



A Sermon in Honor of Gay Pride 2009

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On a daily basis I imbue my son with Unitarian Universalist values, “Everyone is important.” “Be kind in all you do.” Everyone has a voice.” Then he takes the bus, a microcosm of society, to and from school. This past spring bus 451 was awash with conversations, jokes, and rumors about being gay. For weeks when he got off the bus, someone had been “accused of being gay,” someone told a gay joke, gay was the “slight” of the day. So my son, who has friends with two mommies and two daddies, struggled with square one, what I tell him and we teach him, and what “everyone else” says. Every day

he told me what was said, and his mind ticked away when I presented him with a different view of what his young friends said. One day, in my anger, I found myself saying “Your friends have small minds and hearts. You do not need to live or think that way.” I’m not really sure they have small minds and hearts. It is more that humans fear difference, and children follow what they are taught. I wondered who on his bus is gay and wondering about his or her sexual orientation. I was reminded once again how quickly parental teachings can be undermined (if not reinforced) and how quickly prejudice is taught, actually assimilated without thought.

At the same time bus 451 struggled with sexual orientation, a member here asked me if her daughter’s high school friend could call me. Her daughter’s high school friend had just come out to her parents, worn a man’s suit to prom, and her parents were not letting her out of the house fearing that her friends were a bad influence. Yes, of course she could call me. I thought about this young man and prayed she was going away to college and that her parents would let her go. I have not yet heard from her.

Finally, I attended a wedding and met the bride’s cousin, a friendly doctor with a wonderful twinkle in her eye. Her twinkle faded a bit as she explained to me that her partner was not here

When you know who you really are, you can celebrate it and be comfortable with it.⁵

This is a whole we need to know, celebrate, uplift, support, and integrate. To know oneself and live with love, these are perhaps the two greatest purposes of life. Too often we think of LGBTQ as different, other, but it is all part of one race, the human race. And as one of the few religions that openly welcomes LGBTQ members with respect, equality, and celebration we have a vital place in the forthcoming parade and movement. It aligns with our principles, it is mission and vision worthy. If we go Cro-Magnon a few of us go as individuals to the Gay Pride Parade. Good. If we keep our eyes on the prize 50 of us (adults and children) in colorful t-shirts and two decorated trucks walk in Gay Pride with our church banner. Great. People notice this. If you want to know who you really are, I hope you will come with me now and next year. Bus 451 will be in service come September. I hope you will come with me and turn the world around.

⁵ From Plymouth University (NH) website, information taken from ETR (www.etr.org)

exist, they are simply a vehicle for expression. Inside, we are all the same.⁴

Seems to me that there are many great things to learn from the LGBTQ community – forgiveness, flexibility, acceptance, the large and small technicolor view. We have things to learn from our LGBTQ brothers and sisters. I also found a list of “Some Things People Enjoy Most About Being GLBT”

The gay community can be welcoming
Most GLBT people value diversity. So you can know people from many different backgrounds.

Gender roles are more fluid. Who cooks dinner? Changes oil in the car? Initiates sex?

You gain a greater awareness of way other groups are oppressed

There’s an openness about sexuality that can be affirming and refreshing

You can see the courage in your friends and yourself in dealing with prejudice

There are exciting cultural events – gay – related film, theater, visual arts, dance, comedy, athletics, poetry, and literature

today because her parents have never met her partner and don’t approve of her “lifestyle.” They consider themselves married, have been together six years, and she took off her ring to come to her cousin’s wedding. I had enormous admiration for this woman, who was steadfast in her identity and love, and able to navigate the prejudice of her family with flexibility and patience. Her cousin, the bride, had told her she was free to come with her partner and throw her parents and their siblings into consternation. But this woman chose not to, preferring to lovingly chip away at an old world family culture, with little room for her, their child.

All three of these things happened in the same month, May, just before Pride. At First Unitarian Church we offer a unique message, the inherent worth and dignity of every person (that’s our first principle and there are no exceptions for sexual orientation – it is a blanket statement), justice, equity and compassion in human relationships (our second principle), and acceptance of one another and our spiritual journeys (our third principle – and note it does not say “toleration,” but calls us higher to acceptance). I know that not all of us are comfortable with supporting people who are LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer/questioning). Perhaps as a child

⁴ Pat Cheney, *The Great Thing About Being a Lesbian*, 2008.

homosexuality was not tolerated in your family, or considered a sin, or kids on the bus made fun of it, or you didn't think you knew anyone LGBTQ. You probably did, but just didn't know it. No one wants to get picked on in the societal school bus.

All of which I was considering – how to preach a sermon gay pride to people with various understandings - when I received an email that I had pronounced someone's name wrong. You think I digress, but it is all part of a whole. While I strove to reflect on freedom and the beauty of diversity, and those at risk for their beauty, I was reminded that I pronounced someone's name wrong last Sunday. I considered other messages in my inbox from the last year – my skirts are too short, I misspelled a word, offensive Latin translations of choral music and what I was going to do about it, questions about who received a fob and why and what did I have to say about it, my opinion on sentence 2 in by-law 4, repeated requests for dates from two visitors (NEVER AND NEVER), and other assorted irrelevancies. My inbox is devolving, Cro-Magnon, and so are we. Our eyes are not on the prize.

I will take responsibility for this. Church consultants Gil Rendle and Susan Beaumont write

happier as a lesbian . . . There are the obvious answers – I am living more honestly and I can be in a fulfilling emotional relationship – but let's face it, there are some downsides, too. Here in Pennsylvania I can lose my job, some people are prejudiced against me, my partner and I can not have our relationship legally recognized. And on and on. So why do I feel so great about being gay? Foremost, because I am living outside the box. My life was transformed from black and white to technicolor once I accepted my lesbianism. Perhaps the rainbow is the perfect symbol for homosexuals after all! I started to view people and circumstances in an altogether different light. I became more forgiving, less rigid . . . After I crossed the barrier from straight to gay in my mind, I began to question other "truths" I was socialized into accepting. My world became much bigger and much smaller at the same time . . . Bigger because I realized there are many paths people can take and that all those paths are valid . . . smaller as I realized that although these differences

accuracy of the Kinsey Report.”³ One of the things I love about Pride is that it is a chance to celebrate what it means to be LGBTQ. So often we hear about what it is like to be gay or queer or questioning in relation to hate crimes and same sex marriage laws. There are many reasons the LGBTQ movement needs to be politicized, notably because we are still living with legal systems that discriminate against anyone even suspected of being LGBTQ. But sometimes this publicity of the LGBTQ community is as exciting as court statements. It has a purpose, but it has lost the personal, which is where we learn to know, accept, and love one another regardless and because of difference.

To me, Pride is a day to celebrate the personal (as well as the anniversary of the Stonewall Riot in 1969 – forty years ago, that made any and all of this possible). The words on the bus missed the beauty of who we are. It is great to be gay, not acceptable, tolerable, or good, but great. I was interested in the thoughts of one writer, Pat Cheney (not the daughter of Dick Cheney) who wrote,

Having lived most of my life as a straight woman, I can honestly say I am much

³ From the website AlterHeros.

Without a clear and shared outcome in place for a staff person’s work, it is impossible to judge if the expenditure of hours, activities, and resources was appropriate or effective. The real issue of hours and resources is not whether they were spent but whether they moved the congregation toward the outcome of ministry to which it is called by its mission. Staff members are not paid to work hard, but to achieve ministry.¹

Do overly picky questions about fobs, skirts, spelling, pronunciation, by-laws, ministerial dates, and Latin move us towards an outcome of ministry as called by our mission? Because bus 451 comes and goes and a teenager came out and wore a suit to prom, and a family still won’t meet their daughter’s partner, and our former Music Director came out at this very pulpit last fall, and last month Dick Cheney said “I think that freedom means freedom for everyone. As many of you know, one of my daughters is gay and it is something we have lived with for a long time in our family. I think people ought to be free to enter into any kind of

¹ “The Importance of Outcomes,” adapted from *When Moses Meets Aaron: Staffing and Supervision in Large Congregations* by Gil Rendle and Susan Beaumont, copyright 2007 by the Alban Institute.

union they wish. Any kind of arrangement they wish. The question of whether or not there ought to be a federal statute to protect this, I don't support. I do believe that the historically the way marriage has been regulated is at the state level. It has always been a state issue and I think that is the way it ought to be handled, on a state-by-state basis. ... But I don't have any problem with that. People ought to get a shot at that.”² Former Vice President Dick Cheney advocates for state recognition of gay marriage and President Obama discusses civil unions. There are some serious values up for discussion, if we keep our eyes on the prize, and we will have fallen down on our liberal religious values and mission if we don't connect them. To begin with, we need to think bigger.

Proposed vision for five years out: First Church has deepened the faith and ethical life of adults through adult education that creates deeper community, resources for adults in crisis, and an expanded ability for First Church to engage in sustainable community outreach. Or, First Church has deepened the faith and ethical life of all ages by practicing a “radical love” that mixes all ages in activities and events and daily demonstrates the beauty of diversity. As part of

² Dick Cheney, National Press Club, May 2009.

programming to achieve this “radical love” the Tattoo Arts Council engaged in six weeks of appreciative inquiry with Knitters United. Maybe this is not the best vision. These are my early attempts to learn vision. But we have to get there, now to live our faith.

How many people here know about appreciative inquiry? It is a model that uses questions to engage understanding. So often I receive emails and phone calls that assume problems and answers. These are dead message when they arrive. They have no life, no curiosity, no flexibility, no relationship. We have to stop peppering one another with requests that have no interest in understanding the system as a whole. I can not create the Pride service we are and need if we remain Cro-Magnon. Release me. Release us. Release yourself.

So that I can share with you some of the 100 Best Things About Being Gay. The LGBTQ community values humor with a dash of irreverence (probably necessary to survive prejudice). I love humor – it is life giving. The list includes “#62 you know that pigs and bears are not necessarily wildlife, #70 You'll never have to hear your mother complain about your wife, and #92 You have no doubts about the