

## “The Issue of Waiting – Then and Now”

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Ecclesiastes 9:7-8, An excerpt from Obergefell v. Hodges, Matthew 13: 31-33

My sisters and brothers, may the Spirit, Sophia, open our minds and our hearts as we ponder the readings today. May we always know – and help others to know – that God loves each and every one of us always – no matter what.

Before I begin my formal remarks today, I am going to take a moment to look at all of you from this vantage point and just drink this all in. When we came to Redeemer 20 years ago, I never anticipated that I would get the opportunity to preach – never mind preaching on LGBTQI liberation Sunday. It almost makes a gal want to say WOOOOOOOHOOO! This is a day of true joy for me. Here’s a shout out to Honey who been a rock for me throughout the many years we have navigated our lives together. Thank you Honey! I love you.

Happy LGBTQI Pride Day and Pride month! Since I attended seminary, I have always dreamed of doing exactly this – preaching in my home church. Because of the celebratory nature of this day and month, I chose two verses from Ecclesiastes to start off our readings. “Go eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do. Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head”. What a joyous message! Live your life fully and joyfully. Celebrate who you are. When you truly celebrate (not just accept) yourself, you will feel an abundance of joy and love. Remember today and always - God LOVES YOU.

As much as I wanted to preach today, this sermon was challenging. I wanted to be prophetic / to do well / and well – to not put anybody to sleep! What would I / could I say to a community that I have loved for twenty years? In the end, I just had to let it be what it would be (NOT EASY). When I mentioned that I was preaching on LGBTQI Sunday to a friend, the response I received was “aren’t we done with the gay stuff yet?” This person is dear to me; my response was, “Sadly, no.” Could it be that the last year of positive rulings on marriage equality has lulled us into thinking “Ahhhh... the work is done!” Ever since Edie Windsor advocated (and won!) the legal recognition of her marriage to Thea Spyer in June 2013, marriage equality has spread to 37 states with another Supreme Court decision on the way. It is tempting to think that the embrace of living authentically for all people - is just around the corner. Sadly, we are still waiting.

As I reflected on where we LGBTQI people have been and the PAINFUL silence concerning LGBTQI

oppression from some of our religious communities, I realized that I needed to take a quick look back before we look forward. When I read Mary Bonauto’s statement to the Supreme Court recently “the effect of waiting is not neutral”, my sermon took shape. The title of this sermon is The Issue of Waiting –Then and NOW.

Waiting is a curious thing; we spend a lot of our lives doing it. Here’s what I think about waiting. I don’t like it! I want the answers now! Frankly, those answers are overdue! Waiting doesn’t necessarily imply that nothing is happening. While we’re waiting, any number of emotions may wash over us – frustration, anticipation, sorrow, and even joy at the prospect of new adventures. Sometimes waiting is good; other times, not so much.

The mustard seed – the smallest of seeds – looks like it is all about waiting. Don’t be fooled! It takes forever to grow; its progress may not be readily apparent. It is working all the while eventually becoming a magnificent home for all the birds (and people!) of creation. Great things can (and have!) come from planting the smallest “seed” of justice. Sometimes, we wait because we doubt that one person can really make a difference; other times, we fear that the price of action is just too high. When our waiting comes from fear, disappointing events, maybe even harm, can result. My question for you today is: What is the effect of waiting for issues of social justice? What is the effect of waiting for issues of social justice?

THEN – Let’s talk about waiting THEN.

“THEN” was a time when the “love that dared not speak its name” existed in the shadows. Communication for my community was done mostly through a “wink and a nod”. Is she in the family? Does he like Judy Garland? This was a time when closets weren’t only for clothes but also very much for LGBTQI people. Waiting for an answer to my own particular puzzle was painful.

Living in South Jersey, in June 1969, I was completely unaware that the seed for LGBTQI liberation was being planted at the Stonewall Inn. At that time, drag queens and “queers” took a stand for their dignity. God Bless Them I say! Mirroring the slow growth of the mustard seed, with each year, more “pride” marches started happening across the country. When Honey and I dared to march down Fifth Avenue, we ran home at night to see if we were “outed” on the nightly news. We marched because we didn’t want to wait and see what

freedom felt like; we checked the news because we wanted to keep our jobs and feel safe in our home.

What is the effect of waiting for issues of social justice? In his Letter from the Birmingham Jail and his book, "Why we can't Wait", Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. preached mightily on the perils of waiting for justice. Being steeped in justice both at Redeemer and Drew Theological School, my heart absolutely sank the first time I heard Justice Breyer ask: "Why cannot those States at least wait and see whether in fact doing so in the other States is or is not harmful to marriage." Hmmmm. What was your reaction when you heard it today in the Contemporary Reading? The question that came bursting out of me was this: WHEN HAS WAITING TO TAKE ACTION on racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, transphobia and homophobia – you name it – EVER produced positive effects? Where would we be today if the drag queens at the Stonewall Inn had waited? Where would we be today if parents and allies of LGBTQI people just waited for justice for their children, friends, and relatives?

NOW - So where are we now? Are we still waiting?

If you look around at the bumper stickers today, you'll probably notice that they are a lot more colorful. Not only are there rainbow flags but rainbow cats, dogs, almost anything you can imagine. On TV, we're beyond "Will and Grace" and have moved onto Laverne Cox's transgender character on Orange is the New Black. This week we were even introduced to Caitlyn Jenner. Thanks to the efforts of people like Mary Daly, John McNeill, Harvey Milk, and Edie Windsor (whose bios are in your booklet), we've all come a long way baby! We're starting to understand the wonderfully different ways there is to live and love. JOYOUS in my own skin – for a while now! – I am thankful to all those who helped me navigate to this day. Could anything be better than a married lesbian preaching in her home church? Well..... Actually YES!

Despite being awash in all things rainbow – especially in June, all is not well. In September 2010, Tyler Clementi – leapt to his death from the George Washington Bridge. In December 2014, Leelah Alcorn- who was born Joshua - threw herself in front of a train stating in her suicide note: "My death needs to be counted in the number of transgender people who commit suicide this year. Fix society. Please."

What is the effect of waiting for issues of social justice? Not a good one! Given these tragedies and others

like them, what is stopping churches, institutions and families from advocating for LGBTQI people 46 years after Stonewall? Where are we going as a society if we take a wait and see attitude towards crimes committed against unarmed people of color or LGBTQI people coming out of a restaurant? While the waiting continues, real harm is happening.

Mary Bonauto reminds us "In terms of waiting, I do think the effect of waiting is not neutral, it does consign same-sex couples to this outlier status, and there will be profound consequences that follow from that." Even if Ms. Bonauto makes her case – and I hope she does – the fact that employment protection for LGBTQI people only exists in 19 states means you could be married one day and fired the next. It could happen.

We have been waiting far too long. What we need to do – each and every one of us – is to become like the mustard seed. If each one of us can plant a seed for justice – for LGBTQI people, for every child of God, this seed can start doing its work. So what does this look like in reality?

In summary, Each one of us – acting as our own mustard seeds – can confront homophobic, sexist, racist etc. jokes at the office, the dinner table, churches, communities and schools. We can participate in speaker's bureau at local colleges and universities – which some of our members already do! We can reach out to existing organizations like GLSEN to see how we can be a part of the solution here in our own communities. We can open a window through adult forums (and such), which can dialog about the anxiety and uncertainty that may exist around difference or about LGBTQI people in particular. Most of all, we can commit to taking ACTION. REDEEMER's motto proclaims: Church of the Redeemer. Celebrating Love. Doing Justice. Our own Redeemer members – Maureen, Cindy and their family –were integral in furthering the cause of marriage equality in New Jersey.

In closing, I would encourage you to be joyous this day and to live each day with the knowledge that God loves us all. Between Jerry's ordination yesterday and our celebration here today, it's been quite a joyous weekend! But please remember: The effect of waiting is not neutral. There is still more work left to do!

TOGETHER LET'S GET IT DONE! AMEN!  
ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!