

Sermon

A church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.

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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

June 11, 2023

Our gospel today from Matthew is a powerful testament to the ministry of Christ. You can take all other scripture in the Bible and compare it to this for validity. It is the litmus test, so to speak. As I read our passage today, I ask that you listen carefully and do not relate only to what you deem is the message, but put yourself in each person's shoes within this story of love and healing.

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

9As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. 10And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. 11When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

18While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." 19And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. 20Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from

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hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, 21for she said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” 22Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well. 23When Jesus came to the leader’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, 24he said, “Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. 25But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. 26And the report of this spread throughout that district.”

Where did you find yourself within this scripture? Were you Jesus in communion with the people whom others deemed “unworthy” of his time – of his breaking bread with them. Or are there those like the synagogue leader who feels some are a bit more worthy than others. Or are you with the woman who was bleeding for all those years – feeling it is her fight, her faith that makes things better for her. Perhaps we are all a little of each.

June is Pride Month across the world and in the church there are celebrations and commemorations to recognize all of our disciples who identify as LGBTQ and their allies, families and friends.

While the rainbows and glitter may catch your eye, at the heart of [Pride Month](#) is a call for greater unity, visibility and equality for the LGBTQ community, as well as a time to reflect on the milestones of the past 50 years. Some of the

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organizations that have been established since implementing Pride month, to recognize the gay/queer community are:

- [GLAAD](#), a non-government agency founded to promote LGBTQ acceptance along with identifying and preventing discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals.
- [GLSEN](#), a network of students, families and education advocates working to facilitate LGBTQ safety and support in schools.
- The [Equality Federation](#) is a LGBTQ advocacy group working to help advance the rights of LGBTQ people.
- The [National LGBTQ Task Force](#), an advocacy group dedicated to advancing freedom, justice and equality for LGBTQ people.
- The [Library of Congress](#), for history on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer Pride Month.
- The [Anti-Defamation League](#), an anti-hate organization dedicated to fighting bias, extremism, discrimination or hate.
- The [American Civil Liberties Union](#), works to preserve and defend the rights and liberties of U.S. citizens.

Yet much like our scripture today, so many continue to suffer needlessly, some commit suicide over the pain that is inflicted upon them. Maybe, like me, you wonder, how did Pride events even start and why June?

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Pride Month is observed in June to honor the anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, [a touchstone event](#) in LGBTQ history.

In the late 1960s, being openly gay was largely prohibited in most places. New York, in particular, had a rule that the simple presence of someone gay or genderqueer counted as disorderly conduct, effectively outlawing gay bars.

On June 28, 1969, patrons of the Stonewall Inn, a popular bar with a diverse LGBTQ clientele, stood their ground after police raided the establishment. The resulting clash led to days of riots and protests, known as the [Stonewall Uprising](#). So it is told, fighting between the community and law enforcement went on for an entire night into the morning. A transgendered man sat exhausted as did a police officer. It is said all the broken glass looked like glitter shining in the sun and as the two's eyes met, they realized in that moment they no longer needed to hate one another. The fighting could end, at least for them, and this community could be recognized and even celebrated for the love that it represented.

One year later, on the anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, thousands of people flooded the streets of Manhattan in the Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day March, regarded as the first gay pride event ever.

The Pharisees struggled with a similar argument. Our scripture says..."¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Why?

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The woman who comes to Jesus is in need of much more than physical healing- she is in need of reconciliation with community. She is not a sinner – she is the same as the daughter of the Pharisee except that her infliction, her situation has made her an outcaste. The sinners are the community itself for abandoning her through their own ignorance and lack of understanding of her condition. Then through their inability to understand, or lack of trying or being misled by hate, they have injured her and themselves by creating an unnecessary separation between the two. Not benefiting from her love, her talents, her abilities. The Pharisee’s daughter, whom we don’t know nor do we know how she died as it is unimportant, could not be an outcaste simply by her privilege to which she was born. Both those who are outcast and those who are part of the social establishment find in Jesus a compassionate heart. Both those with acute needs and those who are in chronic pain will find healing in Jesus – even a community.

Carrying hate is a burden. It affects our spiritual, physical and emotional well-being. And for those burdened with being labeled an outcaste in some fashion – be it with our life choices or labels that have been imposed upon us, they may believe that they do not deserve help, either from the church or from God, which is the heaviest of all burdens to carry.

Our sense of well-being, no matter how we may have gotten to that place of feeling unworthy or feeling left behind, or our need to impose a label of outcaste upon an individual or community of people, this intersects our relationship with Christ. Throughout the narrative today, conventions are turned upside down, barriers are broken and segregated peoples intermingled. The holy Jesus calls out

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to the sinful tax collector and sits at table with those whom the observing Pharisees consider undeserving. A leader of the synagogue throws protocol aside when he bows down before an unorthodox rabbi. A woman who would have attracted scorn in public nevertheless ventures out into a crowd to reach the one she knows can help. With the touch of his hand, Jesus brings a dead girl back among the living. If such lines as these can be crossed, then surely we can heal ourselves, our own estrangements and segregation that remains.

Our heroes of this passage are two unlikely ones at that...the synagogue leader who puts his pride aside due to his urgent and desperate problem while at the top of the social ladder and a woman, who is not even on the ladder – with a chronic need...both have faith and both despite their social differences, their level of need – both receive attention from Jesus – both receive healing – both are reconciled – one to life and the other to community and wholeness but both are miraculously changed and most importantly, both are equal in condition and circumstance in God's eyes.

Maybe you sit here in some invisible pain – one that you have suffered a long time...or perhaps one we are aware of that we have been praying with you to manage...perhaps you aren't sure how to feel about the Queer community or someone you love who belongs to it. Perhaps today is the day, perhaps now is the time, when, like the police officer at Stonewall – you no longer need to fight but can let go of what was and embrace the love and joy that is.

Each of the six colors of the rainbow flag represent a different [aspect of the LGBTQ movement](#) (not lesbian, gay, bi, transgendered and queer) but: life,

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healing, sunlight, nature, serenity and spirit which is a really beautiful way of describing love..

"If you are not personally free to be yourself in that most important of all human activities — the expression of love — then life itself loses its meaning." — Harvey Milk

Our scripture from Hosea talks of this tension that exists when we stand for justice. Sometimes we stand in opposition with our family members, other members of the community, our friends or even others in the congregation. There are moments when in order to be for the greatest good, we are forced to step outside of our personal comfort zones and be against that which is less than the greatest good. Perhaps we are more comfortable with a “safe” predictable God. One that doesn’t make us rethink things or make us see things in a new way. A computer program that I oversee at ECMC requires us to have a live production and a duplicate one we call the “sandbox”. In the sandbox, we can try out new things to make sure they function as they should and don’t cause major problems in the program before we move it to the production site. But every now and then, we have to do what’s called a refresh where we copy one over the other which means any changes we want to keep, we have to ensure they are established in the live program. So, I challenge you now – please consider a refresh...let go of any old thinking that you were taught was correct – was right – but inflicted pain upon loving, joyful, important, worthy members of our community. If you’ve already performed your own refresh, share that with those who struggle to truly let go.

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Jesus comes to those who are in need and recognize that they are in need. Faith is a restorative agent unto itself, a graceful, unmerited gift from God that precedes the presence of Jesus, providing the rich and fertile soil from which the acts of Jesus may grow and bloom.

Amen