

Sermon for PRIDE

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Pride changes lives.

Well. Yes. But in all honesty, I pretty much grew up believing that when pride changed lives, it wasn't in a good way. "Pride goeth before a fall," my elders would say, shaking their heads sadly. Yet somehow, you knew they were inwardly gloating a little, because there's something not nice in us that sort of likes it when the proud are brought down off their pedestals by the weight of their own foolishness.

It turns out that pride isn't always bad. Pride that's good... that's just another way of looking at it. My experience of the PRIDE tradition in the GLBTQ community has truly given me another way of looking at it.

I walked in my first ever Pride Parade in 2007. I could hardly believe that I was walking down High Street in the capital city of my state, right in front of the Flaggots, and I was waving like Miss America. People applauded as our little group of churches passed by. Applauded! I was proud!

And not a little hooked on the idea of tagging along for the applause. Which can pretty quickly take you into the territory of "pride going before the

fall.” But I digress. This is not about me. Except that it is about my community –the church, the Christian Church, the United Methodist Church. And it is about the voice I have and the role I play in my community, and perhaps most significantly, this is about people I love who are victims of the sin of Pride that our church has committed.

One result of the church’s sin of exclusion has been that a community in exile has been created. The Reconciling community—the church that practices, proclaims and advocates for full exclusion is, for the present, in exile from the official institutional structure. The good news for exiles is that the biblical text knows something about that experience.

Plant gardens. Build houses. Create families. In other words, don’t die waiting for the old normal to come back... create a new normal. Make life. Make life that becomes the source of hope for restoration.

The biblical text knows something about exile. Restoration can take a long time. Seventy years in biblical symbolic language.

The biblical text knows something about exile. God does not forget the exiles.

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. “

doing what we do...making a "new normal" is the most life giving, most hope making church I have ever experienced.

But the Bible doesn't give the exiled community permission to permanently separate itself. It speaks of restoration. And beyond restoration, it speaks of reconciliation.

When we appear at a Pride event, we are ambassadors of reconciliation. We are a new creation... a new church. We are a church not stumbling over false doctrine and faulty proof texting.

But we are vulnerable to the sin of pride, even as we are living evidence of the transformative power of pride.

Dante described pride as the excessive love of self that is perverted into hatred and contempt for one's neighbor.

We who have lived in exile and who are ambassadors of reconciliation much take care that our experience of hope and wholeness and belovedness does not become such that we begin to hold those who do not share our experience in contempt.

Here's the truth. Those people with the bullhorns and the angry not-life-giving message...God has a dream for them too. God has a hopeful future for

them too. They have chosen exile. But we must take care not to come to believe that this exile is God's dream for them any more than it is for us.

And we must realize that we live in two worlds...especially we United Methodists. We live in a community that has been institutionally exiled. But we also live in a community that has chosen to exile itself inside doctrine and proof texting and a false sense of moral superiority. I live in both of these worlds, and there is great overlap between them for most of us.

C. S. Lewis wrote of pride that, "As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on thing and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down you cannot see something that is above you."

The only thing that can save us from both the exile of institutional exclusion and the exile of theological pride is reconciliation.

"Be reconciled," Paul encourages.

And then he tells us that the reconciliation is already accomplished in Christ.

"Be reconciled" is an invitation to faith in this message. It is an invitation to stop thinking about who is exiled on which side of this great divide. To stop thinking about sides altogether.

This is what reconciliation is. This is what we are ambassadors of.

And this is how we do it. We gather. We pray. We protest. We sing. We disobey unjust doctrines. We gather to break a loaf of bread together.

And we remember that this bread is given for our enemies, for the guys with megaphones, for the people that vote against us at General Conference, for people who have given up on church, and for people who are longing for restoration.

We are making hope.

Pride goeth before the fall. Or pride picks you up, stands you up tall and says, "God loves you, and you are reconciled and you are now an ambassador of this good news."

It's just another way of looking at it. The "pride that saves lives" kind of way.

So let's be humbly, gratefully, graciously proud to be followers of Jesus, Gay, Straight, Lesbian, Bi sexual, male to female trans, female to male trans, a sexual, gendered or not. Whatever. Let's all just be human beings!

Let's be humbly, gratefully, graciously proud human beings, loved by God's love in a body broken, blessed and given.

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