

June 7, 2026—The Second Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. James Wyatt

Leaving Our Comfort Zone

June is Pride Month, a celebration of the LGBTQIA+ community, which began as a commemoration of the 1969 riots at the Stonewall Inn in New York, riots that helped launch the movement for LGBTQ liberation. And Pride is on my mind, not least because of the role I ended up playing at Poulsbo's pride flag-raising ceremony last Monday, when the mayor unexpectedly invited me to share a few words and a closing prayer for the event, much to my surprise—and probably the surprise of everyone else there. It's got me thinking about the story of this church and its origin within the controversy over the Episcopal Church's ordination of an openly gay bishop, Gene Robinson, in 2004, and the way we continue to live out that story. It's got me thinking about what we have to learn from folks in the LGBTQIA+ community, both inside and outside of the Church. And it's got me thinking a lot about what we have to offer to our little corner of the Kitsap Peninsula. And, believe it or not, I think all of that sheds some interesting light on our Scripture readings this morning.

Starting with Genesis. During coffee hour on Pentecost Sunday, as we told the stories of this congregation, I said that at the beginning of our story, the Lord said to a handful of God's servants who were worshiping at St. Charles Episcopal Church, much as the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." This was in 2006, when St. Charles got a new priest who was not a fan of ordaining gay bishops or ordaining women as priests, and he decided to make that everyone's problem. So God called this handful of faithful servants to remain in community together. They met in homes at first, then in the firehouse, and a couple of other places around the peninsula. That's the period we often refer to as our "wandering in the wilderness," as this handful of folks tried to remain faithful to God's call to an expansive, inclusive love. So, much like Pride itself, we were born in protest—protest against bigotry and intolerance carried out in the name of our loving God. And we were born in faith—like Abraham, those faithful few trusted that God had something better in mind for them as they left what was familiar, what was home, and set out for something both new and unknown. "Hoping against hope," they believed that God would keep God's promises. And that same faith that was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness, is the faith that sustains us to this day.

I find myself thinking a lot about where God is calling us now. Having brought us through the wilderness back to this place, how is God still leading us to step out of our comfort zone and take another leap of faith? How is God still calling us to live out the vision of all-encompassing love that has made us who we are? Just as Jesus called Matthew the tax-collector, so Jesus is calling us to get up and follow him. And following Jesus always means walking on the way of the cross—it's not a path to worldly prosperity or perfect health or political power, but a path to the margins, to the people who don't fit in, to the outcasts and the sinners. It's a path of death to the things that separate us from God and a path of rebirth into new life with God.

Jesus calls us to the margins. That's why our Fresh Start ministry is so important. It's why I've spent a lot of time in conversation with the folks who run the Recovery Café and the folks who are working on homelessness in Poulsbo and Kitsap County. And that's why I went to the pride flag-raising on Monday, it's why I went to Kitsap Pride and Poulsbo Pride last year and will again this year, and why I'm going to the Pride picnic in Nelson Park today. Because despite the fact that the observance of Pride has the support of the mayor and the city council, despite the fact that the city hangs banners on the lampposts downtown, all you have to do is glance at the comments on any article or public Facebook post about Pride to get a very clear picture of why Pride is still necessary, and why the LGBTQIA+ community is still on the margins. The amount of vitriol and hate directed at this community is appalling, and the fact that much of that hate is couched in citations from Scripture is heartbreaking. At the flag-raising on Monday, I heard from more than one of the handful of people gathered there that

they grew up in the church, learned to love God in the church, and then were told that God's love wasn't big enough to include them. It was a small gesture, for me to be there, to tell them that Faith Episcopal Church is a safe place for them, if they should ever feel called to rediscover the relationship with God that was cruelly taken away from them. A small gesture but, I think, a really important one. And to be clear, that wasn't about me—it was about you. Because you have remained faithful to God's call to bear witness to God's vast, inclusive love that welcomes everyone. I wouldn't be out there inviting the LGBTQIA+ community into this place if I didn't know that they would be showered with love when they walk in those doors.

That is another thing that Faith has in common with Pride: that love and radical hospitality. I saw a social media post the other day that said: "Nothing has been more important to my being queer than when I went to my first pride parade, got separated from my group, had a panic attack about it and was sitting on the side of the road holding a tiny genderfluid flag and freaking out. Then this six foot five drag queen in four inch heels appeared from literally nowhere and sat down next to me. I, this scared-[to-death] trans bi kid at Pride for the first time, very nervously told her she looked pretty and I told her my name and that I got lost and didn't feel like I should be at Pride and she held my hand and said, 'Oh, honey, everybody deserves to be here, especially you. Pride is for everybody who's ever gotten lost, who's been scared of who they are or where they are. You think we never been scared before? Pride's for you, honey, *because* you're scared. You don't have to be proud right now, but you're gonna be one day, honey, I'm sure of it.' I found my group soon after that and I never saw that queen again but to this day I am convinced I met an angel."

Isn't that a beautiful vision of community? Isn't that a beautiful affirmation of God's love for the world God made? It breaks my heart that so many people imagine God's Church to be a less welcoming, hospitable, and loving community than that.

That brings me, finally, to the woman in our Gospel story, the one who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. It's interesting the way the text sandwiches her story into the middle of the story of Jesus raising the synagogue leader's daughter. We're meant to read these stories side by side like this, to compare and contrast the two narratives. Look at how the synagogue leader approaches Jesus while he's eating and teaching and asks Jesus to follow him, just sort of expecting that this teacher, this prophet, will do as he is asked. And now look at how the woman sneaks up behind Jesus in the crowd, not daring to ask for what she so desperately needs, but certain that if she can just touch him, that will be enough. I heard a commentator this week compare her to the early movements of LGBTQ Christians, like the early days of the Metropolitan Community Church in California in 1968. Even before Stonewall, faithful queer Christians who'd been told that God's love didn't include them and God's table wasn't open to them gathered together and claimed that grace for themselves. They knew that all they needed to do was touch his cloak and that would be enough. It was enough, and today the MCC remains a powerful witness to the expansiveness and abundance of God's grace and love. And that also reminds me of our story, you know? When the diocese wouldn't recognize Faith as a church in its own right, this community still reached out for the hem of Jesus' cloak, trusting that his grace was more than enough. You found priests who would feed you at God's table and tend to your spirits as you wandered in the wilderness, and you found your own spaces, your own tables, your own rituals and ways of worship. And that faith has made Faith Church whole.

I love the fact that this community chose the name Faith rather than a saintly patron as so many Episcopal churches do. I mean, I'll always be a little sad that we don't have a patronal feast to celebrate—although I guess we don't really need an excuse to have a party. But Faith encapsulates so much of what makes us who we are—the faith to heed God's call, to get up out of our comfort zone and head out to the margins; the faith that God's love is big enough to encompass everyone, and the faith to protest when God's name is abused in the name of bigotry; the faith to reach out and touch the hem of Jesus' cloak to claim the grace and healing we need.

Hold on to that faith, friends. May it continue to be a source of healing for all who find their way here, and may we be a blessing to this community, inside and outside these walls. Amen.