

23 June 2024, 5 Pentecost Proper 7B (Track 1)  
St. John's Parish of Newtonville

1 Samuel 17:57-18:5, 10-16  
Psalm 133  
2 Corinthians 6:1-13  
Mark 4:35-41

### Queer Joy

**The Rev'd Michael Thompson, Esq.**

Let us pray.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts beating as one be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer, and set our hearts on fire with love for you, ourselves, and each other. **Amen.**

Two weeks ago, my sermon focused on the pain inflicted on and borne by queer people. We are all members of one house but, too often, don't act like it – especially with respect to marginalized communities. We marginalize people precisely because we don't view them as part of the house we are in. "They" are not part of "us."

This has been and continues to be how many view queer folks, and it results in profound wrong being done to those beloved children of God. Even in 2024, queer folks are excluded and told that they are sinful and depraved. Even in 2024, queer folks, particularly our trans siblings, are beaten and killed.

Just as suffering and death are not the end of the Christian story, thanks be to God that suffering and death are not the end of queer folks' story. We must remember that there is great queer pain and work to heal that pain. But we can also learn from seeing, truly seeing, the experience of great queer joy. This joy is sustenance that provides strength to weather the storm of suffering, discrimination, and injustice.

One way in which queer folks find joy is by finding each other, forming communities and chosen families. Some queer folks form chosen families because they are rejected by their families of origin. Before finding their chosen families, the only experience of family they have is one in which they have to hide and reject parts of who they are. If anyone finds out, if anyone sees who they truly are, they are thrown out and cast aside.

Other queer folks are blessed to have perfectly fine, even wonderful, relationships with their families of origin. Their families accept, love, and support them. Even so, it can be difficult not to be around people who understand the challenging experience of navigating the world as a queer person. For these folks, chosen families are bonus families in which they are seen and known, in which their souls are bound to the souls of other queer folks.

So, let me tell you about my chosen family, my queer family. My queer family is made up of folks representing many of the letters in the rainbow alphabet. We have different relationships with our families of origin. We have trod different paths toward our own self-acceptance. We have different experiences of religion. Just like any family, sometimes we let each other down. And yet, these folks are my ride-or-die people. We understand each other at a core level. Our experiences and souls resonate with each other.

When we are around each other, there is no need to worry about hiding aspects of our identity that the wider society might deem unacceptable. There is no need to look over our shoulders. There is safety. Just like anyone else, we get together for dinners and shows, but the experience is a bit different. With each other, in our bubble, there is the freedom of being truly seen and of truly seeing. We can let our guard down.

In just under three weeks, I will be going with several members of my queer family for our annual trip to Provincetown. When we are there, we will meet up with other members of each other's queer families, and we will be surrounded by other queer people. There is no need to police clothing or mannerisms. There is no need to explain language or experience. The only

thing that happens is being. For me, this is an indescribably special time in an indescribably special place.

My queer family, just like families of origin, is made up of people who show up for each other. On December 16, 2023, my queer family sat right over there, with my family of origin, and participated in a liturgy in which I was ordained a priest. The immediate reaction to that might be, “Well. Of course they did. They’re your people.” But for several of them, being at my ordination came at great personal cost. Some folks in my queer family have been so deeply hurt by religion and Church that just seeing this building, even with the rainbow flag out front, caused a mountain of anxiety. Walking through that door, sitting through a service filled with God talk, being around religious people and not knowing if they were safe: all of that took an amazing amount of courage and strength.

Despite how difficult it was for several of them, my people showed up. They did it because they love me that much. They love me so much that they were willing to endure being reminded of years of hurt inflicted on them by religious folks. They showed up because they trusted me and the other members of our queer family to keep them safe and to hold them in their pain. They showed up for me because they believed in the importance of my ministry to

make sure that others on the margins don't have the same experiences of religion they did.

I don't have the words to express how much that meant to me. You may not know how hard it was for some of those folks to show up, but I do. And I will forever carry that love etched deep in my soul.

Queer people often find joy in community, by establishing chosen families and joining other queer people in celebrations like Pride. Just like for anyone, this is about finding your people. This is about finding people and places in which you can be your authentic self. This is about finding people who fully embrace and love you for who you are – not in spite of it. In community is often where queer people begin to accept and love themselves.

The story of David and Jonathan shows us this in such a beautiful way: “the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” We do not know if David and Jonathan had a romantic relationship, and to label them queer would be an anachronism; the understanding of sexual orientation as core to identity is far more recent. But all of that is beside the point. What we do know is that these two men had profound love for each other. They loved each other so much that their souls

were bound together. They saw and loved each other on the deepest level, down to the core of their being.

The Gospel lesson for today gives us another important piece of this. Often when we think of the story of Jesus calming the storm, we focus on what seems to be Jesus chastising his friends and followers for a lack of faith. By focusing there, though, we miss something important: irrespective of the disciples' faith, Jesus, God Incarnate and the Word Made Flesh, calms the storm. Note: Mark says that Jesus rebukes the wind, not his disciples. When Jesus is woken up, he sees the terror in his chosen family's faces and hears it in their voices. He sees them. He sees their need. And he meets that need. He reassures them that, with him, they have nothing to fear. They are loved and cared for. And then he demonstrates why they have nothing to fear. He calms the storm. That's what happens when your soul is bound to another's. That's where God is, and that calms the storms.

I hate the words "The Bible clearly says," but if the Bible clearly says anything, if the witness of Jesus Christ clearly says anything, it is that God heaps love on those who are excluded, oppressed, and marginalized. God declares that they too are beloved. God declares that the divine image is

imprinted on them just like it is on all people. God declares that the divine breath animates them just as it does all people.

In queer communities and in queer families, there is God. In queer families, our souls are bound together, our souls love one each other. In queer families, there is no need for fear, only confidence in a love that calms storms. It doesn't matter whether it is expressed in religious language or Christian paradigms. Queer family is where the Gospel, the love of God, is lived out and felt in the soul. That truly is a source of queer joy.

Amen.