

Fearful and Wonderful

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT
June 29, 2025 – A Sermon for Sunday Morning Worship
Text: Psalm 139:13-18

A blessed PRIDE Sunday to you! The PRIDE celebrations in recent weeks have been especially poignant to me this year, and perhaps for you as well, as there has been so much negativity expressed in regard to the LGBTQ+ community in recent months. That negativity has never really disappeared as long as I have been around, but it had definitely dissipated. In many respects it's even become mainstream due to hit movies like *The Birdcage* released in 1996, the hit television series *Will and Grace* which first appeared in 1998 and then the streaming series *Pose* which first came to our televisions in 2018. Rainbow families were featured in television commercials and LGBTQ themed books found their way to library shelves in those same years. PRIDE celebrations in cities and towns of all sizes have become increasingly prominent, especially this year, even as security measures had to be dramatically increased to keep participants safe. To use the vernacular of the culture, we now have a whole lot more empty closets than we ever dreamed possible. All this is why it is so very, very sad that such vitriol and violence is an all too real occurrence for our brothers and sisters in the LGBTQ+ community. They have come so far and now there are some who would force them all back into the closets and nail the doors shut.

Dear ones, how did we get here? What about this particular group of people – the LGBTQ+ community – inspires such anger and hatred from a few people? And it is a few people! They are just really loud and really obnoxious so it seems like there are more of them than there really are. I honestly don't know why this group is so openly vitriolic in their hatred but I would guess it has a lot to do with difference. The LGBTQ+ community celebrates their difference and that will always make some people uncomfortable. I also think these irrational reactions to our LGBTQ siblings has a lot to do with some folks thinking they should be able to force other people to live the way they think is the correct way to live. Both of these tendencies, to think difference is bad and that everyone should think and live in one particular way, are as old as humankind itself. Unfortunately, this seems to reveal that the human default setting, at least for one subset of people, appears to be anger and hatred of the other, whoever the "other" is in the moment. We have certainly seen many examples of this throughout history which is why this is one of the human realities Jesus was

trying to get people to move beyond. This is why he distilled all of the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures down to what we think of as the Great Commandment or the Golden Rule. Simply, we are to love God with all that we are and all that we have AND we are to love the other as we love ourselves. That's it. Pretty simple when you think about it. And yet another human tendency to complicate simple things tends to take even this very direct statement from Jesus and try to complicate it by adding nuances that Jesus didn't include.

Like loving God is obviously a good thing to do but we wonder, does it have to change your life that much? Of course you love God. But do you really have to prove it, all the time? Yes, actually, you do simply because if you really love God, then you're not proving your love of God. You're living it. You come to worship on Sunday because you need that time and space to reconnect with others trying to do the same thing. You want to make a difference in the world because it's God's world and all the people in it are equally beloved of God. And when that is not happening, when some people are treated as less than or even evil just because of who they are, then we need to point it out because that's what is expected of us precisely because of the love of God we are so quick to profess. But, dear ones, being a Christian is more than saying the right words. Anyone can do that. It's what you do that reveals your heart more than anything you say.

This truth is particularly evident in the vitriol being directed toward the transgender community – the “T” in LGBTQ+. The amount of misinformation out there about transgender folks is overwhelming, not to mention dangerous. It's also heartbreaking and completely unnecessary. I count many transgender folks as friends and I have watched what they experience in the space they occupy as a result of fixed gender stereotypes that are dominant in our culture. I have seen them ridiculed and mocked, denied the basic respect due anybody. This is why I can say that without a doubt, no one chooses to be transgender. It's a biological reality that many trans folks resist and ignore and fight back against because they know what awaits them if they name out loud what they know to be their truth. To be transgender – or any member of the LGBTQ+ community these days – is to know what it is to live in fear. Will I be attacked when I'm out for dinner in the city one night? Will my marriage be written out of existence by some law written by conservative Christian legislators with the support of a conservative court? Will my partner and I not be able to adopt these children we have been fostering because somebody thinks we'll “turn them gay?” Dear ones, the list goes on and on. You know what's on that list as well as I do. It is indeed a

fearful time to be lesbian, or gay or bisexual, transgender or queer. There can be no doubt about that. But the miracle here is that this amazing group of people are more alive and vibrant and wonderful than ever before. As they should be.

This is why I chose this text from the Psalms for our reflections together this morning. In my humble opinion, this is one of the most beautiful psalms in the Bible. In it, especially in the verses we heard read just a few moments ago, we hear just how precious every single, solitary person is to God with no restrictions or qualifications. This is what the psalmist is acknowledging: “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Let’s think about what this is saying quite clearly and intentionally. First, God knows who you are before you are born. God is responsible for you in your mother’s womb. The text puts no restrictions on this. It doesn’t say “unless you grow up to love persons of the same sex.” Nor does it say “unless you grow up to question your very inmost identity.” It says God knits you together in your mother’s womb. God creates the you who is you before you are even born. God creates you to be – you. Whatever that ends up meaning to you. It’s all good because you are all good. You are fearfully and wonderfully made! Fearful because the awesomeness that is you is so incredible that it is beyond questioning. Wonderful because it is all God’s design, God’s intention for you.

This text also continues to make even more powerful and beautiful points:

- 1) Nothing about you is hidden from God ever. You, just as you are, was always God’s plan;
- 2) God saw your unformed substance, all that was to become you, and loved what was seen, immediately and without hesitation.
- 3) God knew all your potential before you even had a clue; because God knows who you are more intimately than you can ever realize.

The author ends by acknowledging that thinking about all this – how much God has invested in us from the moment even the possibility of us existed, how much God has always loved us, how much God wants only the best for us – it’s literally too much to comprehend. “How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! ... I try to count them. ... I come to the end. I am still with you.” In other words, God loves each one of us – Straight or Gay or Lesbian or Transgender or Bi-Sexual or Queer or anything else – just as we are because God literally created each one of us to be exactly who we are!

Ironically, this beautiful text is also a favorite of evangelical Christians because they claim it as proof that not only does God hate LGBTQ folks, God

also wants every baby conceived to be born. Their reasoning goes like this. Obviously, if God formed you in your mother's womb, then God expects you to be *like everyone else*. Put another way, God expects you to be straight. Only problem with this interpretation is that this is not in the text. It's not in the text because that was never the point of what the psalmist was writing. Nor was the point that every baby conceived is intended by God to be born. If that were the case there would be no miscarriages. There would be no ectopic pregnancies. There would also be no babies born with deformities or horrible conditions guaranteeing them short, painful lives. No, this text is not about affirming a set of narrow beliefs of one particular group of people who read the Bible in one particular and narrow way. They go to great lengths to read things into the text that just aren't there. In truth this text is simple when you read it through the lens of God's unconditional love and respect for each person extending to even before birth. This would be especially extraordinary to Jesus' audiences as well as to the people first hearing it in the Temple days after it was written. It would be extraordinary because the Jewish faith believes that life begins not at conception but at birth, in the moment the newborn child draws its first breath. So, for the psalmist to say here that God knew who you were before that moment, that God knew who you had the potential to be throughout your whole life – well, that was quite simply mind-blowing. It changed everything they thought they knew about God.

So, as this PRIDE Sunday and this PRIDE month comes to a close, I hope you will take a moment to consider that YOU – with all your faults and shortcomings – YOU are fearfully and wonderfully made. Born to be exactly who you are – the good and the bad, the smart moves and the stupid mistakes. YOU are beloved of God because you deserve to be. And no one, NO ONE, should ever tell you anything to the contrary. Dear ones, I invite you all to learn this oh so important lesson from our siblings in the LGBTQ community – Stand in your own truth, because it is the truth God gave you. What you do with that truth once you acknowledge it – well, that's up to you. Whoever you are and wherever you are on your journey of life and faith, you are always welcome here. God loves you, and we do too. Amen.