

Pride Sunday – 08/27/2023

Today is Pride Sunday. You have had this celebration here before, but I don't ever remember participating in a Pride Sunday. Thus, for me, this is a blessing. Pride is often thought of in a negative sense as to why do you think you are better than anyone else. Of course, it is quite the opposite, as it is about recognizing that every person is a child of God. This is regardless of anything.

In many churches and with a number of people we in the LGBTQIA+ community have been seen as less than, committing some kind of great sin for being who God created us to be. We at Faith Lutheran church do not believe that. Our welcoming statement spells out many groups who are often excluded, where we are here to welcome and include.

For me today is about celebrating diversity and inclusivity. God did not create us all alike and that is a beautiful thing. In Psalm 139 we read from the New Living Translation: O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home.

You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD. You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.

Wonderfully complex. This is something that all of us are called to grapple with. For those of us in the LGBTQIA+ community, in order for us to find wholeness we have to affirm who God made us to be. This is not an easy process it means we are different than the main-stream person. We are different than what has been seen as "the norm".

Yet God has created us to be complex beings. As God's people we are called to celebrate this. This is not easy when we have people who are afraid of this complexity. There are churches who like to pull out the Bible and find texts to support their fearfulness. For me this is limiting and denying who God has wonderfully created. Everyone in this room and listening online are wonderfully created by God who loves everyone equally!

In our first lesson today, we find that famous rainbow that has become the symbol for the LGBTQIA+ community. The rainbow colors that we encounter in

this Bible story are the colors that when mixed with each other produce all of the possible colors that we can think of. Basic, but yet wonderfully complex.

In the story of Noah's Ark, the rainbow comes at the end of a cleansing of people and animals. God was hoping that taking a family and two of every animal, that God could start over again on the earth. In the end God did not like this and used the rainbow as a sign that God would never do this again.

This is a promise for all people and animals. The rainbow was and is a sign of hope that God would never flood the whole world again and start over. A symbol of God's love for all of creation in the complexity that God created.

The rainbow Pride flag was designed in 1978 by artist and gay rights activist Gilbert Baker. He came up with the design after he was encouraged by Harvey Milk, another gay rights activist, to create a new, positive symbol that the entire LGBTQIA+ could rally behind.

Up until this point, a pink triangle was being used. As you may know, it was Adolph Hitler who conceived this sign during World War II as a stigma placed on LGBTQIA+ people, just as the star of David was used against Jews. Harvey Milk felt that a new symbol was needed that would symbolize love and not oppression.

As a basis for deciding on the rainbow flag, Baker went back to Noah's Ark where it was used as a symbol of hope, a covenant between God and all of creation. Baker also found that it had been used in Egyptian and Native American history. Rainbow flags were flown for the first time in 1978 at "Gay Freedom Day" in San Francisco.

Colors have been added to the flag to represent people of color and the trans community. There are many versions of the flag also, to represent the complexity of God's creation. Once again we are not saying that we in the LGBTQIA+ community are trying to put ourselves above others, but to celebrate who God made us to be.

We can as a community of faith enlighten these colors of diversity when we allow the light of Jesus to shine through us. Jesus tells us in our Gospel lesson for today that we are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.

As followers of Jesus, we do not create the light, but we allow Jesus' light to shine through us. When we use lights, there is a reason for it. We wouldn't turn it on to read and then put it out again. Jesus says once my light starts shining through you, don't cover it up or put a bushel basket over it. If you are going to start shining my light, let it shine all over.

Unfortunately, as human beings it is easy for us to bring that bushel basket out to cover the light. Sometimes we are not even aware of it. We all have biases,

some we know, and others are hidden. Biases are a bushel basket. They can come from things we have learned as children growing up. Biases are passed on until we can identify them and see a need to change our way of thinking.

All of this is a process. I believe biases can be changed over time. It takes the willingness to educate ourselves to begin to identify our biases. Then to see how they have and continue to affect other people. It is when we are willing to let the light of Jesus shine on our biases that we can see the wonderful complexity that God has created. When we begin to work through our biases we are better able to celebrate diversity and begin to embrace inclusion.

This fall I and a friend of mine will be leading a discussion on racism, Indigenous People and gender and orientation. It will be on Zoom for one hour on Sundays at 4:00 pm for five weeks starting September 24. There will be around 1 hour of reading and things to listen to each week that we will then be used in our time together. Please see the announcements and the FLC news for more information and to register.

Identifying what our bushel baskets are and working to erase them is what will allow Jesus' light to shine through us. Eugene Peterson in his paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*, says it this way: You are here to be light, bringing out the God colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We are going public with this, as a public city on a hill. If I make you light bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand-shine! Keep your house open, be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous parent in heaven.

Today on this Pride Sunday, we are called to be light bearers, that Jesus' light may shine through us and bring out God's colors in the complexity of God's wonderful creation.