions about sexualities and gender.

Questions about difference.

Questions about belonging.

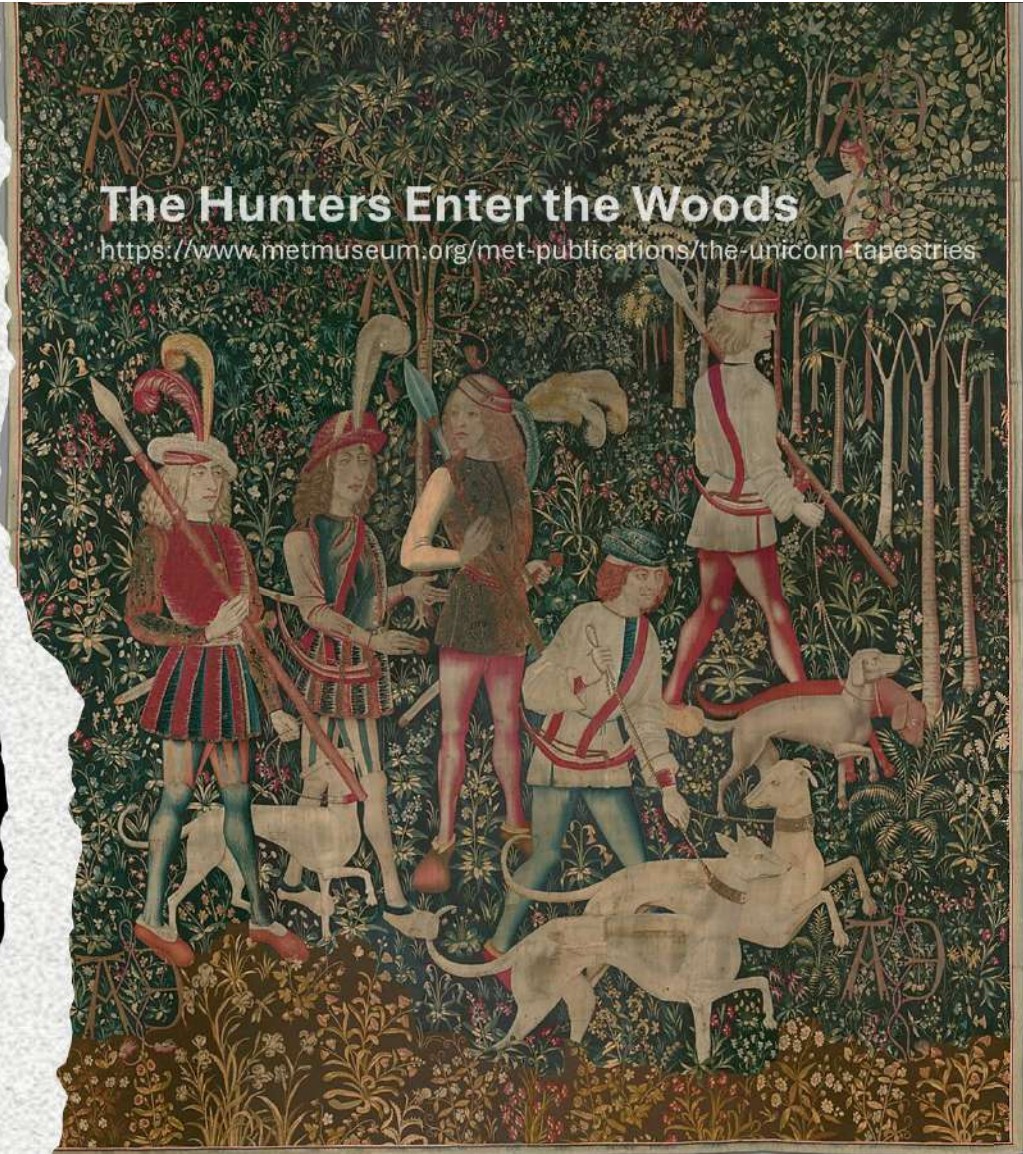
Questions about God.

Questions about what happens when people from different worlds genuinely meet.

Why did you choose this session?

The Hunters Enter the Woods

<https://www.metmuseum.org/met-publications/the-unicorn-tapestries>



A few of my favourite minds:

- Marcella Althaus-Reid
- bell hooks
- Fr Greg Boyle
- Martin Buber
- Emmanuel Levinas
- Catherine LaCugna
- Catherine Keller
- Edward Soja



What Is a Unicorn?

Activity: When you hear the word unicorn, what comes to mind?

- Words
- Images
- Memories
- Feelings
- Stories or Associations

Insights:

The unicorn is already functioning as a symbol – an archetype



Unicorns symbolise those who do not quite fit existing categories.

People who live:

- Between work and vocation
- Between monogamy and polyamory
- Between sacred and secular
- Between illness and recovery
- Between cultures and identities
- Between belonging and exclusion

These edge spaces are not simply in-between places.

- They are sites of encounter.
- Sites of creativity.
- Sites of tension.
- Sites of transformation.

Identity is never formed in isolation.



Much of human life is organised through binaries:

- Us and them
- Sacred and secular
- Church and world
- Believer and unbeliever
- Right and wrong
- Insider and outsider

But we know life exists beyond the binary.

What possibilities emerge when we move beyond either/or thinking?

The unicorn becomes our third.

We cross the stream.

A movement toward imagination.

Complexity.

Possibility.

Perhaps we find our unicorn whenever our desires and longing refuse to let us remain where we are.

The Unicorn Crosses a Stream



Three thinkers as guides for crossing streams.

bell hooks – The Margin as Possibility

The margin is not simply a place of exclusion. It can also become a place of insight. Creativity. Resistance. Transformation.

Those at the margins often see realities that those at the centre cannot.

Marcella Althaus-Reid – The Indecent Holy

Althaus-Reid asks difficult questions about belonging, power, and respectability.

- Who is excluded?
- Who must adapt to belong?
- Where might God already be present beyond our accepted boundaries?

The holy often appears where religion least expects it.

Fr Greg Boyle – Radical Kinship

Boyle imagines the Kingdom of God as a circle where nobody stands outside.

His challenge is simple:

- We do not go to the margins to save people.
- We go so that people at the margins can transform us.

Reflection

- Which of these ideas feels most familiar?
- Which feels most challenging?

The Unicorn Crosses a Stream



Unicorn Others

The Famous "Horse Story"

Martin Buber helps us think about encounter.

I-It: We encounter others as categories.

- Functions. Roles. Objects.

I-Thou: We encounter others as subjects.

- As persons. As sacred encounters. There is openness.
- Mutuality. Presence.

Perhaps unicorn people are those who resist our categories and invite us into deeper encounter.

Reflection

- Who are the unicorn people in your life?
- Who has disrupted your assumptions?



Where Are Your Edges?

Table Discussion

- Where do you experience life at the edge?
- Between work and vocation?
- Between faith and everyday life?
- Between illness and recovery?
- Between cultures or communities?
- Between belonging and exclusion?
- What have these spaces taught you?
- What possibilities have emerged there?



Everyone Is Welcome?

Many communities say:

"Everyone is welcome."

But what does that actually mean?

- Welcome into what?
- And on whose terms?

Sometimes welcome hides an expectation.

You are welcome if:

- You become like us.
- You speak our language.
- You adopt our assumptions.
- You fit our norms.

What boundaries remain invisible?
What exclusions remain unspoken?

The Unicorn Defends Himself



The Margin Reveals

bell hooks argues that life at the margin offers a unique perspective.

The margin allows people to see both the centre and the edge.

This perspective can reveal assumptions invisible to those with greater power.

This is not about romanticising marginality.

It is about recognising that every perspective has limits.

The unicorn often appears at the edge of certainty.



Is the Unicorn Holy?

Catherine LaCugna invites us to imagine God not as solitary power but as relationship.

The early church used:

- Perichoresis
- Mutual indwelling.
- The divine dance.

Relationship is not simply something God does. Relationship is who God is.

If relationship lies at the heart of reality itself, then encounter matters.



Spirit Between Us

How do you imagine the Spirit?

What if Spirit is best understood as:

Presence

Possibility

Emergence

The living between

Spirit is not something we possess. Not something we control.

Yet sometimes in conversation, hospitality, creativity, reconciliation, truth-telling, and courage— something shifts. Something becomes possible.

The Christian tradition often names such moments Spirit.



Holy Disorder

Transformation is not always gentle.
Throughout Scripture the holy appears:
In wildernesses, Among strangers. Through outsiders,
In uncertainty. In disruption

Again and again, God appears where established
boundaries begin to break down.

What if holiness is not always tidy?

What if the holy arrives through disruption?



The Indecent Holy

Marcella Althaus-Reid asks:
What if we have confused holiness with decency?
Too often holiness has been imagined from the
perspective of the centre.

- The respectable.
- The powerful.
- The acceptable.

Yet the Gospels tell a different story.

Jesus appears among those regarded as improper, the
indecent.

- Unclean.
- Marginal.
- Suspicious.

The indecent holy is holiness appearing where
respectable religion does not expect to find it.



The Hunters Return to the Castle

The Kindom Breaks In

Fr Greg Boyle describes the Kindom of God as radical kinship.

A circle where nobody stands outside.

Key themes:

- Radical kinship
- No daylight between us and them
- Compassion rather than fixing
- Mutual transformation

We do not go to the margins to rescue others.

We go to discover our shared humanity.



The Hunters Return to the Castle

The Kindom as Unicorn Space

What if the Kindom itself is Third Space?

Where:

- Outsiders become insiders
- Boundaries become porous
- Belonging expands
- Power is unsettled
- New possibilities emerge

The Kindom is not merely a destination.
It is a living possibility breaking into ordinary
life. A unicorn space.



What if eschatology can therefore be understood as edge?

The horizon where the known meets the unknown.

The place where certainty gives way to possibility.

The place where God's future interrupts the present.

- The edge is not where life finishes.
- The edge is where life happens.
- The unicorn lives at the edge.

Always inviting us beyond what we already know. Always calling us toward what is still emerging.



Searching for Unicorns

A way of noticing:

- Encounter
- Disruption
- Possibility
- Spirit
- Emergence
- Kinship
- The Holy

An invitation is to keep looking.

- To remain curious.
- To remain open.
- To remain willing to be surprised.



La Dame à la licorne

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Dame_%C3%A0_la_licorne

Final Reflection and Sending

Who are your unicorn people?

Where are your unicorn spaces?

What assumptions are being disrupted?

What possibilities are emerging?

Where might Spirit already be at work?

What edge are you being invited toward?

