

The Church of the Transfiguration  
The Third Sunday After Pentecost  
Galatians 5:1,13-25; Luke 9:51-62

## The Joy of Pride Sunday

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Happy Pride! It's wonderful to be here with all of you this morning. One never knows who will actually show up on Pride Sunday with all the traffic and barriers. So thank you for being here!

So this year marks ten years since I first arrived at Transfiguration. How time flies! Back in 2015, I was a newly-ordained priest, and I was looking for a church that I could call my parish home.

Someone suggested that I check out the Little Church Around the Corner. My husband Michael and I came here for mass one Sunday, and we knew right away that this was home. And it wasn't just because Michael was an actor. We were both so happy to be at a church that valued the Anglo-Catholic liturgical tradition, and also one that recognized the inherent dignity of all persons, including LGBTQ people.

What a difference from when I was growing up in the Roman Catholic Church. I remember reading one day, as a closeted teenager, that the Roman church viewed me as being "intrinsically disordered." I started to question whether I could remain a Christian. And so I slowly drifted away from my faith.

But I am grateful that God never gave up on me. And I'm also grateful that I've found my spiritual home in the Episcopal Church, which holds unequivocally that all sacraments – including marriage and ordination – are open to all people.

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Now, why is Pride Sunday so important from the perspective of the Christian faith? We know, of course, that Pride is neither a feast day, nor is it a liturgical season. You won't find it in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, which is the Episcopal Church's book of saints and holy days. But we do celebrate Pride Sunday every year.

Well, the answer lies in one of my favorite quotes. How many of you have heard of the late Rachel Held Evans? Evans was an amazing author and blogger who grew up in the evangelical church and became an Episcopalian. She wrote powerfully about faith, doubt, and making sense of Christianity in the 21st century. Evans died tragically at the young age of 37. But she lives on in her writings, which have made a huge impact on this world.

Anyway, here's the quote. Evans wrote:

"I thought God wanted to use me to show gay people how to be straight. Instead, God used gay people to show me how to be Christian."

Let me say it again. Evans wrote: “I thought God wanted to use me to show gay people how to be straight. Instead, God used gay people to show me how to be Christian.”

God used LGBTQ people to show Evans how to be Christian. For me, that’s why Pride Sunday is so important. It’s through Pride Sunday that all of us can learn to be better Christians.

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First, Pride Sunday teaches us to turn the other cheek.

I can still remember marching on Pride Sunday in the 1990s. I remember walking by members of the notorious Phelps family, who were known for their “God Hates [Gays]” signs. (They actually used a horribly offensive word instead of “Gays.” They were also known for picketing the funeral of people who had died of HIV/AIDS. I also remember walking by St. Patrick’s Cathedral, with its enormous front doors completely shut and guarded by the police.

I’ll be honest, I remember feeling a bit like James and John in today’s gospel reading from Luke. When Jesus and his disciples entered a village of Samaritans and were rejected by them, James and John were infuriated. They asked Jesus: “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” Jesus was not amused. In fact, he turned and “rebuked them” for wanting to harm the Samaritans.

Now, I wouldn’t have wanted fire to come down from the heavens and to consume the Phelps family or St. Patrick’s Cathedral. However, I wouldn’t have minded if, say, a small lightning bolt ended up scattering the protesters and the non-welcoming religious leaders. But seriously, I am glad that love ultimately won out. Those of us who were marching were determined not to fight hate with hate. We turned the other cheek – and kept on marching.

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Second, Pride Sunday teaches us that one can be both Christian and queer.

I’ll never forget the first time I marched on Pride Sunday with a church. Michael and I were parishioners at St. Luke in the Fields in the West Village. It was a really big deal. Even though the parish hosted the annual Pride evensong, it was quite a different thing to be marching through the streets of Manhattan and to affirm both our faith and our queerness in such a public manner. I’m proud to say that my mom even joined us one year!

I’ll also never forget the first time that I marched with the Episcopal Diocese of New York. Not only was there a large contingent of parishes from throughout the diocese, but there was also a float – with bishops on it! That would not have happened in the Roman church.

Society often teaches us that one can’t be both Christian and queer. That is, we have to choose between one or the other. Many of us have experienced churches and denominations that are hostile to queer people. But many of us have also experienced queer communities that were indifferent – at best – to Christians. The exclusion goes both ways.

As such, the experience of being Christian and queer is often one of metaphorical homelessness. We don’t fully belong in either community. I believe that is what Jesus was talking about in today’s gospel reading when he said to his followers that “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but

the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Jesus was in this world, but he was not of it. He was both divine and human – and yet he was neither fully in either realm.

Similarly, Pride Sunday teaches us that we don’t have to make a binary choice between our faith on the one hand, and our sexuality or gender identity on the other. It’s not a matter of either-or. It’s a matter of both-and. One can be Christian and be queer.

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Third and lastly, Pride Sunday teaches us the importance of joy.

There is nothing quite like the joy of being a part of the Pride March, either as a spectator or a marcher. How many of you have watched or marched in the Pride March? If so, you know what I’m talking about. I will always remember the joyful marchers who ran up to Michael and me, handing out stickers, buttons, and pamphlets, while we were standing on Fifth Avenue as spectators during our very first New York City Pride.

And I will also always remember the joy of marching for the first time, meeting dozens of other participants, and walking to the cheers of thousands of people as we went from Fifth Avenue to Christopher Street and walked past the Stonewall Inn, where it all began with trans women of color fifty-six years ago.

We are living in difficult times. One might say that the world is on fire. I don’t know about you, but sometimes it’s really hard for me to experience joy in the midst of so much chaos. It’s also hard for me to express joy whenever I do feel it. Sometimes I feel guilty about posting something joyful on social media – it somehow doesn’t feel right to post something like that when there is so much suffering in the world.

Ingrid Fetell Lee is the author of the book *Joyful: The Surprising Power of Ordinary Things to Create Extraordinary Happiness*. In a recent article, Lee wrote that we should never feel guilty about feeling joy, even when the world is on fire. In fact, the opposite is true. We need joy precisely because it is an act of resistance.

Among other things, joy gives rise to hope. Lee writes:

“[J]oy provides a glimpse of a better future that keeps us motivated to work toward it. . . . It’s one thing to be able to envision a better future, but it’s another to have a momentary flash of it course through our bodies.”

Saint Paul reminds us in today’s epistle that joy is one of the nine “fruit[s] of the Spirit” – and how “there is no law against such things.” I recognize that many LGBTQ people can’t stand Saint Paul, in large part due to anti-queer interpretations of his letters (which, by the way, I believe to be wrong). But I do think that today’s epistle reading from Galatians is a helpful reminder of the importance of joy – as well as the other eight fruits of the spirit – to the Christian faith.

Pride Sunday shows us that marching joyfully is not just a social or political act, but it is also a deeply theological and ethical one.

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As we continue with today's mass, I invite you to reflect upon how Pride Sunday might teach you to be a better Christian – whether it might be turning the other cheek, knowing that one can be both Christian and queer, or recognizing the importance of joy as an act of resistance.

Know that God loves each and every one of us – just as we are. God doesn't make mistakes. In the words of the great Broadway theologian Jerry Herman:

“I am what I am,  
I don't want praise, I don't want pity.  
I bang my own drum,  
Some think it's noise, I think it's pretty.  
And so what, if I love each feather and each spangle,  
Why not try to see things from a different angle?  
Your life is a sham  
'Til you can shout out loud, I am what I am!”

And that, my friends, is the Good News of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Happy Pride!