

**TRUE COLORS:
A SERVICE OF HONOR AND CELEBRATION FOR PRIDE SUNDAY**

Offered at COUNTRYSIDE CHURCH UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
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READINGS

On the occasion of the third anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969, this declaration went forth (adapted):

For as many years as gay and lesbian people in this country or any part of the world
Remain the captives and victims of hate-filled societies
Let a day of each year hold an hour or a day of commemoration for the thousands who, in the missing
pages of our history,
Died alone in fire,
Lived alone in terror,
Wept alone in horror,
Waited alone for each other,
Cried alone for validation:
Whether gay men and lesbians died in the inquisition, in Nazi concentration camps, in prisons and mental
hospitals across this country, in a fire-swept gay bar, tortured and abandoned, or as victims of our own
isolation,
No one of us alone or together has enough tears to bring back to life the thousands of our sisters and
brothers whose deaths have been denied by history and even by their own families.
All of our lives have already been numbered or distorted by a society that is too narrow for our love.
We must widen this world, by whatever means we know,
In the name of those dead, and for the sake of those living.
Let this day and one day each year
Remind us in anger
Remind us in love
That we have years to go
Before we sleep ...
In freedom.

**Mothers, Fathers, Clasp the Children
By Judy Grahn**

Mothers, fathers, clasp the children,
tie them to your breast
and beam like flashlights,
hold the children praise them with buckets
of raspberries, shiny as jelly, give them you.
Show them they are green-worthy as grass in rain,
lofty as kite-flying by the Bay,
sharp as sunrise after an ice-storm.
Grasp them, study their eyes,
talk to them like kittens.
Tell them they have the sturdy grace of deer,
communal peace of stones,
generosity of the sea, able, able, capable and ready.
Tell them they can learn to be happy
no matter what else is true.
Mothers fathers grip the children
with bearpaws of glee,
press them to your hearts,
sing high into their precious ears,

drip strawberry down through their lives,
tell the sons they are ships *and* shores,
tell the daughters they are mountains
and towns that will thrive a hundred years,
say the world is sending them a ticket,
they just need to find the train that's theirs.
Oh winds of change, gather the wounded
boys and girls of all rages
into your giant arms, blow brotherly breath
between their fierce sad eyes, unclench their wish
for motherly porridge, pour fatherly tears
of crooning through their bliss-hungry lips
and tell them this one truth:
When we find or make that motherplace
our vessels heal, contain no leaks
and all around us love pours in, red cells pulse
burning away bleakness,
red cells flash as curious pretty fishes
spelling the words
"this is my darling life, and this is enough"

SERMON

What does it take to let your true colors come shining through?

On June 27, 1969, the gay men and drag queens at the Stonewall Bar in New York City had had enough bullying and intimidation by the police and the mob. That night they decided not to get demurely into the paddy wagons, not to sit passively on the way to the police station, not to be hustled off quietly into that not so good night. Instead they decided to fling their handbags, throw some punches, and shout. There's only one known mug shot and, while the Stonewall Veterans Association knows who it is the police never did because no one gave names. The media tried to ignore it, the police did not allow pictures to be taken and no visual records survive of the actual events of that night. But six days later Jerry Lisker of the New York Daily Post finally wrote a news article entitled Homo Nest Raided, Queen Bees are Stinging Mad. And, although it was going to be a long time before the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender movement would be taken seriously enough for more respectful language to be used – a movement had begun. By June of 1970, one year later, the first Gay Pride March took place in New York City. In 1999 the storefront on Christopher Street in New York was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Now June is considered Pride Month so that each year at this time we may remember that it takes countless acts of courage to set any people free. Today, as the likely repeal of Don't Ask/Don't Tell heads into some months of study before final voting, we are clearly still in the midst of the struggle.

On one level the LGBT movement has always been about the process of coming out of the closet – an expression that captured the yearning to have room to breathe, grow, and honestly live in the sunshine and honesty of the world. Now people who experience other kinds of prejudice have taken on that metaphor.

The work of LGBT rights has always been a balance between wanting to have a simultaneous right to privacy and the right not to be hidden away out of sight. When I'd been living in Atlanta Georgia for a couple of years the case of Bowers versus Hardwick made it to the Supreme Court. Michael Hardwick, a gay man who lived in Atlanta, had been in his bedroom with his sweetheart when a policeman, who'd been harassing him for some time entered the bedroom and arrested him. Hardwick wanted the right to privacy in the bedroom for lesbian and gay persons and he wanted to have the laws repealed that made it illegal for Lesbians and Gay Men to have grown up sweethearts like others do. When Hardwick fought the case all the way to the supreme court of the United States hoping for the right to love he and we all were disappointed by the Court's decision, which upheld old and discriminatory laws. A few years later, when President Bill Clinton decided he was going to make it legal for gay men and lesbians to serve in the military he began to work to eliminate the question that was asked of each person enlisted or drafted – "are you a homosexual?" The question was eliminated but the law called Don't Ask, Don't Tell, made it impossible for Gay people to stay in the military after they came out or were outed by others. And, over the last few years, since a few states passed laws making it legal for people of the same sex to marry — there have been fevered efforts to get those laws repealed – with some success – in those states and in others effort has gone into making it illegal – for people to marry unless they are woman and man.

The history of the gay rights movement is not a straight line – so to speak – but rather a history that steps forward and backward. In and out of the closet.

At heart, while it is a struggle for rights that are accorded other people in our society – it has just as much to do with the unstoppable yearning to be known and accepted for who you truly are. The closet isn't just a place of legal confinement. And coming out isn't simply a matter of stepping forward – the world has to meet each person as that person comes out as well – has to make room and create the possibility that the closet door is something that is closed behind them.

When Harvey Milk, the first openly gay person to be elected to public office, was assassinated in 1978 he left behind these words "If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door."

Coming out isn't simple. I had a book years ago, called *The Coming Out Stories*. It was a collection of women telling about how they first knew that they loved women. It was like a breath of fresh air to a community long in the closet – a way for people to hear the stories of other people like them and to gather the courage to do more than to know it for themselves but to have the courage to tell their families and friends. The courage to do that is the single most important force in changing the way that our society has felt about LGBT persons. There's nothing like discovering that it is your friend, daughter, son, parent, your sister or brother or cousin – to help your thinking to evolve. That first book of stories was like a key to the closet door when it was published in 1980.

I would like to think that so many years later – the world would be completely different so I went on line and googled "Coming Out Stories". I found websites of them. And there were so many stories –

some only a few sentences long. I had a friend who told me that she had to go to the library to figure out what she was – and she searched until she discovered the words to describe herself. Today, at least, you can get on line.

Brett wrote: You know everyone of us have skeletons in the closet, and for the first 18 years of my life I found myself standing next to the skeleton too afraid to move...

Steve: i went through high school in what seems now like a foggy haze. I never drank or did drugs, i also never talked to anyone. The guys called me a faggot. That word for some reason hurt me so bad and it only made me shelter myself more. Then through my church choir, I met these two women and one of them took me to a glbt youth group, that was the turning point of my life. For the first time i allowed myself to have friends. I soon came out to the few people I talked to at school. I went away one weekend and I left behind a letter for my mother. When I got home boy was my mother pissed off. She was angry because I did not trust her enough to talk with her, and because I endured this secret for so long. She assured me she loved me, and that being gay was no different than having blue or brown eyes. She told me that God makes people the way God wants to and God does not make mistakes. And as God is my witness I will never, ever allow anyone to put me or my people down, because they are ignorant.

Matt: I come from a small town. My father would always call me gay and said things like, "All you'll ever be is a gay fag-boy." I knew to myself that that, yeah I was gay, but my father always made it seem as though it were a bad thing, so I never came out all through adolescence. All through high school I was picked on and teased as being gay, yet I said nothing. Finally I met my boyfriend Ben. He was also called gay and fag all through high school. Ben made me realize that it was okay to be gay. I made a decision to tell my family I was gay. They shunned me so I moved away. I am happier now than I have ever been in my whole life. I hope my story can help others...

Stephanie: ... this is not actually a "coming out" story. I was popular in school. You know the type, a cheerleader, one involved in a lot of school activities and all. Well, I hid things pretty well until my senior year. The bad thing is that when my family began to pressure me about my sexuality I made the biggest mistake of my life. I ran from my problems and into the arms of a man. I married him. He and I have a daughter together. We have been married for 4 years and it has been the hardest years of my life. I am not happy and I am denying who I am. A while back I ended up back with my girlfriend from high school. I still love her more than anything, but my family is once again putting pressure on me. They are threatening to take away my daughter away from me unless I stay with my husband. I am to the point where I am giving up. I know that I am giving up a part of myself, but I just don't know what else to do anymore. I guess that is my story. As I said, it's not about coming out, but about being shoved back in the closet. I wish everyone better luck than I have had.

Tim: Coming out has been a cleansing experience. For years I knew I was gay but to afraid to admit it. I lied and lied to cover up my lies. Once I said it, once I said it outloud, once I said it outloud to someone I cared about it meant something. No longer was I afraid of life. Coming out is a process, not a

one time event. I continually come out. Each time I come out I feel more comfortable with saying it and being proud of who I am. Like Sound Garden says in their music, "I knew I loved you before I met you", it was nice to finally meet the real me.

Three years ago this congregation voted to become a welcoming congregation. And that, like coming out of the closet, is not a fact accomplished with one vote – it is a process of learning, doing, and recommitting. When Jane Matthews began talking last year about the Unitarian Universalist Association's Living the Welcoming Congregation Program, it was clear that it would be an ideal way for the congregation to keep practicing our welcoming, to continue learning, and to ensure that we would be a place where Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered persons would truly feel welcome. These are our friends, our family, our neighbors. To Live the welcoming Congregation is to create a sacred space outside the closet – now – not ages in the future -- where the closet vanishes entirely and each person who walks in our door feels truly at home and welcomed to be authentically themselves. Each step has been important – yet, taking a vote is not enough. Hanging a flag in Atherton Hall is not enough – although it's an important step to take. Even going to the Annual Gay Pride March as our Senior High Group began to do a few years ago and will do again this year – even that is not enough.

This program is an ongoing process that will help us to grow in our ability to welcome – ultimately not only LGBT persons but all persons.

With my family visiting this week we headed down town to the Art Institute one afternoon. As we were walking back to the car Mark and I passed a lesbian couple walking down the street holding hands. Two impulses fought inside me – one was to turn around and say – you go girls! Or Something like that. But no one holds hands like that unless they are hoping that someday the act of their holding hands would be ordinary – normal. So, at the same time, I wanted to just act as though what they were doing was ordinary –as though the world they longed for has arrived. At Pride marches same sex couples will hold hands as they march down the street – but even then it is a statement as much as it an act of affection. When I attended a women's music festival held in the Michigan woods many years ago that was the one place where the act of holding hands was nearly ordinary – there was a strong element of celebration in the act – a celebration of utter safety and normalcy. It took a few days for the sense of celebration to wear off and for the sight of women holding hands or the act of holding hands to become positively routine, normal. Not novel, not an act of liberation – but just the same as any other couple walking down the street might do – as I might do these days with my dear husband. After the festival, returning to the city – regular life seemed -- irregular – alien – requiring the constant performance of false acts and the construction of instant closets.

Coming out is still so often a struggle – with family, friends, at school, work, in the world. Looking in the mirror, you do not see simply but see through the eyes of society and the world. It can be hard to see yourself through that mask.

We all hunger for a space where we can be authentically ourselves. Where we can be and find ourselves. A place where you're able to explore the depth and breadth of your being, share that

exploration, and keep growing. In hearing coming out stories what I realize is that most of the work of coming out is done on the inside. It's a matter of liberating the mind. A matter of remembering that we are as we were made to be.

As the minister of a congregation that has become a welcoming congregation, I realize that we all have the work of coming out to do – because we have to meet people at the door. We are blessed because, here, we are more than tolerant – we are accepting. Yet, there is always more growing to do. It is up to each person here to reflect enough, to read enough, to talk enough, to watch enough good movies, to learn enough and listen enough that lesbian and gay love becomes ordinary to us. For many of us this is already the case -- we meet the many people who come to this church each on her or his own terms – male, female, transsexual, gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual – we meet each person fresh and open and ready to learn who they are. When we open our doors on Sunday we open our hearts and minds and expect people to come as they are – as they authentically are. It is one aspect of our that we will strive to meet people as they open our door or the closet door and make them truly welcome. It is a holy act.

On Wednesday I'm performing a wedding for two women who've been together for five years. They want to marry before one has to move back to her home country in South America. She has working papers but her daughter, fourteen, did not. To be with her daughter, she's moving back. It will take years for the women to be able to afford to be together. In the meantime they'll share the knowledge that, though there is no legal standing for their marriage – which would change everything for their families – there is a spiritual standing. And they will be together in spirit.

Last weekend a more than 60 of my colleagues met in Phoenix Arizona to march with thousands of Arizonans to protest the stringent immigration law that was passed there. Together they marched with a bright yellow banner – not unlike the one outside our church. They all wore bright yellow t-shirts – that said – Standing on the Side of Love. By the end of the march and rally one of the ministers there the Reverend Paul Langston-Daley over heard a conversation that went something like this. “Who are those people in the yellow shirts?” “Oh,” said the other person “those are the Love People.”

As Universalists have believed that God was, above all, loving – so are we called – in our many ways of expressing our diverse images but shared path -- in that spirit to manifest the spirit of love. As we believe that we are the hands and spirit of the sacred on earth so we must be those who through worship study and spirit embody that soul force. We can do no better than to be in everyway possible the people about whom it can be said – “those are the love people.” Let us make it so.