

LGBTQ Pride 2022: Setting Audacious Goals & Celebrating Incremental Victories
Pride & Trinity Sunday, June 12, 2022, 9:00 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Susan Russell

*Drawn by thy quickening grace, O Lord,
in countless numbers let them come
till with this Bread shall all be blest
who see the light or feel the sun.*

It was August 1998 and I was a brand new priest serving as the Associate Rector at St. Peter's in San Pedro. It was the Sunday after the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops had adopted resolution Lambeth 1.10 declaring homosexuality "incompatible with scripture" -- and as the bread and wine was brought forward to the altar -- I stood behind it with tears streaming down my face as I tried to sing those words ... gutted by the disconnect between the words of the hymn and the actions of the church.

- Where was there room for quickening grace in the face of oppressive systemic homophobia?
- What about the countless numbers of God's beloved LGBTQ people who heard the bishops who were called to be shepherds of the flock say there was no place for queer sheep at this table?
- And how, oh how, were we going to muster the energy, power, drive or resources to engage in the kind of struggle it was going to take to overcome such a massive setback?

And so we wept.
And then we persisted.

In December 1998, our own Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles took the step -- which others would follow -- of adopting a resolution at our diocesan convention "declining to receive" Lambeth Resolution 1.10 as being contrary to our baptismal promise to respect the dignity of every human being. In 2000 our General Convention adopted a resolution opening the way to the blessings of same-sex covenants -- and eventually to marriage equity. In 2003 Gene Robinson became the first openly gay bishop ... emphasis on the openly ... in the Anglican Communion.

The struggle to become a church where full inclusion is not just a resolution we adopt but a reality we live has continued -- sometimes an inch at a time -- sometimes two steps forward and one step back -- all toward the goal of the church becoming the Beloved Community reflected in today's words of Wisdom from Proverbs:

*I was God's delight day after day,
rejoicing in being in God's presence continually,
rejoicing in the whole world*

and delighting in humankind!

Delighting in humankind -- wonderfully and marvelously made in all its extravagant diversity -- each and every one of us made in the image of the God who loved us enough to become one of us in order to show us how to love one another.

Where the church has too often gotten it wrong -- and continues to get it wrong -- is when it conflates AN image of God for THE image of God ... and then starts creating dogmas and doctrines and structures and strategies to protect "the" image at all costs ... rather than delighting in humankind in all its glorious diversity.

Which *could* lead me -- on this Trinity Sunday -- to launch into a discourse on the mysteries of doctrine of the Trinity ... up to and including how veneration of the narrowly binary male-centric language finite human beings came up with in an attempt to describe the infinite creator of all being led to the deification of maleness and the entrenchment of a patriarchal worldview that has done nothing to serve the Good News of God's inclusive love available to absolutely everyone proclaimed by the radical rabbi from Nazareth.

But I'm not going to go there today. More on that on July 3rd -- when I plan to preach about reclaiming both our theology and our democracy from toxic patriarchalism. Mark your calendars.

Today, however, is the day we celebrate Pride Sunday -- which is many things to many people -- and one of those things is a day to celebrate the struggle.

It is a day to mark how far we've come as a church and as a nation in the journey toward both full inclusion and equal protection for every single beloved child of God ... no matter where they fall on the continuum of gender identity or sexual orientation ... no matter what letter they claim in the LGBTQ+ alphabet song.

It is a day to regroup, recharge and recommit ourselves to continue that struggle -- for even while we mark with pride and gratitude the tremendous progress that has been made, we recognize that there is still work to do: not only to continue to move forward, but to challenge those who would push us back.

It is an opportunity to remember the work of those on whose shoulders we stand; AND it is an opportunity to harness the celebratory energy Pride creates to get back to the work of the fight that remains before us.

George Regas -- our rector emeritus of blessed memory -- described that work with these words:

*We live out the Gospel in the world
by setting audacious goals
and celebrating incremental victories.*

On this Pride Sunday 2022, the audacious goal
we have set before us is nothing less
than the kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven
we pray for every time we gather –
a world where respecting the dignity of every human being
is not just a promise we make but a reality we live.
It is work we are all called to
as members of the Body of Christ in the world –
called to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

And this morning I think of all those who have gone before us ...
tilling the soil and planting the seeds
of radical inclusion and courageous justice ... prophetic leaders in our own Episcopal Church:

Like **Presiding Bishop Ed Browning** –
who opened a new chapter when he declared
“In this church there will be no outcasts.”

Like **Priest and Poet Malcolm Boyd** –
whose “Are You Running with Me Jesus”
fed the hunger of a generation of people
who had given up on the church
or anyone connected with it
having anything relevant to say.

Like **Jim White**: Who walked in the first L.A. Gay Pride parade in 1970
(one year after the Stonewall riots happened)
with no bands, no politicians -- or bishops -- in convertibles.
No one watching from the sidewalks
except some random families
who had come to Grauman's Chinese to see a matinee.

And I think of **Daniel Howell** of blessed memory:
who marched in 1990 the L.A. Pride Parade
in an alb with a processional cross –
taking it upon himself to represent the Diocese of Los Angeles.
And by 1991 we had an organized presence in the parade
and by 1992 there was an official Bishop’s Commission for LGBT ministry
in the Diocese of Los Angeles.

These stories are but the tip of the iceberg of the great cloud of witnesses on whose shoulders we stand this morning as we continue the work they have passed off to us.

On this Pride Sunday 2022 the awesome truth is that we have MUCH good news to tell ... and we live and move and have our being in a culture literally dying to hear it.

To hear that they are loved.

To hear that they are welcome.

To hear that those who pass "Don't Say Gay" bills
and attack LGBTQ youth in general
and transgender and non-binary kids in particular
do not speak for us and do not speak for Jesus.

La lucha continua -- the struggle continues -- and the struggle is real.
And yet ... here we are.

On Friday night we had a Gay Prom here on the quad lawn at All Saints Church.

On Saturday we ordained Tim Hartley into the sacred order of deacons ... with his (dare we say "City Councilman-elect") husband and ridiculous fabulous sons by his side.

And today we are gathered here to celebrate a Pride Sunday that includes the baptism of August Quinn -- as the Progress Pride flag flies proudly over the Northwest door and the Spirit of Wisdom is right here with us ... *delighting in humankind* in all its extravagant diversity.

If you'd told new-priest Susan who stood weeping behind that San Pedro altar in 1998 that in twenty-four years later all that would be possible I'm not sure she would have believed you.

And yet ... here we are.

Audacious goal still on the horizon --
but SO many incremental victories to celebrate.

That's the Good News of God in Christ Jesus AND the Episcopal Church that we have each and every one of us been commissioned to proclaim and that is the work to which we have been called to do.

I want to close with these words from Barbara Mudge --
the one-time Vicar of St. Francis in Simi Valley --
who ended every service with these words of dismissal:

**The holiest moment is now --
fed by word and sacrament**

go out to be the church in the world.

In a moment we will turn our attention to this altar –
the center of our life in Christ – to be fed by the bread made holy
... strength for the journey and sustenance for the struggle
of choosing to be church;
of choosing to reclaim that inch of the planet in front of us;
of choosing to make God's justice roll down like waters;
of choosing to love absolutely every one of our neighbors as ourselves
and of refusing to rest until all who are hungry have been fed.

*Drawn by thy quickening grace, O Lord,
in countless numbers let them come
till with this Bread shall all be blest
who see the light or feel the sun.*

Now -- let's go be church.
Amen.