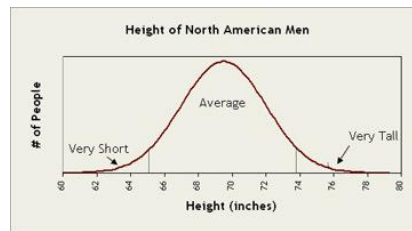


## “What’s Normal?”

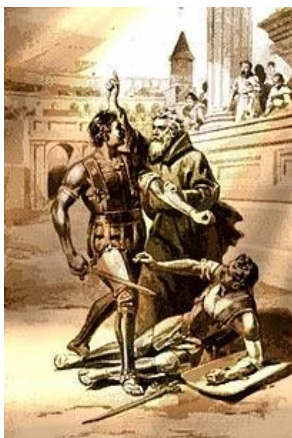
Are you normal? If your closest friends were asked if you were normal, what would they say? Feel free to laugh or cringe after reading that question. My dictionary defines “normal” as: *“according with, constituting, or not deviating from a norm, rule, or principle; regular.”*

So, are you just a regular person? As a former math teacher, I know that “normal” has mathematical references in geometry and statistics. “Norm” can refer to “average.” There is the famous “normal distribution curve.” The statistical theory is that on any given thing you are wanting to measure (height, weight, intelligence, income) we all fall somewhere along that distribution curve—sometimes referred to as the “bell curve.” Most of us fall within range of that 50th percentile. But, of course, there are exceptions!



In the fictional community of Lake Wobegon, Garrison Keillor would always start his radio show with, “Welcome to Lake Wobegon, where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average.” Well, of course, we know that not everyone, no matter your gender identity or age, can be “above average.” Lake Wobegon apparently was a very “unnormal” place.

Do you wish to be “normal?” Or do you delightfully claim your “unnormalness” (I don’t think that’s a real word, but it should be)? As the pandemic is winding down at least in most parts of our country, we hear the rejoicing of “returning to normal.” I too am seeing hope. But is returning to normal really the goal of the followers of Jesus and the Christian church? How about returning to “better”?



Legend has it that a man named Telemechus was attending the brutal games at the Roman Colosseum. Men were tortured and killed by wild beasts as the crowds cheered. Gladiators fought to the death. It is said that Telemechus was so disgusted by what had been “normalized” that he stood up and declared that this barbarism should stop. Legend has it that he was killed by the mob because of this. However, his martyrdom spurred a change in the hearts of the people. Emperor Honorius, himself a Christian, was moved to outlaw gladiator fights to the death. What had been normal—the bloody gladiator fights—eventually changed.

Truly, not everything in the past is worth returning to.

Dare we in the Christian church seek the ways of love and truth found in Christ Jesus? Might we find new ways to follow Jesus even as we cherish the old ways that brought us joy and hope? Maybe there are things in the past unworthy of the Christian message, and we should not return to them and what was considered “normal.”

The apocalyptic vision of the victorious Christ in the Book of Revelation has Christ saying, “See, I’m making all things new.” (Revelation 21:5)

Maybe “normal” isn’t what it used to be. Maybe that’s okay, for the Lord is at work in our hearts, in our churches, and in the whole world shaping us to be what we are not yet.

Thy kingdom come! Your “better normal” be revealed and manifested among us!