

8/24/2025 - Trinity Episcopal Church Santa Barbara - Pride Sunday

Sermon written by: Theo Patterson

Dear Queer People Everywhere,

I hope you know how deeply beloved you are by God. Whether you are here in this house of worship or in a house of worship where you will be alienated or condemned for your existence, you are beloved. Whether you have been to church many times, or you are brand new, you are beloved. Whether you will not, cannot, or still are warming up to the idea of even setting foot in a church, I pray that God's relentless love will find you in ways us church-goers couldn't even comprehend. You are loved fully by God just as you are. Without shame, without the expectation of changing the sexual orientation or gender identity you have been blessed with. You are loved.

Amen. (Please be seated)

Today we celebrate Pride Sunday at Trinity. It is an honor and a miracle that we are able to recognize and celebrate God's LGBTQ+ children so visibly this morning, from the rainbow of colors that we are wearing to the collaborative Pride art project that we will be able to engage with at Coffee Hour. I am also honored to be standing on a legacy of LGBTQ+ advocacy that has shaped our

church's history, from our role in providing support to affected community members during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, to our involvement of Santa Barbara's chapter of PFLAG, which is a support group for LGBTQ+ people, their families, and friends. I also think of the queer leaders who have paved the way before me in this pulpit: Rev. Mark Asman who was Trinity's rector for 22 years and Santa Barbara's first openly gay spiritual leader. Our church's intern last year, Cienna Dumaoal, who preached on Pride Sunday 2024 about Pride being the "consciousness of one's own dignity." And activist and former pastor Karen Rice who addressed our congregation this year about the urgent importance of centering Trans people in our community during this time of heightened persecution. I am humbled to be following in their footsteps, and in the footsteps of the many other queer leaders, allies, and family members of our parish. With all this in mind, I want to preach today about Pride being the freedom that comes from being fully known and loved.

A queer friend of mine recently told me the story of the first time they set foot in Trinity after many years away from organized religion or any type of spirituality at all. I share this story with their permission. My friend was planning to attend our evening Compline service that runs monthly during the school year. Their past experiences with religion had been anything but encouraging, and the wounds of exclusion and condemnation from prior attempts to connect with God in a house of worship still wore heavy on their heart. With a whole lot of

trepidation and a whole lot of bravery, this friend decided it was time to try again. After taking their first steps into this sanctuary, this friend told me that their first thought upon entering into the space was shock that God didn't immediately send down flames from heaven to scorch them on the spot. Think about that image for a second. The words and actions of prior religious people, some of them claiming the name of Jesus, had painted such a picture of God that would lead this person to believe that God would rather burn up an LGBTQ+ person on entry rather than let them even make it past the door. It's deeply disturbing and saddening that our witness as Christians to our queer siblings has been compromised by hate and violence so deeply to the point of disfiguring the unconditional love of God in this way: from the pulpit all the way to the doorstep.

Thankfully, divine flames didn't strike this friend down on the spot. They settled into the back of service and found welcome, peace, and connection in a way that led them to come back again. And again. Until now, when they are attending and participating regularly in this beautiful community that they had previously been led to believe would be a divine incinerator. Praise God for this story of welcome, inclusion, and redemption for a beloved LGBTQ+ person, a story that is tragically still so rare in our world.

In today's gospel reading from the account of Jesus' life as told by his follower Luke, we find another person who is beginning to take tentative steps into a house of worship. A woman who Luke writes has been crippled by a spirit for

eighteen years. This physical ailment leaves her bent over severely, and in my mind, I imagine it would take enormous courage and effort for her to make it to the synagogue on the holy Sabbath day of worship and teaching. Jesus is in the synagogue too, which was the very same place that he began his public ministry, in chapter 4 of the Gospel of Luke when he announces his work by quoting the prophet Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,

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to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And now, nine chapters later, Jesus is going to keep practicing what he preaches. He calls out to the woman and invites her over. With a miraculous act of healing, he sets the woman free from her ailment, and the woman responds boldly in faith by praising God.

Like clockwork, the haters in the comment section feel the need to open their mouths and remind everyone of the rules of their religious tradition: work is to be done on six days, but the Sabbath day is for rest! As if Jesus, who has literally been teaching in the synagogue since he was 12 years old, doesn't already know this. He calls out the religious elites for their hypocrisy with an illustration from everyday life: we untie domestic animals to give them a drink of water, even on the Sabbath day, so why shouldn't this woman be untied from her bondage as well?

Jesus knows that this woman has been suffering for eighteen years, he sets her free, and he calls her a daughter of Abraham, taking pride in her whole identity, by blessing her with freedom from bondage, rooted in a deep knowing of her story and struggles.

Pastor Mark Scandrette, who has spoken at Trinity before and is an expert on practical Christian spirituality, talks about this as the path of right motive, one of the core nine teachings of Jesus's beatitudes, or blessings on how to live. By moving from a place of hiding, to a place of whole-hearted authenticity, we show God and one another who we truly are. It is as if we are saying "here I am, all of my messy and beautiful self!" It is from this place of authenticity and being fully known, that God blesses us with clarity and freedom. In Jesus's words: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

This freedom as a result of being fully known is worth celebrating, and it is a core tenet of LGBTQ+ Pride celebrations around the world. But this type of Pride is not only for queer people, it is a message of Good News for all of us. Whoever we are, whatever parts of ourselves we would rather keep closeted or diminished, whether for safety or from shame, can be brought fully and openly before Jesus in an act of whole-hearted authenticity. Maybe you have been in a place of bondage for eighteen years like the woman in today's gospel story, or maybe it has been even longer. Maybe you know you are part of the LGBTQ+ community but you have never told anyone about it. Maybe you are worried you are too loud, too short, too full of color, too sick, too foreign, too addicted, too fat, too queer, too broken, too mentally ill, or too lost to be fully known. But I have some good news for you: none of those things are true. You are fully loved for all of who you are. I know that God takes pride in you and there is unimaginable freedom that is worth celebrating that is waiting for you. I pray that you can wholeheartedly bring your authentic self before God so that God can bless you with newfound freedom. And I pray that you can find safe people in your life who can also fully know you, so that you may experience freedom in community with other free people.

Pride is a gift to all of us. We honor being lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and all other diverse expressions of gender and sexuality. It's not just that we tolerate

it. It's not just a polite respect for it. We celebrate diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity in the people of God because queerness reminds us that God bashes the binaries, loves relentlessly in ways that the world deems unacceptable, and blesses us with the freedom that comes from being fully known and loved.

Before I conclude, I cannot help but speak on the Old Testament passage today from the prophet Isaiah as well. Isaiah speaks about a breach. To me, it echoes of those spaces and people and places where the gift of Pride will not be honored or celebrated, but this gift will be sidelined or worse. I think about the chasm that is often so wide between the Christianity of this land and the Christianity of Christ, to borrow words from Frederick Douglass. The breach seems impossible to comprehend, let alone bridge. Isaiah speaks prophetically to this disconnect. When we refrain from pointing fingers and playing a blame game. When we speak love and life instead of speaking evil. When we give food to the hungry. When we take care of those afflicted by suffering. And when we honor the Sabbath, following the steps of our loving Lord to release people from bondage on this holy day of rest. THAT is when the light will rise in the darkness. THAT is when we shall be guided by the Lord. THAT is when our foundations will be rebuilt and the breach will begin to be healed.

Notice how Isaiah doesn't say "when your team wins an election" the breach will be healed. Notice how he doesn't say "when you win a debate about the Bible and

homosexuality” the breach will be healed. Notice how there is no instruction to “maximize your impact by working through the Sabbath” to repair the breach. While elements of each of these ideas might contain pieces of what Isaiah is calling for, I am often tempted to think these things are the work in entirety, and I get so easily distracted from focusing on the essentials. The work is not easy. But Jesus has exemplified the way for us, and the work of redemption has already been finalized by him. We follow in his steps, cognizant of our belovedness, taking Pride in the freedom of being fully known and loved. And we are not alone, but we have a community who is working and celebrating with us, until the day when the breach is finally fully repaired.

Trinity, we are doing amazing work of welcome, belonging, and repairing the breach. Thank you for demonstrating God’s great love for LGBTQ+ people and being champions of Pride today and throughout the year. Thank you for being a church community where I and so many other queer people can say “Here I am!” and find freedom in being fully known and loved. Peace and Pride to you all on this special Sabbath day!