

Pride Sunday June 9, 2024

Holy Creator, open our hearts to your unbounded love, our minds, and spirits to your wisdom, and help us to hear your call for us this day. **Amen**

Today, we are celebrating Pride Sunday. This isn't an official liturgical celebration like Trinity Sunday or other official feast days, yet it is an important celebration and affirmation of our LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit or 2S siblings. We take the time and opportunity to do something a little different today to reaffirm our commitment that all are truly welcome here in this specific way.

It took me a long time to come out first as queer, and then as genderqueer. Both terms that I learned from the students I was working with at the time. Words that when I heard their meaning felt like a warm hug. Words I learned to reclaim from a tumultuous past and history of derogatory use against the community to which belonged. For me, these words meant connection. They connected me to a community and to a part of myself that had been missing for a long time.

I grew up in a small town during a time when we didn't talk about these things. We also didn't talk about race. While I was learning about my own queerness, I was also learning about my white privilege. The students teaching me were their own rainbow of cultures and races, and they generously held up a mirror for me to my white privilege, teaching me all the ways I'd never explored my whiteness and how it intersected with my gender identity and my sexual orientation. They helped me unlearn so many things about how I was expected to live in the world and how I could be present to them and their needs. What their lives were and the expectations of how they performed gender and sexuality in their contexts. It was such a liberating experience as I also helped them understand how to navigate a world not built for them.

Today, we again find a very hearty, complex text from Mark. We encounter the idea of Satan and demonic possession, something not uncommon in the time of Jesus.

We also see that the crowd that has gathered cannot eat. As the text begins, Jesus is accused of being possessed by Beelzebul. In response, Jesus shares a parable about a house divided and the consequences of speaking against the Holy Spirit. It is here we can dig in a little

and find a powerful connection for our modern context. The text here names a demonic presence actively engaged against the loving and compassionate works of God. This text points us to our understanding of the evil forces in our own time. Holding up a mirror to our own captivity to those forces. Forces like racism, homophobia, gender discrimination, classism, and other forces asserting the power of one group over another leading to the oppression of others.

These forces divide our house. To be free we must recognize them and work to free ourselves from their hold on us and our communities.

This is hard and difficult work.

Many of these ideas and teachings have been with us since we were children. Then reinforced by our culture and society. Simply saying we want to do something different isn't the response this text is calling for.

Our text today is calling for a deep spiritual change. One that requires us to really acknowledge our own inner demons the ones we don't often talk about with one another. The places inside us where we find resistance to these changes.

As the text continues, Jesus' family arrives, and Jesus concludes his teaching with a powerful statement saying, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." This acknowledgment that family to Jesus was not bound up in cultural definitions but only in those created by following the will of God continues the teachings.

This sense of who is in and who is out creates a unique call for inclusion.

Here, the text is saying that, truly, all who do the will of God are family.

We know that the will of God is to love our neighbor as ourselves and love God with all our hearts. To love ourselves as God loves us is very much a part of this process.

When I began my journey, I needed to begin by addressing my own privilege and internal homophobia.

My family taught me many things, including being biased. Which they were taught by their families and the world and times they lived in. It took a long time to really start unlearning those things. Something I know will be a lifelong process. Accepting God's unconditional love for others started with accepting it for myself.

We learn from our childhood and the people we spend our formative years with. Whether we claim them as family or not. Here I want to acknowledge that the idea of family can be complex and complicated, especially in the LGBTQIA2S+ community. For Jesus, in this

text, he seems to be pointing us to that same idea. Sometimes we must be liberated from the ideas we encounter at a young age so that we can truly love all of God's creation. Sometimes releasing ourselves from limiting beliefs that no longer serve us allows us to better love our neighbor and more lovingly walk the path with Jesus.

Our text for today is a difficult one that calls us to recognize that there are evil forces at play in the world. Forces we must recognize and, with God's loving guidance, work to see in ourselves and try to unroot so that we can more lovingly show up for our neighbor as well as work to uproot them in our world. To try to sew peace, love, and care for God's creation as we love and affirm the creation of all people.

Just as I learned from the students who helped me find who I truly was, I hope that we can all learn from others who are different from us.

Humble ourselves to know that God is in every conversation and interaction we have.

My prayer for us all is that we find new ways to welcome the one who is not yet known to us, be open to all God must show us through them, and let our spirits be refreshed by knowing God's truly unconditional love for us. **Amen**