

Sermon for the Second Sunday After Pentecost: Mark 3:20-35

The Rev. Brooks Cato

Well, folks, it's Pride Month, which means, if you're paying attention you've probably seen all sorts of businesses slap rainbows on their logos to show just how much they support the LGBTQ+ community. Shoot, even if you aren't paying all that much attention, you've probably seen all that. Now, the cynic in me wonders just what this is all about. Corporations with questionable policies suddenly virtue signaling makes me nervous, and the appeal to a group of oft-oppressed people feels a little more like a pat on one's own back than real effort. Of course, to some degree this is better than the alternatives, where corporations ignore who their customers are or even degrade who their customers are, but really, just how far am I willing to trust corporations and their do-gooding? Just about as far as I can toss one of their skyscrapers, I suppose.

But with it being Pride Month, of course, the conversations in the secular world seep into church, and we can't help but deal with what queerness means for us, too. For myself, there's a real sense of gratitude for what the Episcopal Church offers. There's a place here for the queer community and those who love them. Thanks be to God! But we're more than that, and we've talked a lot over the past months about how much differences between us matter in this place, which is to say, our differences in church matter a ton and also not at all.

We come to this place with all of our identities, gay, straight, privileged, oppressed, and so on, we come to this place with the gathered realities of the fullness of humanity, and we present all those identities to God as sacred. AND, we come to this place, each one of us equal to each other before God, with our identity as Children of God at the top of the list. And all that is well and good. We learn more about God the more perspectives we have. We grow in our understanding of God the more our established approach is challenged. We deepen the lived reality of our faith the more our world asks us to make space for another. Pride here, I hope, is a Pride in that place for you and those you love. A Pride in the place God has made for you, regardless of your sexuality, your gender identity, or your complete lack of concern for any of that. You are loved and you are created to be just exactly what you are. St. Irenaeus of Lyons has a saying many of y'all have seen hanging up in my own office: "The Glory of God is the human person fully alive." If that means striving to live into whatever identity brings you that fullness, then by all means, by God, live into and glorify God as you do.

You know, there's a lot of racket in the world of people trying to use Christianity as an excuse for their bigotry. This is nothing new, of course, but we're seeing it a lot lately. We have gotten all in a tizzy about what happens behind the bedroom doors of consenting adults while we seem to care less and less about what happens on national news. Sanity and compassion seem to be values fading into the ether of the past while our politicians actively fan the hearths of division and deceit. For the record, one of those is in direct contradiction of Christian values, and the other is about sexual orientation. But in all that bigotry and deceit and manufactured anger, folks keep finding more and more ways to push the ones they love away. I know in my own family, divisions over once-silly things are deep and painful now. And this month, as Pride rainbows take their places on everything from doorsteps to Big Macs, those kinds of divisions are amplified even more. Pride, as Maggie Nelson puts it, "is a refusal to be shamed by witnessing the other as being ashamed of you." But it's often a painful ask, one that may not seem possible or, if it is, serves as a reminder of what's been lost alongside what's been gained.

When the crowds come calling at dinnertime and Jesus steps out of his mother's house, he steps into a world of division pointing the blame for its division right back at him. He must have the devil in him! But he pushes back and critiques the true causes of division, those who fan the flames of discomfort that grow into anger, those who reject the truth of God's love, those who push and push and push until something or someone breaks. He pushes back on those who benefit from the division, and they think he's lost it. They even try to

drive the wedge into his own family. And maybe they succeeded. His mother and brothers tried to keep him from going out in the first place, they tried to get him to be quiet and give his preaching a break, but he couldn't do it. He couldn't set aside the way he was meant to move in this world. He couldn't set aside what he was created to be: the Word of God, incarnate and a part of humanity. And when he gestures to the disciples gathered around him, he names them as his family.

I've always read this with an ear open towards the pain that might've caused his mother and brothers to hear. But I wonder if I've been listening wrong, or listening incompletely. Because what I'm hearing this year is the other side. What I'm hearing this year is closer to what it means to be in someone's chosen family, or to choose a family yourself. Because in the many painful and growing divisions of this world, the loss of one's ability to rely on their family can be immeasurable. It's disappointing and it's tragic and it leaves a hole that needs grieving but never quite heals. To be asked to join one's family of choice is a deep honor, and to invite someone else into your own chosen family is a cherished and vulnerable gift. But it also can't just be offered and assumed to be done. Chosen family requires both the offer and the acceptance of that gift. Jesus grants that deep honor to those who look beyond division and actively seek unity in him.

It is my prayer that we do that for each other, of course. That these faces at St. Thomas' are the beginnings of a chosen family, a place where every person who walks through those doors feels the sense of undying and indivisible inclusion. That these faces at St. Thomas' do better than the corporate pandering of Pride-edition logos and instead open ourselves up to the incredibly rewarding gift of the LGBTQ+ community calling us home. That these faces at St. Thomas' will never be the source of division or pain or bigotry. This is my prayer.

We can be all of that for so many people. And I pray, that if we'd been sitting around that crowded table at Jesus' momma's house, he would've included us in the ones he named as family, too. And as more and more people begin to return to our space, to our increasingly crowded table, I pray that we'll extend the same invitation. Who are my mother and my brothers? Who are my sisters? Who are my gender non-conforming siblings, parents, acquaintances? Here they are. Whoever seeks God and seeks to do God's will, it's them, our chosen family.