

Believing the Future into Being: A Pride Sermon for 2025
Sunday, June 29, 2025, 10:00 a.m.
All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Susan Russell

It was 1974 and Dr. Louie Crew and his partner Ernest had just arrived in San Francisco from Georgia for a summer teaching gig. As Louie told the story, he called Grace Cathedral and asked to speak to someone who could connect them with other gay Episcopalians. His call was transferred six times and met with stifled laughter ... an experience which was – in his words – “devastating.”

"I knew what they were doing was violating the wholeness through which I was experiencing God," he said. And so he turned to Peter Haynes -- a Berkley parish priest and ally -- who sympathized with him and then challenged him.

"So what are you going to do about it?" Peter asked.

"I'm going to start an organization," Louie said.

"What are you going to call it?" Peter asked.

"Integrity" said Louie ... "to reclaim what has been violated."

Louie Crew loved the Episcopal Church too much to let it settle for what it was, and resolved to challenge it to become what it could be.

And the rest – as they say – is history.

Fifty years later, the church that laughed at Louie Crew has a decades long track record of affirming LGBTQ inclusion with General Convention resolutions supporting everything from marriage equality for same-sex couple to gender-affirming health care for transgender youth.

There are currently six openly LGBTQ bishops serving in the House of Bishops, our national church staff includes a transgender Missioner for Gender Justice and a Task Force on LGBTQ Inclusion is part of its organizational structure.

And this year, for the first time ever, our still wet-behind-the-ears Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe presided at a service of Blessing and Commissioning from the Church Center in New York City for all those throughout the Episcopal Church who would make God's love tangible in Pride Events across the nation ... something many of us never have imagined we would live long enough to see.

Yes, there is still work to do.

No, we will not be done until the full inclusion of all the baptized in all the sacraments – which is still an aspirational goal in some places in this church – is *fait accompli* in **all** places in this church.

And **absolutely** it is true

that our journey on that arc of history
we are told bends toward justice
is a journey of two steps forward, one step back --
a truth that has never been more clear than it is in this moment
when the forces marshalled to turn back the clock
on LGBTQ rights in the civic arena
have been working overtime and scoring victories right, left and center.

The struggle is very real.

Nevertheless, we persist – persist in reclaiming that which has been violated: refusing to settle for the world as it is ... challenging it to become what it was created to be.

And as we do, we remember that we stand on the shoulders of those – like Louie and countless others – whose faith and commitment and action paved the way for us to come this far on the way ... from where we were then to where we are now.

From a church where at the 2000 General Convention queer deputies and affirming dioceses were subjected to “The Great Salt War” as a deputy from Dallas sprinkled “blessed” salt on their chairs on the floor of the House of Deputies as a symbol of cleansing, healing and exorcism. Yes, the violation was real.

From a church where in 2003 when Gene Robinson was consecrated as the 9th Bishop of New Hampshire, attendees had to walk through metal detectors and pass by bomb sniffing dogs in order to be part of the service where the gay bishop-elect wore a bullet proof vest – and straight allies like this guy sitting right here stood next to him without one. Yes, the threat was real.

From a church that in 2006 -- when it found itself on the verge of being voted off the Anglican Communion Island for its commitment to LGBTQ inclusion -- “blinked” by enacting a three-year moratorium on any additional queer bishops in order to guarantee our bishops an invitation to the world-wide conference of Anglican bishops at Lambeth in 2008. Yes, the betrayal was real.

It has been a journey to be sure. And it is a journey that is far from over. But part of what sustains us on that journey are moments like these when we pause to remember the past in order to change the future.

When we recommit ourselves reclaiming what has been violated as part of the work of becoming Beloved community ... reclaiming what has been violated by becoming community where this is no “other” ... where there is no “them” ... there is only “us.”

Where the power of the love we experience in Jesus -- the one who loved us enough to become one of us in order to show us how to love one another -- will be made so tangible that this beautiful and broken world will be realigned with God’s love, justice and compassion.

And where do we start? One place to start is with prayer.

Not the kind of perfunctory prayers
politicians invoke with their hollow, predictable responses
to mass shootings and natural disasters
while voting against gun control
and denying the existence of Climate Change.

Not the kind of prayer Miroslav Volf
was talking about when he wrote,
“There is something deeply hypocritical
about praying for a problem you are unwilling to resolve.”

The kind of prayer I’m talking about is the kind Walter Wink wrote about in his seminal book
“Engaging the Powers:”

*When we pray we are not sending a letter to a celestial White House,
where it is sorted among piles of others.
We are engaged, rather, in an act of co-creation,
in which one little sector of the universe rises up
and becomes translucent, incandescent,
a vibratory center of power
that radiates the power of the universe.
History belongs to the intercessors,
who believe the future into being.
Intercession, far from being an escape from action,
is a means of focusing for action and of creating action.
By means of our intercessions we veritably cast fire upon the earth
and trumpet the future into being.*

History belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being by acting to repair that which has been violated, to center those who have been marginalized, to be the change they want to see in the world.

And nobody ever said it would be easy. We inherit a whole Bible full of stories of how our spiritual ancestors have been on that two steps forward, one step back journey of living into who they were created to be – sometimes succeeding brilliantly and other times failing dramatically. Hear again these words from our reading from Galatians this morning:

“The whole of the Law is summarized in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you go on snapping at one another and tearing each other to pieces, be careful, or you may end

up destroying the whole community.

In this dire time of rampant polarization and division, Paul's warning rings as true to 21st century Pasadena as it did to 1st century Galatia. And – just for the record – loving your neighbor as yourself is not a sound bite Jesus came up with out of thin air. It is as old as ... wait for it ... **Leviticus**. Leviticus 19:18 to be precise: "*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.*"

I know. Right? Who had Leviticus on their "likely to be quoted in a Pride Sermon" Bingo card?

But there it is. And that core value – that foundational belief is one we aspire to live into as followers of Jesus is one we share with our interfaith siblings ... expressed beautifully in these recent words from our sister in the struggle, Rabbi Sharon Brous:

Our work is not only to preach a theology of love and belonging, but to ensure that our communities strive to embrace that mandate ... a sacred mandate to hear each other, to embrace each other, to love each other up, especially on the hard days.

To take this mandate seriously means to do everything we can to free our sacred spaces of shame and stigma. Communities of love and belonging are spaces where even at our most vulnerable, we're still willing to show up and start walking, trusting that our community, those circling toward us, won't look away.

The scientific data and spiritual insight here are in strong alignment. Disconnection is a plague on our society ...and the antidote is rich, meaningful connection. We all need someone to meet our vulnerability with concern and care, to weep with us through the night, and to stand with us in the trenches, working with love to build a better world.

To meet our vulnerability ... to stand with us.

Working with love to build a better world.

Working together not only to reclaim that which has been violated – but working with God to dismantle systems that oppress and violate; working with God to make that kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven not just a prayer we pray but a reality we live.

And what does that look like in action?

Where do we even begin?

For me, it looks like this story I've told before but not in quite a while.

It's a story from one of my favorite writers Robert Fulghum.

It's a story called "Giants, Wizards & Dwarfs."

Being left in charge of about 80 children 7 to 10 years old while their parents were off doing parenty things, I mustered my troops in the parish hall and explained the game. It's a large-scale version of Rock, Paper, and Scissors, and involves some intellectual decision making. But the real

purpose of the game is to make a lot of noise and run around chasing people until nobody know which side you are on or who won.

The excitement of the chase had reached a critical mass. I yelled out, "You have to decide now which you are: a GIANT, a WIZARD, or a DWARF". While the groups huddled in frenzied, whispered consultation, a tug came at my pant leg. A small child stands there looking up, and asks in a small concerned voice, "Where do the Mermaids stand?"

A long pause. A very long pause. "Where do the Mermaids stand?" I say. "Yes, you see, I am a Mermaid." "There are no such things as Mermaids." "Oh yes there is, I am one!" She did not relate to being a Giant, a Wizard, or a Dwarf. She knew her category - Mermaid - and was not about to leave the game and go over and stand against the wall where the loser would stand.

She intended to participate, wherever Mermaids fit into the scheme of things, without giving up dignity or identity. She took it for granted that there was a place for mermaids and that I would know just where.

Well, where DO the Mermaids stand? All the Mermaids - all those who are different, who do not fit the norm, and who do not accept the available boxes and pigeonholes? Answer that question and you can build a school, a nation or a kingdom on it. What was my answer at the moment? Well, every once in a while I say the right thing.

"The Mermaid stands right here, by the King of the Sea!" I said. And so we stood there, hand in hand, while the Wizards and Dwarfs and Giants rolled by in wild disarray.

"It is not true, by the way, that Mermaids do not exist," Fulghum concludes. "I know at least one personally. I have held her hand."

And so have I. I have held the hand of more than one who has come to this church of ours. I have seen the joy and amazement on their faces when they find there is not only a place to stand but there is a community to stand with them, where they are welcome and invited guests in a radical welcome that says "whoever you are and wherever you find yourself on the journey there is a place for you here." Wizards. Dwarfs. Giants. Mermaids.

Where at our best, all are not only included but celebrated – where there are no strangers at the gate or mermaids on the margins.

Where whoever you are and wherever you find yourself on the journey, you know that the God who loves you beyond your wildest imaginings journeys with you. And so do we.

And where making that love manifest to the world is the work we have been collectively given to do ... knowing there will be setbacks and challenges along the way –

knowing it is work in progress –
and so are we.

Nevertheless, we persist –
persist in reclaiming that which has been violated:
refusing to settle for the world as it is ...
challenging it to become what it was created to be
as we believe the future into being
as we resist the powers and principalities
which would divide and distract us
and as we act as agents of change and challenge anything --
absolutely anything –
that stands in the way
of that other world which is not only possible ...
she is on the way.

Won't you pray with me.

Another world is not only possible. She is on the way. Amen