



God who creates us, redeems us and sustains us. Be with us this day and remain with us always. Amen.

Good morning. Here we have a man with a withered hand, a man who needs hope and healing, and then here are the ones who stand on the side and watch and wait. What will He do? Will the young man from Galilee who has crowds following Him, the peasant from the town of Nazareth, will He cure this man? There are laws and customs, rules and commands. Will this one who is attracting crowds, unsettling the accepted ways of believing and behaving, what will He do right or wrong, in or out, included and beloved, excluded and ignored, cast out and vilified? It mattered then and it matters now. If we are 14, 43 or 84, who's in and who's out? Who decides who counts? It is still a way in which many of our worlds are ordered. And Jesus over and over again looks at the ones who revere custom and history more than humanity. He shows a different way. Be you, says Jesus, be your authentic self. And to the community He courageously says, care. Welcome all.

And today we mark the beginning of the month of Pride. Pride for people made in God's image and likeness who happen to be LGBTQIA+. Queer on some level. As an out lesbian, married for as long as it has been legal in our country, and partnered for 37 years to the Reverend Dr. M Susan Harlow, I am stunned to be a bishop. In my world, when I was growing up, if I ever told anyone that I thought I was lesbian, I was convinced, and I probably wasn't wrong, that I would be shunned and scorned. When I was 16, I had an experience on a retreat of being completely and utterly loved by God and the person of Jesus Christ, and that experience changed everything for me. I knew God loved me. The rest of the world, well, it was still up for grabs. And yet here we all are celebrating Pride and rejoicing in the people today who have decided to be confirmed, received, or publicly reaffirmed their baptismal vows. Two events that are not at all incongruous or disconnected.

And some in our world would say, you cannot be queer and Christian, to which I say, look at the words and the actions of Jesus Christ. He says nothing about homosexuality, and what He does do is welcome all people and advocate continually for right relationships, which enable all of us to be our most authentic, courageous, and welcoming selves. And that is what I want for all of us gathered here today. For those who are making public professions of faith, those who are

supporting and witnessing those vows, and all of us celebrating Pride, to be our authentic, welcoming selves.

And the reality is that I'm actually in awe of all of you here today. In the midst of all that's going on in the world, here you are saying in spite of, or perhaps because of the chaos and the anxiety in our lives, you are here today making a public profession of faith, of who and how you long to be in the world. And what I hope is that you will experience today as a moment on your journey of faith where you considered risking embodying the charisms of Jesus Christ. A specific time when you said, what the heck, I'm going to do my level best to imitate Jesus. And I believe that Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, exuded authenticity, courage, and an openness to all. And I believe it is these three characteristics that He longs for His followers to embody. He is authentic. He never pretends to be anything or anyone other than who he is.

Remember when Jesus is talking about His upcoming death? How He will suffer and be killed? And Peter kind of pulls Him aside and does a little PR moment with Him, says you might want to tone it down a bit. I think you're scaring them. Right? To which He says, get behind me, Satan. Or the time when Jesus walks into the temple, sees the people selling the animals that folks are going to buy and use to sacrifice to God. And He just gets so peeved that he completely loses Himself. And He flips the table and He's flinging the coins and He's shouting at them, you will not turn my Father's house of prayer into a marketplace.

Or the night before He dies when He goes to the Garden of Gethsemane. And Jesus knowing what is likely to happen, being scared to death, scared of death and pain, He prays so hard that the sweat turns to blood. Lord, let this cup pass, let it pass. But not my will, yours. Jesus is real. He doesn't stand on ceremony. He doesn't hide His displeasure and He names and He faces His fear. Jesus, though He is the son of God, or maybe in spite of being the Son of God, Jesus is completely and utterly real. Rarely did people ever have to ask, gosh, I wonder what Jesus is thinking. Authenticity.

Courage. Jesus is courageous. Look at the gospel, the story in Luke's gospel when Jesus is still a kid. And His family goes to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. And after their time in the big city, Jesus' family begins the return trip home. And after a few days, they notice that Jesus isn't with them. I mean, to be fair, Mary and Joseph aren't the world's worst parents. It's just that families traveled in large units and the children would kind of frequently run back and forth between the extended group. So it is possible to be decent parents and to take three days to realize that your child is gone. Like when you thought, actually for the last two days He was with His grandparents.

But when Mary and Joseph go back to Jerusalem and they find Him, there He is, talking about scripture and theology with the scholars and the priests. And I got to say, even if you are the Son of God, it takes a fair amount of chutzpah to engage adults in serious religious conversation when you're 12. Over and over again, He is courageous. Remember how He's always putting Himself in harm's way, going to the temple to preach and to pray, publicly calling out the scribes and the Pharisees for acquiescing to Rome. Or even after He is arrested, standing tall before Pilate, living into His call, knowing of the pain that is likely to come if He is found guilty for inciting the people. Over and over again, He moves towards His fate instead of quietly sliding away from the people in the spotlight.

And then there is the raw, brutal courage on the cross. And in the midst of it, throughout His life, Jesus offers a profound welcome to all, ignoring, breaking sidestepping the norms and the stipulations of the day. Eating with Zacchaeus, the despised tax collector, who pretty much everyone shuns because he's always shaking them down for money. And there He is chatting with the Samaritan woman at the well, who by all accounts had four husbands and a boyfriend. A pious Jewish man would not be seen in the company of a Samaritan woman with that sort of history, yet there He was. And she becomes one of the first people to understand who He is. She says, He told me everything I have ever done. Could He be, could He be the Messiah?

Or coming to the aid of the woman accused of committing adultery. And where was the man, by the way? Last I looked, adultery takes two people. But anyway, questioning the men who were there to stone her. Wondering aloud if the one who was without sin should perhaps throw the first stone, all the while drawing literal and metaphorical lines in the sand, and eventually looking up from His work to see that only He and the woman remain. And then asking her, so where are they who have accused you? And she looks around and states the obvious. They are all gone, she says. Well then, neither do I accuse you. Go and sin no more.

Over and over and over again, Jesus of Nazareth offered a full and complete welcome to all. Authenticity, courage, welcome for all. This then is what Jesus of Nazareth embodies and we who want to be, we who long to be His followers, this too is how we are called to be. And my question is, do ya think you can pull it off? To which I say, well, even a broken clock is right twice a day. Which is to say, I think by ourselves on our own, we can every once in a while do it for sure, but to really do it, to be authentic, courageous, and utterly welcoming to all, I think we need each other. For try as we might, we are not the Son of God, but with each other in a community of faith, in a community of communities of faith, we can together help each other along and call each other into our very best selves.

Together we are saying we long to be like Jesus. Straight and queer, together with pride, we can make this longing, tangible and real. And the chaos, and the fear,

and the anxiety that seems to fuel our world will ebb away, replaced with God's hope and God's call for all of us together. This is what I hope. This is what I pray. And this, friends, is what I see here today.

Amen.