

The Beautiful, Outrageous, Uncloseted, Queer Love of Christ
Sunday, February 25, 2024, 10:00 a.m.
All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Mike Kinman

He's here in the midst of it –
right at the centre of the dance floor,
robe hitched up to His knees
to make it easy to spin

At some point in the evening
a boy will touch the hem of His robe
and beg to be healed, beg to be
anything other than this;

and He will reach His arms out,
sweat-damp, and weary from dance.
He'll cup this boy's face in his hand and say,

my beautiful child
there is nothing in this heart of yours
that ever needs to be healed.

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We get the messages early.

That we are not enough.
Not good enough.
Not straight enough.
Not talented enough.
Not tough enough.
Not compliant enough.

We get the messages that what is deepest inside us that we cannot change is somehow at best unacceptable and at worst shameful.

And we learn to trust those voices more than and instead of our own bodies, instead of our own desires, instead of our own emotions ... even instead of other voices that try to convince us that we are enough, that we are more than enough.

We get these messages so early ... and they become the internal voiceover that narrates our lives.

Growing up, I attended St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church and School in Tucson, and the rector, who was also the school's headmaster, one day gathered a bunch of us together to rehearse singing *We Three Kings* at a parish Epiphany service.

He had each of us sing a solo part in front of the group and those whom he deemed to be "good singers" were given a solo verse to sing. I had always been told I was a good singer so I sang with confidence and was rewarded with a verse.

My friend, Ian, had always been told he couldn't sing and so when it came his turn he had very little confidence and his uncertainty made it hard for him to hold a tone. And he knew it.

And so, when Father Fowler told him that he should "just stand in the back row and quietly drone."

Drone ... that was the word he used.

And when the rest of us in our 7th and 8th grade insecurity laughed along ... myself included, Ian went along with it and laughed as he took his space in the back row.

There are moments in my life ... too many of them ... where I look back and I wish I hadn't been afraid to say something.

I wish I hadn't been so grateful that it was him being singled out for ridicule and not me and so afraid to lose the privilege I had as one of Father Fowler's favorites.

I wish I had the presence of mind to say, "Don't say that about my friend. He has an amazing voice."

Because he does.

Let me tell you about Ian's voice.

Ian has a voice that has comforted me in times of despair and sadness for nearly 50 years.

He has a voice that has consistently brought compassion, humor and brilliance into my life.

He has a voice that I know would never tell me I was less than, would never tell me I wasn't good enough, would never tell me that I was anything but loveable, and has never called me anything but friend.

And yet in that moment, I stood by as he was told to take that beautiful voice and silence it. To stand in the back and drone so that the supposed unworthiness of his voice wouldn't "ruin" the piece of music. And obediently, he did just that.

It was the church and humanity at our worst.

Because here's the thing. Ian could sing.

My choir director in seminary, Vicki Sirota, maintained that barring a physical disability everyone can sing. And to prove it she set as the final exam for the liturgical music portion of her course that every student had to sing the Exsultet – that extraordinarily difficult piece of music the deacon traditionally sings at the Easter Vigil. You know "Rejoice now ... heavenly hosts and choirs of angels."

And for her entire teaching career, she said, nobody had ever failed to do it. The key is trusting that you can sing.

Trusting that God gave you a voice and it is unique and beautiful, and it works wonderfully. And ... it might not sound like other people's voices ... and thank God. Because we don't need you to sound like anyone else ... we need you to sound like you, boldly, loudly, joyfully.

Vicki said to me once that we allow others to tell us we can't do something ... or we tell ourselves we aren't good enough because we don't imagine we can live up to a standard of perceived excellence that makes us acceptable.

When I was writing a piece of music for her class and became so upset and ashamed that it seemed so simplistic and unworthy, Vicki looked at me and said "stop comparing yourself to Bach. We've already had a Bach and he was wonderful. But Bach is dead. Be Mike."

Sometimes the stakes are relatively low ... like believing we can sing. And sometimes the stakes are unbelievably high. Our very identity high. Life and death high. But even the life and death stakes have their roots in the simple debilitating command:

Stand in back and drone.

The poem I read a few minutes ago is titled "Jesus at the Gay Bar" ... it's by Jay Hulme, an award-winning transgender poet, speaker and theologian.

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*my beautiful child
there is nothing in this heart of yours
that ever needs to be healed.*

I am not sure there is an image of Jesus that resonates more deeply with everything I've experienced of the Christ at their absolute best.

Jesus hitching up his robe and dancing furiously to house music.

Jesus stumbling home as the sun peeks over the horizon carrying her heels in her hand with her heart still beating fast from how her lovers made her body feel. And how she made their bodies feel.

Jesus gently, nervously and joyfully touching themselves for the first time after their top surgery.

Jesus singing at the top of their lungs not “not caring if anyone hears” but longing for everyone to hear because they know what they have to sing and the unique way they sing it is not only incredibly glorious but valuable and necessary. That it would be to the world’s great poverty if their song didn’t reach the world’s ears.

There is an uncloseted, unbound, queer, reckless abandon to the way Jesus lives and loves. And that is how God dreams for us to live and love because that is how God lives and loves us.

Do you want to know what seeing God face to face is like? It is coming face to face with a love that can’t stop giggling in delight .. because that’s what God does whenever she is thinking about you ... and she is always thinking about you.

You. Your personality. Your voice. Your body ... yes, your body. Your body just as you are and your body just as you are becoming is a delight to God. How you love and who you love is a delight to God. Everything about you makes God’s heart skip a beat.

Everything about you makes God’s heart race like you just passed her a note in Algebra class.

She doesn’t want you to drone, she wants you to serenade and she wants to serenade you with an endless chorus of love songs.

And ... too often, that is not the God we generally experience in Church. For nearly 2,000 years, we have done everything we can to closet the divine.

For nearly 2,000 years, we have done everything we can to force God’s exuberant outrageousness into hiding.

For nearly 2,000 years, we have dressed Christ up as my old school headmaster and told the beautiful, outrageous, queer people of God – and by the way, that’s all of us ... we are all queer in magnificent, different ways – we just have various competencies at hiding it. For nearly 2,000 years, we have dressed Christ up as my old school headmaster and told the beautiful, outrageous, queer people of God to stand in back and drone.

And the real Jesus has wept because she gets so tired of singing and dancing with everyone else but us.

In this morning’s Gospel, Jesus and the disciples are living the life God dreams. Enjoying the way food tastes in their mouths, the sensation on the tongue, the joy of sharing a meal and sating a

ravenous appetite. And on the surface, the religious authorities seem to have a simple and commonsense objection voiced by mothers from time immemorial:

“Can you please just wash your hands before you come to the table?”

Except the issue is not one of simple hygiene. For the clergy, it’s not enough just to wash your hands. Rabbinic tradition dictated a specific handwashing ritual before eating.

So, the issue was that they didn’t wash their hands up to the clergy’s standards. Doing something the supposed “right way” was more important than meeting each other in a place of love and hospitality.

For the clergy, appearances, maintaining a specific cultural tradition and not making people for whom the status quo is natural and familiar uncomfortable is more important than every child of God being able to participate in the beautiful, outrageous, queer love of God.

And in fact, Jesus hitches up their robe and twirls in a fascinating direction with the example they give. The clergy have formed a tradition that says you can take all the money you were going to use caring for your parents, leaving them destitute, and give it to the church. In other words, it’s OK to betray the most basic ethic of caring for our elders as long as it is in the financial interests of the church.

And that is where the rubber hits the road, isn’t it? When the beautiful, outrageous, uncloseted queer love of God comes smack up against the church’s financial solvency? Which God will we serve ... which Jesus do we dance with – or not dance with – then?

And queerness is the right word. It’s why the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and otherwise queer people in our midst are essential to the life of the Body of Christ not as ornamentation but as exemplars and gurus of the fabulous and courageous queerness of Christ.

The brilliant scholar Marcella Althaus-Reid ... and please do yourself a favor and read her incredible books [Indecent Theology](#) and [The Queer God](#) ... Marcella reminds us that “Queering theology is the path of God’s own liberation.... It is irreverent in the sense that it tends to desacralize *what has been made sacred for the sake of ideological interests*. There is nothing quite like queer theology for making fun of (the) idols” we have constructed and insist on vesting with the power of the Gospel.

Queer theology reminds us that “our task and our joy is to find or simply recognize God sitting amongst us, at any time, in any gay bar or in the home of a camp friend who decorates her living room as a chapel and doesn’t leave her rosary at home when going to a salsa bar.”

A Jesus who eats with unclean hands reminds us that there is no part of us that can ever be unclean. That our desires are holy because they emanate, like Jesus themselves, from our own embodied experience of the life of the divine dwelling in us. Our desires, our experiences of being embodied, of longing for and being longed for, of touching and being touched, of expressing out loud what is deepest inside of us even if we are unsure of it ourselves ... these are the most powerful forces in the universe and their power can both entrance and terrify us.

And so, we fearfully imprison ourselves in theologies that become like someone admonishing us for coloring outside the lines... and yet what happens outside those lives is the wildness and excitement of God’s shalom. Inside the lines, we can control the Gospel and use it to support the systems that bring order at the expense of those who fall outside those boundaries. And like the clergy in this Gospel story, we too often value the rules over the relationships, the dogma over the dancing.

*Mama always told me not to look into the eyes of the sun
But mama, that's where the fun is*

Althaus-Reid writes, “Ideas are formed by social interactions and people’s experiences, and then, like an act of magic, people disappear and disembodied ideas become persons, while real persons ... become inanimate objects.”

There is no end to the irony of making Jesus the arbiter of this purity culture. The Jesus who dances at the gay bar is not a God who gave us bodies to test our ability to resist them, but a God who, as Greg Boyle writes: “Is too occupied in being unable to take Her eyes off of us to spend any time in raising an eyebrow in disapproval.”

And yet that purity culture has infected and continues to infect the church. And the roots run deep. And transforming and healing it is not just the low-hanging fruit for us of recognizing that whoever you are and wherever you find yourself on your journey of faith you are welcome to Christ’s table.

It is in all things moving from tolerance to radical welcome and embrace. It is recognizing that that in worship or community that might be deeply meaningful to me might be oppressive to another.

That we too often and easily confuse our deep and sacred experience of the divine in worship and community with the specific cultural trappings in which we have experienced it.

That being God's beloved community means, in the words of Evangelical Pastor Adam Philips whose church was kicked out of the Evangelical Covenant Church denomination for radically embracing LGBTQ+ persons at the heart of their congregational community, that "One way of loving people is to acknowledge that they have desires which exclude us."

Put another way, if this sermon or that anthem or this piece of liturgy or that ministry isn't resonating with you it might not mean that it's bad or wrong but that this one is for someone else and we can rejoice that we get to be a part of another part of the community being fed and trust that we are loved enough and that other aspects of this community will similarly feed us.

The revolutionary Jesus who chastised those clergy and who is dancing right now in some gay nightclub doesn't want you to stand in back and drone.

The only purity culture the dancing, queer, uncloseted, outrageous, revolutionary Jesus cares about is purity of heart in how we try to love each other and ourselves.

Our friend Brandi Miller had a great podcast series on dismantling purity culture and in one episode she talks about how her therapist regularly tells her that which is feeling disquieted and disjointed within her "makes sense" given the purity culture in which she was raised.

She says:

"It makes sense that if *the mission* was always seen as the most important thing, that it feels like your needs, wants and boundaries can easily get pushed aside."

*It makes sense that it is hard to honor your own limits and decisions if you were taught that God wants compliance and obedience over participation and relationship.

*It makes sense that making decisions about your life would feel difficult if you were raised to think there was one right answer about what you should do next (and you're screwed if you get it wrong).

*It makes sense that it is difficult to know how you're feeling in your body if you were told not to trust your body for a very long time.

The answer is not to double down on the Pharisaic mistake. It is to double down on dancing. To remember, in Miller's words,

"You do not need to be afraid of yourself. You are free to question and explore.

"You deserve a healthy relationship with your body and you are worthy of the time, space and resources it takes to create that relationship.

“Pleasure is not a sin. Delight and pleasure are a beautiful part of being alive.”

To remember that “you are whole. You are healing. Purity culture often preaches that you could be broken beyond repair. Instead, hear that there is no ‘too far gone,’ you are always worthy of wholeness and healing.”

Our bodies are for honoring, not policing. We are queer followers of a queer Christ. And thank God for that.

Jay Hulse wrote another poem, this one called “‘Queer’ is a Calling”

They want us to be

ashamed of this, God

so why did you make us?

Spin stars together

in shapes that never quite

fit?

We were called to

complete your creation.

Like the skies

we were shaped

by your song.

We are wonderfully, outrageously, queerly made ... every one of us. Like the skies we were shaped by God’s song and God wants nothing else for you to sing it out loud with joy and power.

Please, no droning.

Amen.