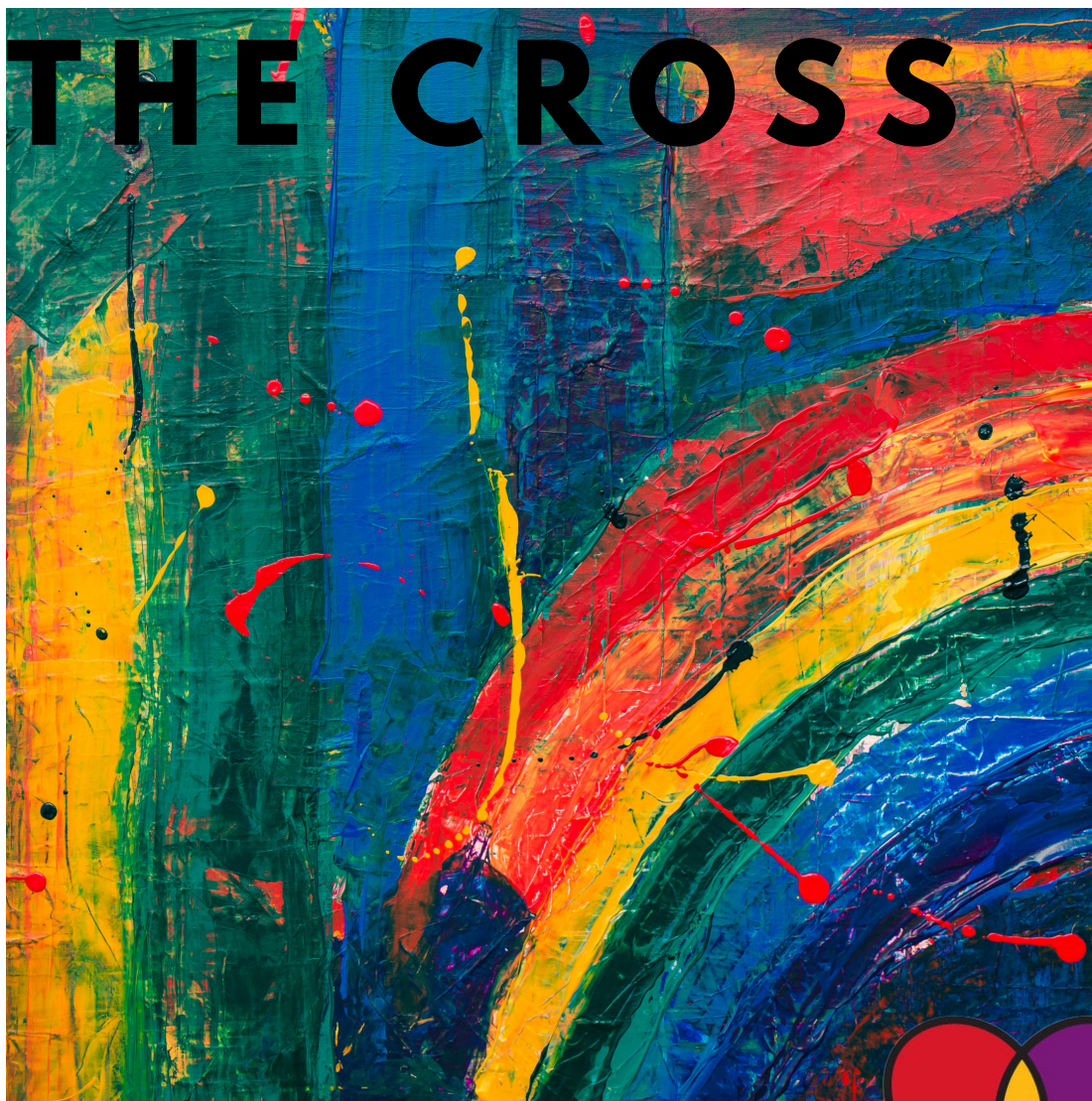


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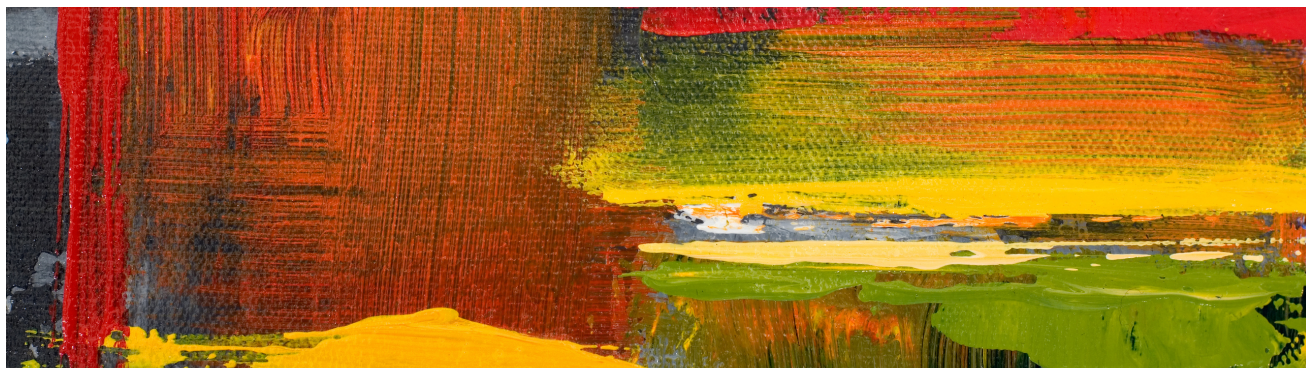


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ReconcilingWorks
LUTHERANS FOR FULL PARTICIPATION





Beloveds,

In John 14:3 we hear, "I am indeed going to prepare a place for you, and then I will come back and take you with me, that where I am, there you may be as well." [1] This resource is intended to be a way to live into knowing how God has gone before us. It is up to us, as the hands and feet of the Divine, to allow our hearts and minds to be transformed and in so doing, we transform the world as it is in this moment into a place where all are truly welcome and celebrated. Just as God has already gone before us to prepare the place, as we walk through the journey of Lent toward Holy Week, let us be reminded that the experience of faith, hope, and love, lived out in our everyday lives, is not only the promise God has made to us, but the promise we make to one another as we live into, celebrate, and become our most authentic selves. May we experience and be filled with the faith, hope, and love of the Spirit and become a blessing for all peoples. As we enter into the mysteries of scripture and Spirit in the coming pages, allow us to hear these stories with new ears, to see them with new eyes, and to experience them with compassionate hearts.

Amen



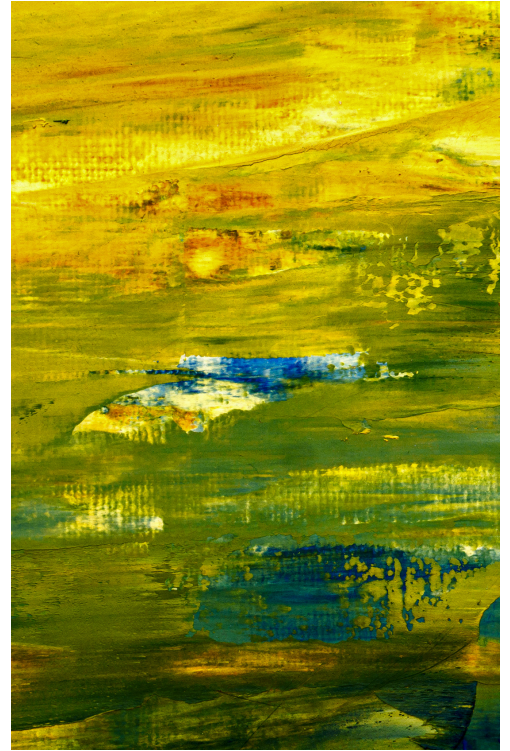
All Biblical references are taken from Priests for Equality. (2007). The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

By: Rev. Heather Thonvold, BCC

JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

Then Jesus went to the place called Gethsemane and said to the disciples, "Stay here while I go over there and pray." Jesus took along, Peter, James, and John and started to feel grief and anguish. Then he said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death." Please, stay here, and stay awake with me." Jesus went on a little further and fell prostrate in prayer: "Abba, if it is possible, let this cup pass by me. But not what I want - what you want." When Jesus returned to the disciples, he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Couldn't you stay awake with me for even an hour?" Be on guard, and pray that you may not undergo trial. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Matthew 26:36-41



REFLECTION

Being queer is an act of subversion in a world which screams at us to conform to the expectations others have for us. Our community is beautifully resilient and our collective strength to provide support for others when they need it most is one of the many gifts we bring to the church. Stay awake, dear ones, for your community needs you, and your unique gifts, now more than ever. God has called and entrusted us to care for one another in this moment.

Reflect on the gifts you bring to your community and the difference you make simply by being you. How have you experienced the strength and resilience of the queer community in your life?

PRAYER

Loving God, we give thanks for the uniqueness and strength of the LGBTQIA+ community. In the many ways we have been gifted with the fruits of the spirit, continue to call us to live in deeper and more holy relationship with you and one another. Amen.



JESUS IS BETRAYED BY JUDAS AND ARRESTED

While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd carrying swords and clubs; they had been sent by the chief priests, the religious scholars and the elders. The betrayer had arranged this signal for them: "Whomever I embrace is the one; arrest him and take him away under guard." Judas went directly to Jesus, embraced him and said, "Rabbi!" At this, they lay their hands on Jesus and arrested him.

Mark 14:43-46

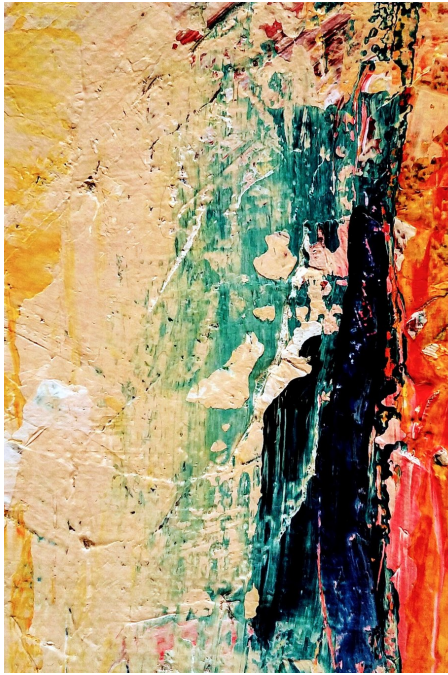
REFLECTION

Many LGBTQIA+ people have experienced betrayal in their lives at one time or another. Whether from a close friend or family member, or someone we are barely acquainted with, the break in trust and relationship is difficult to experience. In the queer community, we also experience betrayal from the church in many ways. How often the church tries to simultaneously welcome LGBTQIA+ people and also make space for beliefs that continue to marginalize and cause great harm. Welcome requires bold clarity and intentionality in how people are seen, named, and cared for.

What continued learning is needed in your community to ensure your welcome of LGBTQIA+ people is clear and shared boldly? Can you think of a time when you were called to act boldly and lovingly to care for your neighbor?

PRAYER

Holy One, we pray for those who have experienced a break in relationship. May your love and strength be with them. We pray also for the church, that it may continue to expand care and compassion for peoples of all gender identities and sexual orientations, as you extend your love and compassion to all. Amen.



JESUS IS CONDEMNED BY THE SANHEDRIN

At daybreak, the Sanhedrin - which was made up of the elders of the people, the chief priests and the religious scholars - assembled again. Once they had brought Jesus before the council, they said, "Tell us, are you the Messiah?" Jesus replied, "If I tell you, you will not believe me. And if I question you, you won't answer! But from now on, the Chosen One will have a seat at the right hand of the Power of God." Then all of them said, "So you are God's own?" Jesus answered, "Your own words have said it!" "What need do we have of witnesses?" they said. "We have heard it from his own mouth!" Luke 22:66-71

REFLECTION

The LGBTQIA+ community knows what it feels like to be condemned by those who hold power. Whether it is someone at work, in our personal lives, a landlord, or even a stranger, our community knows what the white-hot sting of condemnation feels like. Many times, we are afforded the opportunity to pass that condemnation to others but Jesus teaches us a different way. Instead, we are invited to allow our hearts to go before us, rather than seeking retaliation or retribution against those who have wronged us, and to end the cycle of oppression, despair, and injury. We are invited to choose the path of love, to follow where Jesus leads us, and to refuse to cast stones at others. The elders in this story choose the path of fear and retaliation rather than one of radical openness to choosing another way to be in a relationship with those who are different.

Can you think of a time when you could have responded with hatred and condemnation but chose to respond with the power of love?

PRAYER

Divine breath of life, you have invited us into relationship, not to condemn and judge, but to love and care. Help us extend your grace to all people and to welcome those the world has labeled as "other." May all people experience the unity your love brings and live into our call to love others as you first loved us. Amen.

JESUS IS DENIED BY PETER



While this was happening, Peter was sitting in the courtyard. One of the attendants came over and said, "You were with Jesus the Galilean too, weren't you?" But Peter denied it in front of everyone. He said, "I don't know what you're talking about!" When Peter went out to the gate, another attendant saw him and said to those nearby, "This one was with Jesus of Nazareth." Again he cursed and denied it: "I don't know him!" A little while later, some bystanders came over to Peter and said, "You certainly are one of them! Even your accent gives you away!" At that, Peter began cursing and swore, "I don't know the man!" Just then a rooster began to crow, and Peter remembered the prediction Jesus had made: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." Peter went out and cried bitterly.

Matthew 26:69-75

REFLECTION

How often the church has denied and continues to deny, the sacredness of queer people. Our community is so rich and vibrant, and the diversity of gifts our community brings cannot be overstated. The future of the church is queer, in the many ways that manifest itself. By continuing to deny and diminish the fragrant offerings LGBTQIA+ people bring to the church, the church seeks to lay down barriers where the Divine has made a path through the wilderness to a new way of experiencing community, love, and hope.

How do you see the fruits of the spirit manifested in the gifts the queer community brings to the church? What are ways you can impact how the church you are a part of celebrates and rejoices in the gifts of LGBTQIA+ people?

PRAYER

God of us all, continue to make paths where others have erected barriers. Help us seek the way of peace and justice for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. May we be for each other a balm in the midst of suffering and a helper for those who struggle. Amen.

JESUS IS JUDGED BY PILATE

At daybreak, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took formal action against Jesus to put him to death. They bound him and led him away to be handed to Pilate, the governor. Pilate said to them, "Then what am I to do with Jesus, the so-called Messiah?" "Crucify him!" they all said. Pilate finally realized he was getting nowhere with this - in fact, a riot was breaking out. Pilate called for water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, declaring as he did so, "I am innocent of this man's blood. The responsibility is yours." But he had Jesus whipped with a cat-o'-nine-tails, then he handed him over to be crucified. (Matthew 27: 1-2, 22, 24, 26b)



REFLECTION

For allies of the queer community, the importance of your continued advocacy and support cannot be overstated. The time has come when it is no longer enough to say you love and support the community but now is the time to advocate for the sacredness of queer lives in tangible and meaningful ways. That advocacy will look different for each person but the time has come for words and beliefs to become actions and acts of service to the benefit of LGBTQIA+ people.

What are ways you can live out your values of love, justice, and welcome for LGBTQIA+ people in your life? For allies, how have you used your voice to advocate for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities? For LGBTQIA+ folks, how have you experienced allies working for justice?

PRAYER

God who invites us to work for justice, we give thanks for our beloved allies. Help our allies continue to walk with the LGBTQIA+ community, lending their support and work for a more just world for us all. In the many ways they lend their time, talent, and abilities, we lift up the ways they move in the world, seeking to offer compassion and support for the marginalized. Amen.



JESUS IS SCOURGED AND CROWNED WITH THORNS

So Pilate ordered Jesus be flogged. Then the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns and put it on his head, and dressed him in a purple robe. (John 19:1-2)

REFLECTION

All too often people in the LGBTQIA+ community experience others forcing an identity on us that doesn't fit? LGBTQIA+ people who fall outside the arbitrary lines of the gender binary are often made to feel like an exotic other, resulting in being mocked and marginalized. It is a sacred act to live into being the person the Divine has named and claimed as beloved, in a world that tells us we have to look or be a certain way. One of the greatest gifts the queer community offers to the world is the gift of our authenticity and being able to name our truth in ways that feel the most life-giving to us.

How can you celebrate and affirm the diversity of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions? How have you experienced the gift of authenticity in your life?

PRAYER

God of many names, we give you thanks for the gift of diversity. For the many ways, you manifest your love for us and the many ways we experience love from one another. Thank you for those people who live out their authentic witness to be the people you lovingly created them to be, and the bravery instilled in their hearts which allows them to move in the world in their own amazing way. Amen.

JESUS TAKES UP HIS CROSS

"Take him away!" they shouted. "Take him away! Crucify him!" Pilate asked, "Do you want me to crucify your king?" The chief priests said, "We have no king but Caesar!" Then Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, carrying his own cross, to what is called the Place of the Skull - in Hebrew, "Golgotha." (John 19:15-17)



REFLECTION

When we move in the world with authenticity and clarity, with a firm sense of knowing who we are and what we stand for, we move through the world embodying pride for ourselves and in our community. In a Christian context, pride is often looked at negatively, but for the queer community, being proud of who you are and how God lovingly and intentionally created you to be, is an act of love and respect for ourselves and others.

How have you experienced having pride in yourself or your community? Can you think of a time when you felt particularly proud? How does living as your authentic self influence your daily life?

PRAYER

Dear God, in the example of your son Jesus, we see someone called to live a different way - a way of love and compassion. Help us to see the gifts each one of us embodies, as unique and wonderful, and to have pride in ourselves and our community. Amen.



JESUS IS HELPED BY SIMON OF CYRENE TO CARRY HIS CROSS

A passerby named Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was coming in from the fields. The soldiers pressed him into service to carry Jesus' cross.

Mark 15:21

REFLECTION

The queer community in particular knows about the importance of being able to give and receive support. We have a beautiful and diverse community, full of caring, empathetic, and compassionate people, and it is in those moments when we reach out to others that we truly become hands and feet of God. Giving and receiving support is a sacred act. In a world where our community often experiences exclusion and hatred, we are visible reminders of the holy for one another and for our greater community.

Who in your life can you count on to be there to help you in times of struggle? Have you told them how much you appreciate their presence in your life?

PRAYER

God who calls us to be in community, we give thanks for those in our lives we can rely on for support. For those people in our lives who are your hands and feet in this world, may they feel our tremendous gratitude. Amen.

JESUS MEETS THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM



A large crowd was following, many of them women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. At one point, Jesus turned to these women and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me! Weep for yourselves and for your children! The time is coming when it will be said, 'Blessed are the childless, the wombs that have never given birth and the breasts that have never nursed.' Then people will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us up!' For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"
Luke 23:27-31

REFLECTION

The church often celebrates how far they've come but in reality, the journey and work have just begun to bring about the fullness of the imago dei - that true vision of the divine where all people are welcomed, included, and celebrated. The church laments how divisive the work of inclusivity for LGBTQIA+ people has been. The church cannot continue to lament the perceived losses the work of inclusion brings about while simultaneously engaging the work in half-hearted ways. The church has required the LGBTQIA+ community to do the majority of the work to bring change. When we are clear in communicating the needs of our people, we are told to slow down or wait. The full inclusion of the queer community demands the church acknowledge we too are children of God, without hesitation, qualification, or need for further explanation.

What would the full welcome, inclusion, and celebration LGBTQIA+ people mean to you in the church? What are we as the people of God called to do to help bring about the imago dei?

PRAYER

God of divine vision, we pray for the church to raise up bold leaders who live out the gospel calling to seek justice, to love boldly, and proclaim your good news to the world. Bring forth those prophets who will proclaim your love for the world without qualification or hesitation. Help the church be bold in showing her love for people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. Amen.

JESUS IS CRUCIFIED

When they had reached the place called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there - together with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Abba forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." Then they divided his garments, rolling dice for them.

Luke 23:33-34



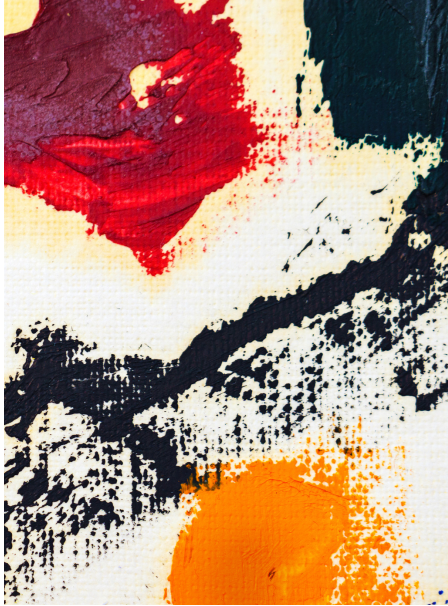
REFLECTION

The epidemic of violence against the transgender community, and BIPOC transgender people in particular, should be a call to action for us all. We may never know the true number of transgender people who are victims of violence due to deadnaming, misgendering, and other factors that seek to erase their existence from our society. We all can and must do better for our transgender siblings because they deserve to live fully into the people they know themselves to be.

What are ways you can live out your values of love, justice, and welcome for LGBTQIA+ people in your life? We extend an invitation to learn about the lives of transgender victims of violence, to say their names, and share with friends and family how you stand in solidarity with the most vulnerable in the LGBTQIA+ community.

PRAYER

For those who continue to work for justice for transgender victims of violence, we give our thanks. For those who experience violence at the hands of others, may they experience healing and restoration health - mind, body, and spirit. May we all continue to work for a more inclusive and just world for all people. Amen.



JESUS PROMISES HIS KINGDOM TO THE REPENTANT THIEF

One of the criminals who hung there beside him insulted Jesus, too, saying, "Are you really the Messiah? Then save yourself - and us!" But the other answered first with a rebuke: "Don't you even fear God? We are only paying the price for what we have done, but this one has done nothing wrong!" Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your glory." Jesus replied, "The truth is, today you'll be with me in paradise!"

Luke 23:39-43

REFLECTION

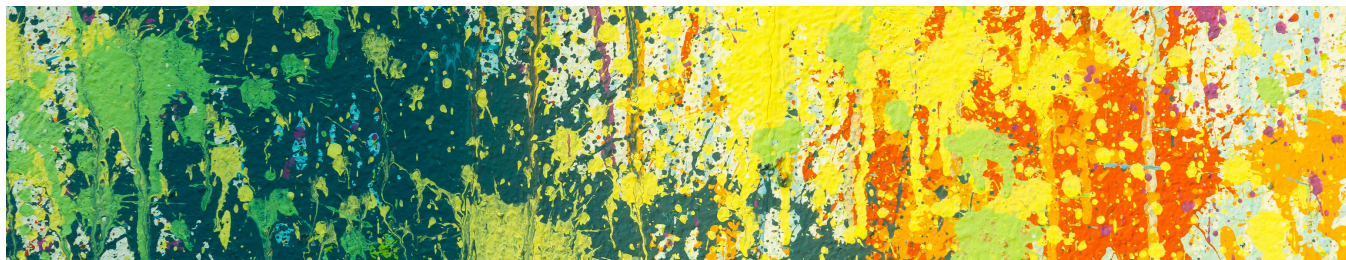
How often do LGBTQIA+ people hear the message that our lives and our love do not matter? In the many ways the LGBTQIA+ community experiences bigotry and hatred, we are reminded that Jesus remembers us and extends love and grace for us all. This love and grace is freely offered to all peoples, in all places. May we all be fortunate to experience this grace and be reminded we are all children of God.

Can you recall a time when you felt welcomed? How did someone go out of their way to help you feel welcome?

PRAYER

Holy and loving God, we pray we continue to experience your love and grace, poured out for us and for all people. May those who the world has forgotten be remembered. And may those the church has excluded be welcomed. Amen.

JESUS ENTRUSTS MARY AND JOHN TO EACH OTHER



When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing there, he said to his mother, "Here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that moment, the disciple took her into his household. (John 19:26-27)

REFLECTION

In the queer community, many of us are fortunate to have chosen family - those folks in our lives who aren't blood relatives but are so close to us, they might as well be. So many of us have been blessed with those people we know we can count on no matter what. It's often a special moment when we realize those friends have become our chosen family and their presence in our lives feels like one of the greatest blessings we can receive.

Who is in your chosen family? What makes those relationships so precious?

PRAYER

Loving and gracious God, we give thanks for families - for those families we are born into and those we choose and make for ourselves. For those people in our lives who give and receive support, our gratitude overflows. Amen.

JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

It was about noon, and darkness fell on the whole land until three in the afternoon, because of an eclipse of the sun. Then the curtain in the sanctuary was torn in two, and Jesus uttered a loud cry and said, "Abba, into your hands I commit my spirit."
Luke 23:44-46



REFLECTION

Queer people often experience a type of death when they come to know their identity. We die to the old ways of being in the world which did not serve to feed our spirit and sometimes that comes with ending relationships or leaving a situation altogether. Just as pruning a tree can create space for renewal and change, by leaving those things behind which we know are not part of who we are, we create space to grow and deepen our authenticity. May those things which need to be let go of, be let go, and those things which are life-giving, healthy, and joyful, remain.

Can you think of a time when letting go of something allowed an opportunity for new growth?

PRAYER

God who calls us from death to new life, help us discern what is life-giving and help us live courageously into letting go of those things which are not. Guide us as we work to create space for new creations to emerge - so that we may live more fully and deeply into the people you created us to be. Amen.



JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

When evening fell, a wealthy man from Arimathea named Joseph, who had become a disciple of Jesus, came to request the body of Jesus; Pilate issued an order for its release. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in fresh linen and laid it in his own tomb, which had been hewn out of the rock. Then Joseph rolled a huge stone across the tomb and went away.

Matthew 27:57-60

REFLECTION

This is a tremendous act of service. Joseph takes the body of Jesus and lays it in his own stone tomb. No doubt this was a place of great significance for Joseph and his family. In essence, by this act, he is saying to Jesus, "You are part of my family now." In the queer community, our chosen family is a tangible and visible reminder of the love God shares with us in our daily lives. By experiencing love and care from others, we are reminded we are loved, our lives are sacred, and we too are deserving of care and compassion.

In what ways do you affirm LGBTQIA+ people and how do you best feel affirmed yourself? Can you remember a time when someone in your life did something profoundly significant and meaningful for you and how it made you feel?

PRAYER

God, you have named us as part of your family. May we all continue to experience an invitation to relationship and grace. May all who seek it, be comforted by your love. Amen.

JESUS RISES FROM THE DEAD



Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance, so she ran off to Simon Peter and the other disciple - the one Jesus loved- and told them, "The Rabbi has been taken from the tomb! We don't know where they have put Jesus!" At that, Peter and the other disciple started out toward the tomb. They were running side by side, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He didn't enter, but bent down to peer in and saw the linen wrappings lying on the ground. Then Simon Peter arrived and entered the tomb. He observed the linen wrappings lying on the ground and the piece of cloth that had covered Jesus' head lying not with the wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the disciple who had arrived first at the tomb went in. He saw and believed. As yet, they didn't understand the scripture that Jesus would rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes. 11 Meanwhile, Mary stood weeping beside the tomb. Even as she wept, she stooped to peer inside, and there she saw two angels in dazzling robes. One was seated at the head and the other at the foot of the place where Jesus' body had lain. They asked her, "Why are you weeping?" She answered them, "Because they have taken away my Rabbi, and I don't know where they have put the body." No sooner had she said this than she turned around and caught sight of Jesus. He asked her, "Why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?" She supposed it was the gardener, so she said, "Please if you're the one who carried Jesus away, tell me where you've laid the body and I will take it away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned to him and said, "Rabboni!" - which means "Teacher." Jesus then said, "Don't hold onto me, for I have not yet ascended to Abba God. Rather, go to the sisters and brothers and tell them, 'I'm ascending to my Abba and to your Abba, my God, and your God.'" Mary of Magdala went to the disciples. "I have seen the Teacher!" she announced. Then she reported what the savior had said to her.

John 20

JESUS RISES FROM THE DEAD



REFLECTION

Mary did not recognize Jesus until he said her name. This seemingly small act, one which we have experienced many times in our lives, is such a significant moment in scripture. The names we call ourselves and how we are known to others matters a tremendous amount for LGBTQIA+ people. By allowing people the space to name and claim their identity for themselves, and by taking the step to use their pronouns or chosen name, we honor that spark of the divine within each of us. What we call each other matters and when people trust us enough to share with us their identity or what they want to be called, we owe it to them to honor that authenticity. Just as Jesus called Mary's name to help her recognize him, let us call one another the names and pronouns we want to be called, and by doing so we honor the sacred within us all.

What are the name and pronouns that make you feel seen, names, and cared for? How can we honor names and pronouns in our faith communities?

PRAYER

God who names us as beloved, you know the power in a name. Allow those of us who need it, to have the courage to name our truth. May those who boldly proclaim their truth to the world be honored and respected. May those who are not yet safe to share their full selves with the world be loved and secure in their self-knowledge. May we all work toward a world where people of all sexual orientations and gender identities can live fully into the people you created them to be. Amen.