

Sermon: “The Queerness of Christianity”

2 Cor. 3:17-18 & Galatians 3:17-18

Reflecting back on this sermon series The Bible is Queer and Genderful - I'm truly grateful. I've learned something insightful and meaningful from every guest preacher and from the queer and trans theologians and activists whose voices we've been listening to. I've also appreciated hearing from you - your reflections and the conversations we've had. It's been a rich time.

Though this is our last sermon in our series, this will not be the last time we talk about these things. If anything, we are learning that we really need to keep on with this work, lifting up the stories of queer and gender non-conforming folks in the Bible and to keep on listening to the voices of our LGBTQ siblings.

Christians have been driving queer and trans folk out of the church for decades. It is no wonder that people are made to feel that they have to choose between God and being gay or that to be a Christian means that I have to hide or deny the fact that I am transgender.... That I have to choose between being Christian and being queer. And this is deeply troubling to me - just how much the church has been involved in crushing the bodies and spirits of queer and transgender people. I don't think I know any queer or trans person personally who does not have a story of religious harm done to them.

When you do a series like this, I experience it as freeing and joyful and celebratory. But it can also be painful - because to talk about LGTBQ+ experiences in the context of spirituality and the Bible, it often brings up the pain that we carry - the hurt that we've experienced from the hands of people who claim authority in their interpretation of the Bible.

It takes time to heal. It takes time to begin to get used to hearing the liberating voice of God and the loving presence of Jesus Christ, who came that we might experience life in abundance. It takes time to believe that Jesus wants us to be well. That Jesus wants us to love our bodies, to love the way our body loves, to be our authentic selves. I am still working on believing and trusting these things in my own life.

I really think that what we have been doing with this series over the summer is *important*. Changing the narrative, taking back the Bible and lifting up those stories in the Bible that speak to queerness and gender non-conformity... Lifting up the fact that the Bible witnesses to a God we worship who resists the gender binary themselves! And that if we are made in God's image, then we are set free to be queer and genderful people - as God is.

I've come to a discovery in this series that I want to share with you. It's a discovery that many many other people have already talked about and written

about, but it's been dawning on me these days. And I love that metaphor of dawning on me. Because it feels like the dawn - when the sun rising just above the horizon and the moment when light starts to explode over creation and you start to see things that were only in the shadows before and now there is marvelous light and color over everything. And so this discovery has felt like a dawning. What has dawned on me is that *Christianity is Queer*.

Now what, do I mean by "queer?"

*Historically *queer* meant "strange" or "peculiar"

*In the 19th century the word "queer" became a derogatory word used against people of same sex orientation. But in the 1980s queer scholars and activists began to reclaim that term, taking out the negativity and making it a term of pride.

Today the word "queer" is often used as an inclusive umbrella term to refer to folks in the LGBT community. However umbrella terms have their limitations. For example - not all transgender folks would identify as queer, some trans folk identify as straight or heterosexual and don't find the word "queer" appropriate for them. And sometimes folks choose to identify as "queer" because identifying as "lesbian" or "gay" feels too narrow of a definition and being "queer" because it's somewhat vague and fluid and open in definition feels like it fits better. So you can see again, the word is complex in meaning and often used to talk about LGBTIA folks but is not always used by LGBTIA folks themselves to talk about themselves.

And perhaps it is only right that “queerness” is not easily explained! What I want to focus on when I say that “Christianity is queer” is to think about queerness from the perspective of queer theory which historically has aimed to rupture binary thinking, and to disrupt our efforts to reduce our experiences of life and God into simplistic dualisms”. And this definition comes from the Rev. Elizabeth Erdman, queer priest and author of the book *Queer Virtue*. Rev. Erdman says the word “queer” has at its center an impulse to disrupt any and all efforts to reduce into simplistic dualisms our experience of life, and of God.”

So disrupting dualisms or binary thinking we are talking about “Either/or” thinking: You are male OR female. You are either Gay or Straight. There is either light or darkness. You are either Dead or Alive - simplistic dualisms. Queering is about disrupting these simplistic dualisms, *because* they don’t speak adequately about reality, to our lived experience or to our experiences of God. And so when I say that “Christianity is queer”- I mean it in the sense that Rev Erdman is speaking about. I’m not just talking about gender and sexuality, though that is part of it, I’m talking about the many components of Christian faith and life. That Christian life is about queer life.

Let me give us some context and examples for this. We have to start with Jesus! Because his life and witness, his death and resurrection is at the core of Christian faith. We’ve been talking about how Jesus himself transgressed gender

expectations and norms of his time to live authentically into his calling as God's child. Jesus failed to marry, Jesus did women's service work like cooking and washing feet.

And Jesus all the time — challenged simplistic dualisms in all kinds of ways. For example -

He challenged the false binary of Sacred vs Profane:

He would touch “unclean” bodies, healing people on the sabbath, welcoming children and women and gender non conforming folks into spaces that were only reserved for men.

He challenged of course the false binary of who is considered “In” and who is considered “Out” in terms of God's welcome and acceptance.

The Apostle Paul has a wonderful way of articulating this when he said, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female...for all of you are *one* in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Notice that what Paul is doing here is that he says when you become a Christian through baptism, God will queer the lines of separation that you've constructed or that your culture has constructed. So the people you once considered disconnected from you or not your kin, they are now your kin. There is no longer Jew or Greek. Male or female. Slave or free. God will queer these identity markers when you become Christian. That's what Paul is getting at.

These examples are not marginal to the Christian faith - they are the core of our faith.

We could go on. Think about how the God we worship disrupts and challenges us to rethink our notions of who “My Family” is?

Who is my family? Jesus asks, Who is my mother? Who is my sibling? Those who do the will of God are my mother, my brother, my sibling. Notions of who is in and who is not in my family - Jesus shakes up these notions of ours and totally redefines what it means to be family.

I am NOT comfortable with this, you know. There are certain simplistic dualisms that I'd rather like to keep because they work for me. It works for me to feel that I am an entirely separate kind of human from those “Trump Supporters” - those evil white supremacist, misogynistic, homophobes - thank God I'm not like them. That stance works for me, it makes me feel better. And whether I say that out loud or in the silence of my heart, I've already done the act of separating myself from “those people” creating a false binary. Because if I'm willing to look at it, I actually have a lot in common with people who support Trump. I shouldn't act like *they* are all racists and somehow I've gotten free of racism. We know it's more complicated

than that. We all have those contradictions in our lives between what we say we believe and what we actually do.

Somehow deep down inside we know that these polarities, these binaries, are false. They don't adequately speak to what is true about us as people. That we actually are very connected. And for any healing or transformation to actually take place - somehow we have to begin to break down this polarization that makes us believe that we are so separate.

When God reveals God's self to us and we allow God to move in our lives, God *will* shake us up and break us open. This is part of what liberation is all about. Paul says, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom" "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is Liberation" , there is shaking up and rupturing of false binaries. And so we ought not to expect that nothing will be disrupted or challenged when we walk with God. If you expect that, stop listening to God's voice.

Rev Erdman says that "God queers our world, our lives and our hearts in order to set us free."

Christianity pushes me out of the comfort of my false binaries - all the time. And though I know I need that pushing, it can be painful and hard! And sometimes it just makes me pretty angry! "Love my enemy? Do good to those who hate you? Come on! How could that possibly be an option?"

So when I say that Christianity is queer - I'm saying that God and the God I know through Jesus Christ are constantly pushing me and us out of the comfort of our false binaries whatever they may be.

I love that our Pride t-shirts say, "You're Queer? We're Here!" (Thanks to Jim Gerhard!). I love this message even more today than I did at first. Because Tabernacle is a queer and genderful faith community of Jesus followers. And I want our witness to be one in which we can claim loud and clear: you don't have to choose between being queer and loving Jesus. That's a false binary! And we've got to smash that binary to pieces because it's done such harm to folks. **We've got to start to understand that** loving and following Jesus will queer your life. Jesus is gonna invite you to become more queer than you already are.

The God we know in Jesus Christ is a Liberator who came to set people free from oppression. Sometimes that means that Jesus comes to set people free from the oppression that they've experienced at the hands of people who claim to believe in that same Jesus! There's a lot of blasphemy going on in our day today, a lot of taking Jesus' name in vain...we have to be on the look out for this kind of fake news, because there's a lot of it when it comes to churches and "Christians".

We have to find our place in the stream of Liberation that has always been there. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberation."

