



Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

1st Sunday of Advent, Year C

TROUBLE ALL AROUND. GOD, YOU THERE?

Advent is the church's preparation for the coming birth of Jesus. Why then does this Advent begin with a discussion of the end?

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Jeremiah 33:14-16](#); [Psalm 25:1-10](#); [1 Thessalonians 3:9-13](#); [Luke 21:25-36](#)

WHO'S IN THE CONVERSATION

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



"It would be easy to become cynical about the slow rate of progress in our world. I remain hopeful, however, because just when I think we have reached the end of our rope, God raises up allies and additional resources from unexpected places."
Michael Joseph Brown



"In Christ's advent there is no division among people based on race, gender, sexual orientation and class." Shively T. J. Smith

WHAT'S OUT IN THE CONVERSATION

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Luke 21:25-36 can be a difficult text to understand, especially during what is supposed to be a

joyous time. We prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus at Christmas, but this passage addresses the end of the age. Jesus tells his disciples that the time will come when people “will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Luke 21:26). The interesting twist is that although this would appear to be a text of doom and gloom, it is in truth the opposite. This period of chaotic change, when entire populations will be confused “by the roaring of the sea and the waves,” is just the birth pangs of a new age of justice (Luke 21:25).

Jeremiah 33:14-16 makes this point most clearly. The prophet tells us that God has promised us that one day we will live in a land where justice and righteousness reign. Instead of being in despair because of the rapid and often confusing changes that are occurring around us, Jesus tells us, “Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28). Changes, especially huge social ones, are often difficult for us to accept. At other times, those who press for such changes are met with fierce resistance. The gospel tells us, however, that such change is to be welcomed as preparation for the new age that will be ushered in by Jesus Christ.



Where in society do you see social changes emerging? How are the church and broader society exhibiting resistance and support for those changes?

For those in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community fighting for change in our society is a challenge that can feel like a burden. Advances on one front can often be met with stagnation and even regression on other fronts. Being an agent of change can bring us to the point of despair. **1 Thessalonians 3:9-13** urges us, however, to face the challenges with the confidence that God is working with us to create a world in which all individuals can live in dignity. Instead of cynicism and despair, the apostle Paul prays that Christ will “make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you” (1 Thessalonians 3:12). All the readings for the day call for us to embrace the transformations that are going on around us, and even to honor our own roles in bringing about these transformations — because they are signs that reign of God is near (Luke 21:31).

Shively T. J. Smith, an ally of LGBT people, says, “In Christ’s advent there is no division among people based on race, gender, sexual orientation and class. Rather there is equality and loving acceptance beyond our human understanding and average human experience. All people will see and feel the distress of the world. All people are also free to experience the strength and peace of God which comes from a divine relationship that reorients us to the world around us.”



Where is radical social transformation needed in your local community? How can you and your faith community organize and contribute to such transformation?

The gospel passage from Luke ends with a word of warning that may be particularly relevant to those in the LGBT community: “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life” (Luke 21:34). Being on the front lines of any struggle can be difficult. Depression, addiction and a sense of helplessness challenge members of the LGBT community daily. We can easily be misled into thinking that working for positive change in our society is futile. **Psalm 25:1-10** is helpful here. It is a prayer that calls on God to assist us in such difficult times, to keep us faithful.

Michael Joseph Brown, who works with the AIDS Survival Project in Atlanta, points out, “It would be easy to become cynical about the slow rate of progress in our world, especially when it comes to pandemics like HIV/AIDS. Millions around the world are affected by this devastating disease, and even in the United States the spread of HIV/AIDS among marginalized communities is relentless. I remain hopeful, however, because just when I think we have reached the end of our rope, God raises up allies and additional resources from unexpected places.” Transformation can appear chaotic, disturbing and futile, but we should take heart in our moments of doubt and confusion that God’s promise to us is that the day will come when we can live in dignity and safety, and that God is actively working for this as well.



At devastating and depressing times, when have you felt like divine help has come to you and your community? What are ways you can cultivate hope in communities in the midst of social crisis and helplessness?

PRAYERFULLY OUT IN SCRIPTURE



Eternal God,
during times of transition, conflict and chaotic change,
remind us that such times may be birth pangs
one in which justice and peace will reign.
and that when you are the source of our strength
one in which justice and peace will reign.
Encourage us.
Lift up our heads and spirits. Amen.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

2nd Sunday of Advent, Year C A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

As we make our way through the season of Advent, we encounter others along the way. Advent's encounters in the wilderness, like the Christmas encounter in Bethlehem, can be transformative as well.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Baruch 5:1-9 or Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:68-79 \(not discussed in this commentary\);](#) [Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6](#)

WHO'S IN THE CONVERSATION

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



"The word of God did not come to any of the leaders named in this passage — the emperor, governor, ruler or high priest — rather it came to John, an outsider of the religious and political institutions and powers of the day." Shively T. J. Smith



"Living as an 'out' person in our society, especially if you have a partner, means opening your life to others in ways you did not expect. Everyone from the neighbors to the mail carrier knows about you. It is definitely a wilderness experience." Michael Joseph Brown

WHAT'S OUT IN THE CONVERSATION

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Luke 3:1-6 is a text of preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. It describes the ministry of John the Baptist, who announces his work as preparation for "the way of the Lord" (Luke 3:4). A couple things stand out in this passage. First, notice that the author, Luke, goes out of his way to set the historical context for John's ministry. Most people would skip over this part as unnecessary filler, but it is meant to send an important message to readers. Human beings live their lives and vocations within defined historical parameters. To put it another way, there is a certain "givenness" to our lives. We are the inheritors of the contributions of those who came before us, and we provide a context within which future generations live and operate. What we have been given as a context is a tremendous gift, even if an imperfect one. (Also review how God is present in the account of John's own birth and the hopes of his parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, in **Luke 1:57-80**).

Through actions like the Stonewall riots of 1969, modern lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people were given a voice that now resonates throughout our present society. Even the current issues, like same-sex marriage and ordination, would most likely not have come about if it had not been for men and women who risked their lives and reputations in events like Stonewall. In addition, Shively T. J. Smith would have us remember, "The word of God did not come to any of the leaders named in this passage; rather it came to John, an outsider of the religious and political institutions and power of the day" (Luke 3:1-2). Looking at the setting for today's passage, it probably was not the best time to begin preaching a message of repentance, but if John was going to prepare "the way of the Lord," then it was the only context that was readily available (Luke 3:4).



Where in society do you hear the most prophetic voices coming from now?

In this passage, John's ministry is conducted in the "wilderness" (Luke 3:2). In ancient time, many saw the wilderness as a dangerous and lonely place, isolated from the comforts of civilization and vulnerable to the violence of others. As with far too many members of the LGBT community, John lived his life on the margins. By doing so, he opened himself up to "the slings and arrows" of others. LGBT individuals understand this kind of vulnerability. Whenever they claim their identities and begin to live out their lives with dignity, they put themselves at risk. As Michael Joseph Brown says, "To live as an 'out' person is definitely a wilderness experience. It can feel isolating and dangerous." In these kinds of circumstances, having a supportive community is invaluable.



What groups in your local community seem invisible and are socially marginalized? How is God calling you to be an advocate for a supportive and safe community for all people?

John's message was a challenge to existing power structures and patterns of behavior. We are

told that his message was one of "repentance," which literally means to change one's way of thinking (and consequently of acting) in the world. John's message was a call to transform society in preparation for the time when "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6). **Philippians 1:3-11** reminds us that this is still a work in progress. Paul says, "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

As with John, members of the LGBT community are often on the margins advocating for a transformed society. Shively T. J. Smith adds, "The gospel reading forces us to face the reality that the emotional pain and estrangement that groups like the LGBT community and various ethnic communities face do not spring from the Gospel message of love and acceptance. Rather, it is the result of the Christian community's failure to truly follow the model of John as a prophetic voice that 'makes [Christ's] paths straight.'" It is a difficult task, but this text reminds us that it is an important one.

This is the message we find in **Malachi 3:1-4** as well. The prophet tells us that the messenger's task is a difficult one. Yet, after the necessary transformation has occurred, "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years" (Malachi 3:4). As we make preparations for the celebration of Jesus' birth, we are called by today's passages to dedicate ourselves equally to the task of preparing the way for a transformed society.



In what ways does your local community need to be transformed? How have you contributed, or not contributed, to this process?

PRAYERFULLY OUT IN SCRIPTURE



Eternal lover of our souls,
during this Advent time of preparation,
help us understand the wilderness experiences of our lives
as opportunities to assist you
in your prophetic transformation of the earth, of all.
In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible

3rd Sunday of Advent, Year C

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

As we continue through Advent, we remain focused this Sunday on John the Baptist. He tells us, in no uncertain words, that people of faith must act with God's justice and love.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Zephaniah 3:14-20](#); [Isaiah 12:2-6](#); [Philippians 4:4-7](#); [Luke 3:7-18](#)

WHO'S IN THE CONVERSATION

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



"Rejoice! There is no word more jubilant at this advent time of year. Rejoice because we gather because we have heard the good news, that people everywhere, the desperate and the expectant, the hungry and the well-fed, the lowly and the exalted, are all accepted in God's presence." Alton B. Pollard III



"In this passage from the gospel of Luke, the writer calls on hearers to reflect on why they respond as they do to God's activities within the world." Shively T.J. Smith



"Isn't it delightful that encounters between groups do not have to end in conflict. They can become the birthplace of coalitions and alliances that can transform the world." Michael Joseph Brown

WHAT'S OUT IN THE CONVERSATION

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Luke 3:7-18 narrates a conflict between John the Baptist and the crowds who came out to hear him. Hold on a minute! Maybe it is not a conflict after all. John, who lives on the margins of society, tells the crowd that they must bear "fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). This scene is recorded in Matthew 3:1-12 as well. In that scene, John addresses Pharisees and Sadducees, but in today's text it is the entire crowd. In Matthew the tension of conflict is unalleviated, but in today's passage the tension dissipates quickly. John challenges his hearers to act in ways that demonstrate that they have had a change of thinking. It is a challenge that faces us as well.

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people experience hypocrisy when they interact with those who believe that they are open and welcoming. They claim to embrace diversity, including sexual diversity, but they continue to act in ways that perpetuate the marginalization of LGBT people. Church, in particular, can be a difficult place for LGBT people because it is often one of the places in our society where mixed messages are sent. One large African-American congregation, for example, claims to embrace all of God's children, but silently refuses to perform a same-sex commitment ceremony, even though such ceremonies are allowed by the larger denomination. The verse "Bear fruits worthy of repentance" means that our practices must coincide with our rhetoric (Luke 3:8).



When have you encountered instances in which people's actions do not match what they say they believe? How did you feel and what did you do in those instances?

The crowd's response to John's challenge highlights the importance of practices: "What then should we do?" (Luke 3:10). This is the good news in today's passage: there are people who are willing to bear fruits worthy of repentance. There are individuals and communities who are willing to respond to the gospel's call for a transformed society. Although it will involve a careful examination of their attitudes and behaviors, they are willing to closely look at their lives for the sake of the new world it will create. Shively T.J. Smith comments, "In this passage from the gospel of Luke, the writer calls on hearers to reflect on why they respond as they do to God's activities within the world." In today's lesson these people are described as being in a state of "expectation" (Luke 3:15). They are excited because they are open to the movement of God. Shively adds, "Regardless of one's socio-political standing, ethnicity and gender, we are called not only to believe in the coming of Christ, but to live our lives in such a way that reflects the just and compassionate love we experience in Christ." In the season of Advent, we celebrate the movement of God that transforms communities into welcoming places for LGBT individuals.



When have you examined your attitudes and behaviors only to find they conflict with the gospel's call for a transformed society? What did you do to truly repent and align yourself with the word of God?

Philippians 4:4-7 reminds us that when we embrace such transformative thinking and practices, we open ourselves and our communities to a radically new state of affairs. Paul says, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). In another text, Paul characterizes the Christian life as one of peace (Romans 5:1). When LGBT people and their supporters embrace an inclusive vision and practice of community, they live lives "which [surpass] all understanding" (Philippians 4:7).

In response to this new vision of community, Alton Pollard says, "This is a word that speaks to people like you and me — we who are sometimes up and sometimes down, but who worship because we must, who seek the divine because we must. We rejoice because we gather because we have heard the good news that people everywhere, the desperate and the expectant, the hungry and the well-fed, the lowly and the exalted, are all accepted in God's presence. It is a reality that gladdens the heart, sets the captive free and quickens every pulse. It affirms truth without conditions, unrestricted, unreserved and universal. It is a resounding affirmation of our embodied existence, same and both gender affection, gender equality, a love supreme. We have longed and waited, watched and prayed, believed and hoped, fought and held on in expectation of this heralded day. If this is not also the final significance of the birth of Mary's baby and Joseph's child, then whatever else it means avails not."



What are some significant features of a new community of vision that embraces all people? Where have you seen glimpses of such a community?

Rejoicing is also the theme of **Zephaniah 3:14-20** and **Isaiah 12:2-6**. Most poignant for members of the LGBT community are the words of the prophet Zephaniah, who says, "I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth" (Zephaniah 3:19). When oppression is only a faint memory and those who were once outcasts are accepted — without stigma, but instead with praise — then the prophecies that accompany Jesus' coming become fully realized. What can be a more jubilant community than one where all humanity can be united as one?

PRAYERFULLY OUT IN SCRIPTURE



Loving God of creation, transform us.
Turn our words
 into acts of your justice and love.
Turn points of conflict
 into possibilities for coalition.
In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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Out in Scripture

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4th Sunday of Advent, Year C

BEARING A BURDEN, BEARING GOOD NEWS

On the last Sunday of Advent, Mary's song challenges us to embrace our distinctive call—a call pregnant with both burdens and joys—for God's holy and just purposes.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Micah 5:2-5a](#); [Luke 1:47-55](#) or [Psalm 80:1-7](#); [Hebrews 10:5-10](#);
[Luke 1:39-45 \(46-55\)](#)

WHO'S IN THE CONVERSATION

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



"Mary's song is as much a battle cry as it is an announcement of the coming birth." Michael Joseph Brown



"Mary's song, the Magnificat, is a wonderful reminder that God acts in the world on behalf of the powerless and oppressed." Shively T. J. Smith

WHAT'S OUT IN THE CONVERSATION

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Luke 1:39-45 (46-55) contains the incredibly powerful declaration we call the Magnificat. What is odd about this song is Mary's delight, as an unwed mother in an extremely traditional society, in taking on such an incredible burden. Unlike the birth narrative in Matthew, the angel Gabriel speaks to Mary directly and there is no record in Luke of the angel informing Joseph. In response to God, Mary embraced the distinct holy calling of being other than whom society held as the norm. She welcomed "otherness."

Mary accepted the stigma — this calling and conviction — because God was doing something new and powerful in the history of the world. Acknowledging her own situation, Mary declared that God "has looked with favor on the lowliness of God's servant" (Luke 1:48). Like many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in our society, Mary understands what it feels like to carry the awful burden of otherness.

Unlike many LGBT people, however, Mary does not see her otherness as a reason for despair. She sees through the identification, this stigma, and recognizes that God is working through her otherness to transform the social structures that dominate the world. Through Mary's acceptance of the identification, God scatters the proud (Luke 1:51). Her song continues that God has brought down the powerful from their thrones; lifted up the lowly; filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. God has delivered God's people according to the promise made to Israel's ancestors, to Abraham and Sarah, and to their descendants forever (Luke 1:52-55).

What a radical transformation! Shively T. J. Smith comments, "The emphasis on God as Savior highlights the plight of the powerless and not the powerful. The hymn is an invitation to all people to recognize that the Good News of Jesus Christ is that God stands on the side of the socially ostracized and oppressed. Those who lack recognition, appreciation and voice in the larger society and religious world are assured that God is with them first and foremost because God is Savior. Isolation from human institutions is not separation from God's mercy and compassion." The promise of Jesus' birth is that the oppressive structures that rule our lives will be overturned, justice will be imposed and those who were at the bottom — or on the margins — may claim their rightful places in the new social order.



When have you personally felt "otherness" in your own life and affairs? Who provided you support and safety during those times?

The thread that runs through all the readings for the day is God's promised deliverance. In **Psalms 80:1-7**, the psalmist cries out to God for deliverance of God's people from attacks by their enemies. The prayer highlights God as liberator, similar to the transforming God expressed in the Magnificat. The author of **Hebrews 10:5-10** re-imagines for the early church what Jesus' ministry meant in ritual or liturgical terms. Like Mary, Jesus took on a mission that transformed central human practices. Instead of repeated sacrifices, Jesus' once-and-for-all act of sacrifice abolishes such practices (Hebrews 5:9). **Micah 5:2-5a** is a text of transformation as well in which the prophet foresees the agent of change as "the one of peace" (Micah 5:5a).

No transformation, however, occurs without some disturbance to the existing structure. People in our society are regularly isolated into groups in which gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation and gender identity result in violence, injustice and neglect. Many have come to realize that reaching out across these lines of division — division often imposed by negligence and misuse of power — creates not only a new power base, but one that can shake the foundations of a social structure invested in perpetuating its own prejudices.



If and when you have felt stigmatized, what has been your prayer? How can you begin to conquer the idea of being stigmatized in your own life?

As members of the LGBT community prepare for the coming of the Christ child, we should recognize the opportunity in our midst to reach out to others who carry the burden of socially imposed stigmas as well. We begin by re-thinking the idea that we are stigmatized. The idea that we carry a social stigma is one imposed upon us by others, not one that we should accept as a true definition of ourselves. Who we are is a gift from God! When we accept our lives as a gift, although one that brings along with it a calling, mission or vocation, then we can resolve to interact positively with the world around us. Like Mary, we can and should glorify God for gifting us with our genders, ethnicities, sexual orientations and other distinctive identifiers that make us who we are. In response to our amazing particularity, we should sing, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 2:46-47).



What is your prayer and the prayer of your own faith community for those who are stigmatized? How can you reach out to those in your community who face socially imposed stigmas?

PRAYERFULLY OUT IN SCRIPTURE



Mighty God,
help us to see our burdens as blessings,
our stigmas as badges of honor,
and help us dedicate ourselves anew
to the gracious mission you have prepared for us in this world.
In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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Out in Scripture

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Christmas Eve, Year C

YOU WILL FIND A CHILD

Ponder, seriously consider, what difference the birth of Jesus makes to you and our world. What transformations are possible?

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14 \(15-20\)](#)

WHO'S IN THE CONVERSATION

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



"God's gift to us, a child, is that all may know that nothing short of a miracle has come to meet our need this day." Alton B. Pollard III



"God's saving actions are present today for those in need of saving."
Shively T. J. Smith



"What sounds so simple is in truth profound." Michael Joseph Brown

WHAT'S OUT IN THE CONVERSATION

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Luke 2:1-14 (15-20) describes the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Reflecting on this passage, Alton Pollard says, "Aside from Luke, the only other historical record we have of the birth of Jesus is in Matthew. In Matthew, the story of magi is told, a story of the powerful, the elite. Society's standard-bearers were present, the kings with their gifts. In Luke, on the other hand, only the simple peasants and the shepherds were present. Two disparate accounts, two different segments of the social order are expressing themselves around this newborn child. Is it important or inconsequential that the stories are left to us this way? Why not a gospel story wherein the triumphant, the esteemed, the heads of state, the powerful aristocrats, as well as the humble, the demeaned, the forgotten and working people concentrate together on the divine mystery in their presence?"

Pollard continues, "Think about it. For if these two worlds flowed together there would have to be peace on earth. But as long as they do not come together and relate in ways that are mutually exclusive and unjust, there remains a vacuum in our world. War, violence, madness, envy, fear, hatred, all the grisly agonies by which our days are tormented persist and our nights are converted into nightmares. God's gift to us through the child Jesus is that all may know that nothing short of a miracle has come to meet our need this day."

At this joyous time of year, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community can celebrate the birth of the child Jesus whose entrance into our world marks the beginning of a new and progressive state of affairs. Like Mary, we should treasure "all these words" and ponder them in our hearts (Luke 2:19).



What hope might oppressed communities discover by pondering the miracle of Jesus' birth? What good news does the Christmas story bring to communities longing for societal transformation?

The words of **Isaiah 9:2-7** encourage us to rejoice as well. The prophet tells us that "a child has been born for us" (Isaiah 9:6). We rejoice with the prophet, because this child demonstrates that something spectacular has come into our world. Isaiah says, "For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian" (Isaiah 9:4). As we ponder the birth of Jesus, we should remember that the purpose of Jesus' coming was to dispel our burdens and remove our oppression. LGBT individuals groan for the culmination of this prophecy. They yearn for the day when they are no longer burdened with the stigma of otherness and oppressed because of it. The joyous words of **Psalms 96** elaborate on this sentiment by extolling the greatness of God.

The apostle's words in **Titus 2:11-14** remind us that "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all" (Titus 2:11). When will LGBT individuals experience the fullness of this statement? On this Christmas celebration, let us remember that Jesus came to create "a people of

his own who are zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14). This includes members of the LGBT community as well.



To what good deeds is God calling you and your community during these holy days of Christmas? What are ways that you can transform normal holiday celebrations into a time of truly embracing and cultivating social transformation?

PRAYERFULLY OUT IN SCRIPTURE



O God who delights in the presence of all of your children,
grant us grace so that we can accept this great gift
you have bestowed upon us,
the gift of Jesus Christ.
Let us embrace Jesus.
Dispel the world's burden,
remove oppression,
bring good news of your peace to all.
Amen.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

1st Sunday after Christmas

GROWING IN WISDOM AND STATURE

This week you are invited to integrate a ministry to youth, and especially to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth, into the full life of the church. We are called to provide a wholesome and safe environment for them to bring themselves – their questions, prayers, hopes, and gifts – to Christ.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Psalm 148; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 41-52](#)

WHO'S IN THE CONVERSATION

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



"Traditionally we have read and interpreted the stories of Samuel and Jesus for this week in a way that privileges an adult reader. The church needs to hear these texts anew as stories of young people and then ask the question, 'What are we doing to provide a safe place for LGBT youth to grow in wisdom and stature and be clothed with what they need for the journey?'" Mona West



"This week's passages involve children, Samuel and Jesus, who are ministering before God in a culture where children typically had no status and no voice. These are instances that demonstrate that even in oppressive circumstances those without voice and place still find a way to push the limits of the roles that are Assigned by the culture." David Wynn



"The new prophetic voices in our churches today are those of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youths. How is the church providing spiritual mentors and spiritual resources to make certain that LGBT youth voices are heard, their gifts are welcomed, and they are made full and inclusive members of the church?" Irene Monroe

WHAT'S OUT IN THE CONVERSATION

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

The story of Samuel's youth is important for both ethical and theological understandings of God's call and choice of Samuel as a leader. **I Samuel 2:18 -20** tells of Samuel's faithful service contrasted to the wicked behavior of Eli's sons (verses 12-17). Samuel's mother, Hannah, made a vow that if she were to bear a child, he would be dedicated to God's service forever (1 Samuel 1:11). When Samuel was finally born he was taken to the priest Eli to make good on that vow (1 Samuel 1:24-28). Many years later Samuel is "ministering" before God wearing a linen ephod, the proper garment of a priest, though he does not have a priestly pedigree. Even as a youth, he begins to fulfill his calling.

Verses 21-25, which are omitted from the reading today, express Eli's ineffective rebuke of his wicked sons. In contrast, verse 26 brings the reader's attention back to Samuel showing how he continually improved in wisdom and in God's favor. These passages bring to our attention the significance of young people who respond to God's call upon their lives. As LGBT people of faith our ministry should be with youth in the places where they live, grow and mature. We should be working with youth to help them bring their gifts and ministry to the life and liturgy of the church.



What does this passage evoke in you and your community about ministry with young people?

Psalms 148 is used each year for the first Sunday after Christmas, and also for the fifth Sunday of Easter in year C. Psalm 148 belongs to the "hallelujah psalms" which include Psalms 113-118 and Psalms 146-150. It is a hymn for public worship.

The psalm has three parts. In verses 1 to 6, the psalmist calls on everything in heaven to praise God. In the Bible, "heaven" or the "heavens" means two things. It can mean the sky, where we can see the sun, moon and stars, (verse 3). Or it can mean the home of God, where God's angels also live, (verse 2). The angels are God's servants in "heaven." In verses 7-10, the psalmist tells everything on the earth to praise God, but not humans. Finally, in verses 11-14, the psalmist calls for people to praise God.

As we consider the call of youth in the full life of our congregations, we need to include them in leading worship as well — especially when the psalmist calls on "young men and women alike, old and young together" (verse 12) to praise God.



In what ways can we help LGBT youth express their gratitude to God and express their joy in worship?

Colossians 3:1-17 describes the new life of those who have been called by Christ. Verse 12 calls

attention to "God's chosen ones." This verse recalls God's covenant relationship with the Hebrew people as the chosen people of God (Deuteronomy 7:6). Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience are all qualities and attributes which God's chosen ones are to exhibit. These qualities were, however, generally considered qualities of servants within the Hellenistic or Greek culture in which the Colossian Christians lived. They are also qualities characteristic of Christ as an expression of the idea that "Christ is all and in all" (Colossians 3:11). Verse 13 states "Bear with one another" emphasizing that the interaction of the chosen ones with each other is to mirror the relationship between God and God's people.

The passage for the day continues to identify qualities of life to be lived by those who are called: Verse 13b states as God "has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" This same thought is expressed in reverse in the prayer of Jesus, "Forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive..." (Luke 11:4). Verse 14 states, "Clothe yourselves with love," which emphasizes that love is an essential attribute of the chosen ones, and an expression of the love of God in Christ that binds all Christians together. Verse 15 states, "You were called," and reminds us that the chosen ones did not initiate their being chosen, but rather were "called" by God. Individual differences, strengths as well as weaknesses, are subordinated to being called by God and also to the unity of God's chosen people. Verse 17 concludes the epistle for the day by calling on us to live our lives fully, in all we do, in the Christ's spirit of love and unity.

As LGBT people we must teach our young people that they too are God's chosen people. As God's chosen, their individual differences must not be used to weaken their bonds with God and each other.



How as a community of God's chosen people — a people both straight and gay — can we express both unity in Christ and faithful service to Christ?

Luke 2:41-52 is unique in the gospels. This is the only account we have in the canonical gospels of Jesus' childhood between his birth and his emergence on the public scene around age 30 (Luke 3:23). The entire gospel of Luke is structured as a journey, as Jesus travels from Galilee to Jerusalem.

Verse 41 states, "Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover." According to the Hebrew teaching, every adult male in Israel was to appear before God for the three festivals: Passover, Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and Booths (Exodus 23:14, 17; 34:23; Deuteronomy 16:16; 1 Kings 9:25). On this occasion Jesus accompanied his parents "when he was 12" (verse 42). This mention of the 12th year is odd, since a male attained his religious majority at 13 when he observed the mizvot (duties) of the Torah. However, this verse shows a connection between the story of Jesus with the story of Samuel. According to Jewish tradition, Samuel's prophetic period started during his 12th year.

Luke 2:46, which reads, "Listening to them and asking them questions," suggests that Jesus was not instructing teachers in the temple, because he was a pupil himself. Only later does he become the teacher commended in verse 47. Verse 50 states "I must be in my Father's house." Jesus knows even at the early age of 12 the holy dimensions of his calling and chosenness. The word "must" expresses the force and power of his call that will continue throughout his life. Verse 51, "Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor," repeats the thrust of

Luke 2:40, and completes the frame around the entire passage for the day. Jesus, a youth following in the footsteps of Samuel, was called out and chosen by God. This passage invites us to remember and attend to the spiritual power that children, called of God, possess



What might be lost by reading the passages in 1 Samuel and Luke from only an "adult" perspective? How can we recapture a reading from a young person's perspective? What might God be saying to you and your community about ministry with young people?

PRAYERFULLY OUT IN SCRIPTURE



Great Spirit,
As we travel our spiritual path,
inspire us with a youthful spirit and wonder.
Teach us to listen for your voice in the
prayers, questions, and gifts
of younger sisters and brothers.
Protect and guide all your children with
your wisdom, grace, peace, healing and courage.
In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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