

“Queer Love Sets the Stage for Communion”

Mark 14:12-16

The First Sunday after Pentecost

June 4, 2023

Rev. Anita Peebles, Seattle First Baptist Church

As we enter into Pride month, a time set aside to uplift our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual and more family, friends, neighbors and more, it is no secret that LGBTQIA+ rights are under attack in this country. Just two weeks ago, the Human Rights campaign joined the NAACP and Equality Florida and issued a travel advisory for the state of Florida, saying that the recent legislative session was the “most anti-LGBT legislative session in history,”¹ resulting in six bills that were openly hostile to LGBTQIA+ people, including bills that limit public education, increase barriers to gender-affirming healthcare, and even restrict what bathrooms people can use. The Human Rights Campaign says they are not calling for a travel boycott, but they want to be clear about the choices that the Florida government is making so that people can be informed about where they spend their time and money. And it’s not just Florida—Texas, North Carolina, Mississippi, Tennessee, Idaho, Utah...and more and more states are joining the call of bigots (inside and outside of government) to persecute LGBTQIA+ people with a strength not seen in several decades.

And, soberingly, let us all be aware that though we sit here in Seattle and in Washington state, where there are many important protections for the LGBTQIA+ community, these sentiments and laws are really not that distant. I do not say this to add to fear-mongering, but to echo the reality that there are people present among us whose wellbeing is at stake, and the wellbeing of loved ones is at stake.

To those among us who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community—you are loved. Your identity is sacred. You are created in the image of the Holy. You are an important part of this church family.

And so throughout the month of June, we will celebrate and honor Pride Month, uplifting our LGBTQIA+ community, and focusing in preaching and other elements of worship on bringing forward texts from scripture that contain queer dynamics and which LGBTQ people have looked to for years as a sign that they are included in the biblical text.

Today, we turn to the gospel of Mark, to a story we have surely heard many times, but I invite you to come to it with fresh eyes and ears and hearts today.

¹ <https://eqfl.org/updated-travel-advisory-HRC>

Scripture: Mark 14:12-16 (NRSVUE)

¹² On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, [Jesus'] disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" ¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, ¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹⁵ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." ¹⁶ So the disciples set out and went to the city and found everything as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

Embedded in this story that Christians read every year during Holy Week is an act of gender transgression...and a call from Jesus to follow the one who is doing the transgressing.

Gender transgression means that a person is not appearing or behaving as they are "supposed to" behave based on social norms and rules. In this text, we read that the disciples will find a man carrying a jar of water. This may be gender transgression, as women in the ancient world were traditionally the ones to fetch and carry water for their household.

Lewis Christopher Payne writes this in *Transgendering Faith: Identity, Sexuality, And Spirituality*:

"Take a moment to think why this man might be a water carrier, why he might have a traditional female job. Could he have chosen this job because he felt more comfortable with a female role? Perhaps he identified himself as female? Or perhaps he used to identify himself as female, but now lives as male. Just maybe the water carrier is a transgender person right at the heart of the story, which we do not even notice. Could [this person] be a male-to-female person or a female-to-male person or an intersex person?"²

Kittredge Cherry, a lesbian Christian author and theologian, writes,

"Jerusalem was crowded for Passover, so how were the disciples supposed to pick out this particular water carrier? Even standard commentaries explain that he stood out because usually only women carried water pitchers. Jesus told his disciples to follow a gender nonconformist. Christ trusted a queer man to lead them to the next stop on their spiritual journey, to the room where the disciples share his Last Supper and later received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost."³

Furthermore, Jesus tells the disciples that the man carrying the water will return to a house, and talk to the owner of the house, who is also a man, asking for space to host Passover dinner. There

² <https://qspirit.net/queer-water-carrier/>

³ <https://qspirit.net/queer-water-carrier/>

are two men living together in this story—two men who seem to be responsible for the wellbeing of their household!

Friends, there is queer love at the heart of the gospel!

Gender transgression is a huge part of what is driving the anti-trans laws around the country. The clothes people wear not matching with their sex assigned at birth are for some reason, a higher danger to the general population than access to firearms! There are many examples being shared on social media of how people are watching each other with suspicion as someone enters a bathroom, or shops in a particular gendered section of a store, or goes into a public changing room. And political and religious leaders from around the country are encouraging this peer suspicion, and putting in place sanctions and fines for people who are not behaving as the dominant, white, patriarchal and misogynist, Christian-nationalist culture says they should. Truly, how does a man wearing a skirt hurt anything? A woman with a short haircut and cargo pants? A nonbinary person just going about their day? A trans person just searching for a place to use the restroom?

And in our sacred text, a man does woman's work, providing sustenance for his household, which includes another man as head of the home. Right here, in the Bible, these men's identities have been passed over for generations who read this text...until those with the eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to receive the queer love at the center of the gospel said, "Hold on, there are queer people passing and being passed over here."

I wonder how many people have been forced to "pass" in their lives, never given the opportunity to "come out," never noticed and surviving but not thriving.

This afternoon at the choir concert, our choir will sing in benefit of the Trevor Project, an organization that was formed 25 years ago to support LGBTQ young people through a 24/7 crisis hotline. One of the founders, Peggy Rajski says,

"While the LGBTQ community has achieved wider representation over the years, that increased visibility has been met with a virulent backlash. The Trevor Project's 25th anniversary comes during a time when LGBTQ young people across the country are faced with dangerous rhetoric and frequent legislative attacks, including a record number of bills targeting transgender and nonbinary youth. The Trevor Project has experienced attacks that have sought to prevent LGBTQ young people from reaching our crisis intervention services, and undermine our affirming suicide prevention programs.

For 25 years, The Trevor Project has not wavered in its dedication to LGBTQ young people. In the face of these attacks, and as LGBTQ youth suicide continues to be a national public health crisis, we vow to be here for the next generation too."⁴

⁴ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/blog/the-trevor-projects-founder-and-interim-ceo-reflects-on-25-years-of-saving-lives/>

Let us make this vow, too, church. We will continue in our unwavering support of the LGBTQIA+ community, for those among us now and those coming in the next generation. We will seek queer readings of the Bible, queer theological expression, and to give voice to LGBTQIA+ preachers and teachers.

Jesus told his disciples to follow the man with the jar of water. Jesus told his disciples to follow the path queer love set forward. Queer love set the stage for the meal that would become our pattern for Communion.

Beloved church, let us seek to make a world where all people are free to thrive.