

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
Luke 9:51-62

No Place Like Home^{*}

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Church of the Transfiguration
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Forty-seven years ago, during the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, the New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn. Not only was Stonewall the only gay bar that allowed dancing back then, but it was also a safe space where people could be themselves. Although the police routinely raided gay bars and arrested their patrons, on that particular night the assembled community – led by street queens of color, butch women, hustlers, and homeless youth – refused to tolerate this violation of their safe space, and they fought back.

The ensuing riots lasted for two days, and it gave birth to the modern-day lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (or “LGBT”) rights movement. It is because of the Stonewall riots that we celebrate Pride each year on the last Sunday of June.

Fourteen days ago, during the early morning hours of June 12, 2016, a gunman burst into the Pulse Night Club in Orlando, Florida, and killed 49 people and injured another 53. Like the Stonewall Inn, Pulse was supposed to be a safe space where young LGBT people of color could be themselves, especially during Latin Night. Unlike the Stonewall Inn, however, many of Pulse’s patrons never made it out of the club alive. Although things have improved dramatically for LGBT people during the decades since the Stonewall riots, the Orlando shooting reminded us of just how fragile our community’s safe spaces can be.

Safe spaces – that is, places that feel like “home” – have always been important to the LGBT community. This is not surprising, given how many of us felt unsafe while growing up in our households, schools, and neighborhoods. To quote Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*, “There’s no place like home.”

For many of us, there’s no place like the Little Church Around the Corner. It’s an incredible blessing for me, as an openly gay priest who has been with his husband for nearly twenty-five years, to serve in this community. We have out LGBT people as parishioners, vestry members, wardens, musicians, altar servers, and clergy. Our parish is a spiritual refuge in a world that, sadly, still hates LGBT people.

And yet, a horrific event like the Orlando shooting raises the question as to whether there can ever be a truly safe space in this world.

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In today's gospel reading, Jesus reminds us that Christian discipleship is actually not about security or stability. Jesus tells a would-be follower that, while "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests," the "Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Indeed, Jesus and his followers were literally homeless. They were itinerant teachers and, as such, were often dependent upon the hospitality of strangers for food and for a roof over their head.

Jesus also reminds us in today's gospel that Christian discipleship is not about following societal norms, such as adhering to the customs of burying one's parents. Jesus tells his disciples, shockingly, to "Let the dead bury their own dead." Finally, Christian discipleship is not for those who are still bound to their families of origin. For those who want to "say farewell" to those at "home," Jesus tells them that "No one who . . . looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

The parallels between the LGBT community and Christian discipleship are striking. Many members of the LGBT community, like Jesus and his followers, are literally homeless. Our own parishioner Cal Skaggs has produced and directed a powerful documentary, "A Road to Home," that chronicles the stories of six homeless LGBT youth in New York City. For many of these young people, burying their parents and saying farewell to their families is not even an option, since they have already been kicked out of their households. Even LGBT adults risk the possibility of losing their families when they decide to come out of the closet.

Others in the LGBT community, such as transgender and gender queer individuals, have experienced a kind of metaphorical homelessness. The recent passage of laws in many states that restrict public bathroom usage to one's birth sex is not only absurd for those who have a different gender identity, but it also renders such individuals homeless when it comes to bathrooms. In fact, the entire gender binary system of male or female – or blue or pink – simply doesn't work for people who don't fit neatly in either category.

There are, of course, many other groups within the LGBT community – including queer people of color, long-term survivors of HIV/AIDS, and our aging elders – who also experience the loneliness and isolation of metaphorical homelessness.

When Jesus says that he has no place to lay his head, he is referring to a deeper christological truth. Jesus was literally born homeless; he was born in a manger because there was no place for his family at the inn. And Jesus died homeless as well; he was shamefully executed in public, on a cross, as a common criminal. Metaphorically speaking, Jesus was also homeless to the extent that he didn't fit into simple binary categories. He was both human and divine, both servant and king, both the sacrificial lamb and the high priest, both dead and resurrected, and both temporal and eternal. Just as queer folk do not fit neatly into either blue or pink, Jesus does not fit neatly into a simple either-or binary system.

Whenever we gather for the Eucharist, we do more than just break bread for a communal meal. We also recognize God's solidarity with all those who, like Jesus, have nowhere to lay their heads. In the breaking of Jesus' body and the shedding of his blood at the high altar, we remember all those whose bodies have been broken and whose blood has been shed. God did not will the violence and carnage of the Pulse Night Club. Rather, God mourns and suffers with us because God has experienced the very same violence – to the point of death on a cross.

As Christians, we refuse to believe that death is the last word. Each Sunday, we proclaim during the Nicene Creed that we “look for the resurrection of the dead” and the “life of the world to come.” In the face of death and destruction, we are called to hope and not despair. We are, after all, an Easter people. For me, there have been glimmers of hope in the outpouring of responses from all around the world to the Orlando shootings. The newly-found solidarity between so many different groups – and their coming together – has created new safe spaces in the larger Body of Christ.

And so, while it is true that the “Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head,” we are blessed to have a home in Christ Jesus. In Christ, we have our Stonewall. In Christ, there's no place like home. And, in Christ, we have a safe space that can never be taken away. Blessed are those who have nowhere to lay their heads, and blessed is the Little Church Around the Corner. Happy Pride!