

Rev. Laura Fitzpatrick-Nager, Kate Summerlin, Raegan Graziano
Sermon: Reflections: Where Love Takes Us
June 30th, 2024
Acts 2:1-12

I like to think of Pentecost described in our scripture this morning as a Pride parade. Have you ever been to the Pride parade in Middletown or Guilford or Manhattan?

Oh my. You're missing out!

All kinds of people dressed for celebration and their own fire of expression and taking it to the streets. All kinds of bodies celebrating difference and uniqueness of not only themselves but everyone who shows up All kinds of hats and wigs and fabulousness. All ages and languages and ways of being in the world are dancing down the street together! Speaking one common tongue: that of Love and Freedom.

As William Shakespeare wrote in *The Tempest*, "O brave new world that has such people in it!"

We all are on a journey. We all need to be seen and understood. Accepted and dignified, celebrated and honored. And of course, remembered.

June 28th, Friday, was the 55th anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall uprising in New York City, now considered a galvanizing and symbolic event in the struggle for LGBTQ rights. Stonewall National Monument Visitor Center, in Greenwich Village, which made its public debut on Friday June 28, Pride Day, marked the 55th anniversary.

As the history goes, police raided the Stonewall Inn bar, on the pretext that the bar was selling alcohol without a liquor license — but it was the third raid in a row on a Greenwich Village gay bar, and this time, the outraged patrons didn't disperse, but rather gathered on the street and actively resisted the police. The ensuing unrest lasted five days, and inspired activism around the country. On the first anniversary of the uprising, the inaugural gay pride parades were held in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago.

Wrote a young friend of mine, "Pride Month is about sharing your true self with the world. ...In spite of the ongoing threats and violence."

Jesus came to be with the least last and most invisible and forgotten, full stop.

Right now, in particular, our trans siblings are under attack in devastating and inhumane ways from restrictions and bans on essential health care, to language use and the ability to use one's pronouns. Certain sectors of our society along with 17 states are seeking to legislate hate and cruelty with restrictions and bans on health care, language use and the ability to use one's pronouns. ¹ Essentially, these cruel attempts to ban human beings are antithetical to the gospel and to human rights.

We have a long way to go. And the resiliency, strength and courage of the Queer Community and those family members and friends in my own life, continue to teach me and us about celebrating diversity and the wide spectrum that is the human experience.

One of the powerful strategies for building the language of understanding is storytelling. At this time, I'd like to invite Kate Summerlin to share what she calls in her book of essays, "Observations of an Ordinary Life" There's nothing ordinary about you my friend! Kate will be followed by Raegan Graziano, a new member of our church. I'm honored to have you both in the pulpit with me this morning!

Vocabulary

A poem by Kate Summerlin

Daughter no longer
Son neither
You've birthed yourself somewhere in between
Invented a new vocabulary
Invested in a new dialogue
you gave your body permission to speak.
We are learning the language now
Not without hesitation but infused with love
we stumble past what was familiar
changing tenses
understanding how the plural can satisfy the singular
educating others as we become aware
of our linguistic limitations
our binary ways of speaking the truth
our license to exclude and shame.
No more
Your liberation is contagious
It infects our outlook with all the possibilities
of being human
heralding a brave new world
When called by any other name
Is recognized
Simply without translation
Family.

Kate Summerlin, a lover of all things to do with the garden, the written word, the spoken word and the comforts of an old farmhouse, is a late bloomer. After 17 years as the Library Media Specialist at A.W. Cox School, she recently discovered the language of poetry and has just finished a memoir of essays and poems called *Observations of an Ordinary Life*. A member of the Guilford Poets League, Kate is also author of a children's picture book, *A New Kinda Blue*. Kate is also a dedicated volunteer with the ABC Program, The Guilford Free Library, North Madison Congregational Church, St. Martin de Porres School and the Connecticut Storytelling Center. Kate and her husband, David, live in Guilford, CT.

Raegan Graziano

Sermon Sunday, June 30, 2024

I've been asked to speak today. Laura asked me if I would be willing to participate on this day particularly as it is recognized by some as Pride Month and, after a lifetime of saying, No, I am learning to say, Yes. Yes, to life!

I have lived my life on the periphery, always on the outside looking in and desperately wanting human connection.

As a child, I experienced violence, hatred and harassment. I was demoralized by two, male, grade school teachers who took it upon themselves to ridicule and taunt me in front of my classmates. Grade School! I was sensitive, artistic, soft-spoken, really, for this I was attacked. They must've known something about me that, at that young age, I still wasn't privy to. As a young teenager, through no fault of my own, I was hated because it was presumed that I was gay.

The phenomenon of abuse is such that the victim at some point will turn against him, or herself; abandon and hate oneself. This happened to me.

My voice was silenced by trauma and I've been on a healing journey my entire life.

I enjoy writing; I've written throughout my life and just a few years ago, in the middle of the worldwide pandemic, at a very low point in my life, I was inspired to pen these words.

It is written to the innocent child I once was; the lost self, the child whom I abandoned in order to be loved, embraced and accepted by world that was incapable of loving. The little boy's name is Ricky and I'd like to read it for you now.

FOR YOU

I did it for you, Ricky

I did it for you.

All the struggle to have a 'normal', happy life-

I did it all for you.

All the sacrifice, the many things I learned to live without-

All for you.

The countless acts of courage, walking through fear time and time again-

It was for you.

Acting as if I were confident, high self-esteem, value and worth,

Letting go of vice-like control to explore new vistas, new horizons-

It was for you.

Getting up and doing it all over again, and again, and yet, again.

I would have it no other way. If it's the last thing I ever do, it was all for you.

-Richard Raegan Graziani

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I would like to close with a quote from Toni Morrison, American Novelist. "If you are free, you need to free somebody else.

If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else."