

## **FULL OF PRIDE**

---

Matthew 10: 40 – 42

Rev. Dr. Benjamin J. Broadbent

June 28, 2020

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost / Pride Sunday

### I.

Last year, along with members of the First Congregational Churches in Santa Rosa and Sonoma, we marched as a congregation in the Sonoma County Pride Parade.

We were lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and straight allies. We were older and younger, richer and poorer, with a variety of skin shades.

Some of us walked, but others used wheels – a bicycle, a stroller, a wheelchair.

For some of us, this was our first parade. Others were veterans of pride. We wore rainbows and face paint, clergy collars and tie-dyes.

We mingled with other parade participants and shared mutual appreciation for this opportunity to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community in Sonoma County and beyond.

We drummed and marched and shouted, carrying an enormous rainbow banner down Fourth Street while singing “We Are Marching in the Light of God” and “This Little Light of Mine.”

It was meaningful and beautiful and fun.

It was the church “being the church” in the midst of the city.

This year, pride month looks a little different.

We have to celebrate Pride Sunday distanced from each other, but we celebrate anyway.

Part of what it means to be a community is to celebrate and honor all the people who make a community what it is.

In the book we’re using to guide our summer worship, John Vest writes about the “Stewardship of Community.”

“If stewardship is about faithfully and responsibly deploying resources that God has created and gifted to us,” Vest writes, [then] “the church must realize that it often no longer needs to *create* community and can instead focus on living missionally in communities that already exist.”<sup>i</sup> Our church community exists among other already existing communities. Our members and friends who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and any number of other ways, make us who we are as a people who worship God and share the love of Jesus Christ, while connecting our community to other communities.

## II.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus sends twelve disciples to share good news throughout the region of Galilee.

In today’s passage, he speaks a word of welcome: “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me.”

When it comes to welcome, I think the church needs to be careful.

Barbara Brown Taylor once wrote that she cringes whenever she sees an “All Are Welcome” sign outside of a church.<sup>ii</sup>

As with politics, so with the church, it is probably better to under promise and over deliver.

Saying unequivocally that “All Are Welcome” is a hard promise to keep.

The other problem with welcome is that it sets up a power dynamic.

Those who already belong have the power to welcome those who do not yet belong.

And if you have the power to welcome you also have the power to exclude.

I think it is helpful, then, to talk about different forms of welcome, each one requiring more a deeper intention than the one before it.

A first level of welcome says “You are welcome to come and experience who we are.”

In this *conditional* form of welcome, there is a clear line between we and you, and an expectation that you can join us if you become like us.

A next level of welcome says, "We welcome you to be who you are and to share yourself with us."

In this *diversity* form of welcome, you can be you as an individual, but don't expect us to change.

In a third level of welcome, the invitation is this: "We welcome you as you are, and in welcoming you, we expect that we will change so that who you are will be a part of who we are.

This could be called a *transformational* welcome.

The church, including our local church, has imagined itself as to be a welcoming body, but what form of welcome have we been extending?

### III.

In his words we hear today, Jesus complicates things even further. Jesus imagines the church not as a welcoming body but as the ones being welcomed.

In other words, the disciples are not the ones extending hospitality, but the ones seeking it.<sup>iii</sup>

"Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

For Jesus, the church lets go of the power to welcome so that it can open up itself to the possibility of being welcomed into God's family.

The church moves beyond safe terrain and seeks to build new relationships of mutual welcome so that all may be transformed by God's love.

In other words, the work isn't so much to build community as it is to seek community where it already exists, and to live with others as God's beloved.

### IV.

Today is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall uprising in New York City, a powerful symbolic event in the struggle for LGBTQ rights.<sup>iv</sup>

An aspect of the uprising that isn't always remembered is that transgender women of color were at the center of the uprising. In this way, Black Lives Matter and the modern struggle for LGBTQ rights are inextricably linked.

Different, overlapping, communities transformed one another.

Turning to our own congregation, The Community Church of Sebastopol simply would not be what it is without the LGBTQ+ people who have been part of this community since its founding.

This church has been enriched by LGBTQ members who have shared their gifts and life experiences with others.

Some went to seminary and some were ordained.

We've been blessed by ministers, musicians, youth directors, other staff, and lay leaders who have shown us new ways to be the church.

Our congregation has been offering Our Whole Lives: Sexuality and Our Faith classes that honor the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions.

OWL provides an opportunity for participants, especially young people, to ask questions about sexuality anonymously in a safe atmosphere.

In 1999, this congregation declared itself to be an Open & Affirming congregation in the United Church of Christ, adopting the following statement:

"We welcome and affirm people of every religious background, family composition, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, ethnicity, age, and gender. We encourage all people to participate fully in every aspect of our church's life and ministry."

There's that "welcome" word again, and that "we."

What form of welcome will we offer?

Will it be a welcome that transforms the we?

And what might it mean to become the ones seeking the welcome rather than offering it?

It might mean revisiting the meaning of the word “gender” in our Open & Affirming statement and revising it to say “gender identity and expression.”

It might mean taking this as an opportunity to wonder why, if we welcome people of every ethnicity, we do not reflect the ethnic diversity of our county.

And it might mean taking a moment on Pride Sunday to say to our LGBTQ+ kindred, you make us who we are, or, in a twist of the Nguni Bantu phrase, *Ubuntu*,

“We are who we are because you are who you are.”

And for that, we are all full of pride.

Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> Copeland, Adam J., *Beyond the Offering Plate: A Holistic Approach to Stewardship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), p. 117.

<sup>ii</sup> Taylor, Barbara Brown, *The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

<sup>iii</sup> Roth, Diane, “Reflections on the Lectionary,” *The Christian Century*, June 17, 2020.

<sup>iv</sup> The Theologian’s Almanac: <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-media-resources-blog>.