



Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

Epiphany, Year B

Arise, Shine

Epiphany challenges us with the light of truth. Will we step into it or shrink away from it?

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors

“*Stand up!* Stand up because, no matter who might be opposed to us and our sense of the Gospel, God resides in us, among us, all around us.” Mykal Slack



“Just as the light of our divinity has drawing power, doing justice also has drawing power.” Mona West



“The star light that announced the birth of Jesus evoked both hope and fear.” Greg Carey

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Epiphany is the season of light. Sometimes light draws us forward; sometimes it pushes us away. Sometimes light brings hope; sometimes it provokes fear. People who experience exclusion appreciate the power of this illumination. Words from **Isaiah 60** pour into their very being: “Arise, shine ... Upon *you* Divinity will shine ... Raise your eyes, look around you; those who have despised you have gathered around you ... The dust of their camels has covered you, so many have gathered ... As you behold them you will glow and your heart will throb and thrill.” The light of God shines glory among those obscured by society’s shadows. It is time, Isaiah says, for God’s people to *rise up* as beacons of the divine presence.



Can you name times when you shied away from being exposed to the light? Can you name times when you could bask in the light, confident of God’s blessing?

Unfortunately, light imagery has sometimes served evil purposes in our society. Racist discourse has glorified lighter hues and vilified darker ones. How may faithful people claim the universal human experience of rejoicing in daylight? Perhaps we might follow a clue from Marianne Williamson when she says, “It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us... We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God... And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same” [*A Return to Love* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), chapter 7, section 3, See also <http://www.marianne.com/>].



Has your community of faith held an open conversation about worship language, including the language of light and darkness?

Just as the light of our divinity has drawing power, in **Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**, we are reminded that doing justice also has drawing power. The psalm articulates a cause and effect relationship. Nations and rulers gather to the righteous ruler – *because* that one “delivers the needy when they call” (verse 4). That righteous ruler regards the blood of the needy as precious. What a wonder that would be, when rulers treasure the blood of the poor as much as they do the income of the powerful!



Do we really believe that justice compels people to draw near? When have you joined others in doing God’s justice? What was so compelling about the call to justice for you?

In **Matthew 2:1-12**, the star light that announced the birth of Jesus evoked both hope and fear. The magi trekked countless miles to see the hope-child, Sophia's child. But Herod's fear led to mass murder. It is as if Herod read Psalm 72 and pursued the opposite path. Domination, not justice, set Herod's agenda. Those who cultivate domination work in the shadows, avoiding the possibility that light might reveal their vulnerabilities.

The divine design to which **Ephesians 3:1-12** appeals echoes Isaiah's call. Now is the time to arise and shine. In other words, *stand up!* Rise up because, no matter who might be opposed to us and our sense of the Gospel, God resides in us, among us, all around us. God's is the light that many will see. While others try to snuff it out, many will gravitate toward that light because it is a light of truth and of grace.

The passage from Ephesians testifies to God's many-dimensional Wisdom (*Sophia*). In other words, the divine Wisdom embraces diversity. Wisdom's plan has been to unite all of humanity in the presence of God, yet this plan has remained – it still remains – a mystery, obscured by human sinfulness. Christian ministry, Ephesians proclaims, involves bringing that Wisdom to light, revealing the essential oneness of all persons in God's design. Ephesians nearly sings it out: one body, called to share in the blessings of Christ (verse 6). Thus Ephesians extends the call to *rise up*. After all, the many-dimensional wisdom of God reveals itself through God's people.

Epiphany light does not shine on everyone the same way. The arrogant turn away in fear, while others rise to bask in its glow. Few places can rival the joy experienced when lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender folk worship together in an affirming community of faith. Can we envision that moment when our neighbors perceive our community as a radiant site of divine Wisdom? Can we become the people who draw our neighbors to that light?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



*May this holy season be for each of us
a time of moving beyond what is "reasonable"
and toward the star of wonder.
God, move us beyond grasping tight to what we have
to unclenching our hands and letting go.
God, lead us to the Light,
moving beyond competition toward cooperation,
seeing that all humans are sisters and brothers.
moving beyond the anxiety of small concerns
towards the joys of justice and peace.
May the transforming acceptance of Mary and Joseph,
the imagination of the shepherds,
and the persistence of the magi,
Guide us as we seek the Truth,*

*always moving toward the Divine promise,
always aware that God may be hidden in the frailest among us,
always open to the unexpected flash of Grace,
to the showing forth of that Love that embraces us all. Amen*

Adapted from "Blessings and Benedictions," by W.L. Wallace in Geoffrey Duncan, Ed.
Shine On, Star of Bethlehem (London: Canterbury Press, 2004) 212.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

The Baptism of Jesus – 1st Sunday after Epiphany, Year B

Creation And Rebirth

Creation, water, baptism, birthing – new life. Baptism marks us as God's people, born of water and born of Spirit.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“The faith journeys of many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people include learning to trust that same voice that Jesus heard at his baptism, ‘You are my Beloved in whom I am well pleased.’” Mona West



“The beginning and ending of Jesus’ ministry rip apart the boundaries that divide the realm of God from the realm of mortals. Not only does baptism mark a new beginning for Jesus, his baptism opens a new world for all people.” Greg Carey

“The day of my baptism was, without doubt, the most remarkable moment of my life, precisely because it removed a veil of uncertainty and darkness from my

heart, mind and spirit. It revealed to the community and to myself God's deepest knowing of and love for me."Mykal Slack

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Birthing themes continue in the scriptures for Baptism Sunday, the first Sunday after Epiphany. From Genesis to Mark to Acts, water is the watery womb of God's life-giving ruach (spirit). **Psalm 29** evokes God's thundering voice, which thunders out creation, but in Genesis God's Spirit broods over the face of the deep like a great mother bird hatching her egg. On this Baptism Sunday we follow Jesus into the watery womb as we re-member our baptism. Jesus comes up out of the water to encounter the spirit calling him Beloved. We in the church try to live into that great baptismal formula of Paul's, which states that there is neither Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free but all are one in Christ Jesus.

The faith journeys of many LGBT people include learning to trust that same voice that Jesus heard at his baptism, "You are my Beloved in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). We learn to trust the voice of God that is indeed within us, instead of the negative voices that want to say we are an abomination, not worthy of ordination, excluded from the sacraments. As we learn to trust the voice of God calling us the Beloved, we also stand firm in our baptism – a baptism that makes us part of the body of Christ, a baptism that no one can take away from us. We learn to embrace our baptism more fully as we embrace who God has birthed us to be as God's LGBT children.



What forces make it difficult for us to hear that God names us as Beloved ones?

The scene in Acts 19:1-7 recounts a controversial baptism. Paul encounters disciples who have been baptized – yet somehow without receiving the Holy Spirit. Mykal likewise testifies to his own baptism as a female-male transgender person. No doubt controversy would attend his baptism in many contexts. Here is Mykal's testimony:

"And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day" (Genesis 1:5). This is exactly how the day of my baptism felt! It was, without doubt, the most remarkable moment of my life, precisely because it removed a veil of uncertainty and darkness from my heart, mind and spirit to reveal to the community and to myself God's deepest knowing of and love for me. And being baptized as 'Mykal' held particular significance because it represented God's hand in my transition and transformation. I recall looking up to the heavens, thanking God for my trans-identity and all the ways God has laid a path of support before me and feeling a distinct coolness come over me, as though the living water of the Holy Spirit had been poured over my whole

being.”



Do you have a baptism story to share with your community of faith?

Mark 1:4-11 recounts the wonders of Jesus’ own baptism. As Jesus rises from and parts the waters of the Jordan, as the Spirit descends, and as the heavenly voice calls, a great portent occurs: Jesus sees the heavens literally tear apart. The Greek verb here, *schizo*, occurs only one other time in Mark. At the moment of Jesus’ death, the curtain of the temple rips in two from top to bottom (15:38). Thus, the beginning and ending of Jesus’ ministry rip apart the boundaries that divide the realm of God from the realm of mortals. Not only does baptism mark a new beginning for Jesus, his baptism opens a new world for all persons. Creation, water, baptism, birthing – new life. Baptism marks us as God’s people, born of water and born of Spirit.

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



A prayer exercise:

Use the words that Jesus hears at his baptism as a breath prayer.
On the in-breath pray, “*You are my Beloved.*”
On the out-breath pray, “*In whom I am well pleased.*”
After breathing this prayer for ten minutes, write down your experience in a journal.

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2nd Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

The Power and Possibility of Change

Dramatic conversions may come infrequently, yet we are invited to seize those rare times for transformation. During these holy days following Epiphany, both spiritually and politically, God calls us to step boldly into the unknown.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 62:5-12; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“I am grateful that God’s love is so unbound that God uses it to guide me with my own uniqueness. God is persistently, continually beckoning in ways that get my and our attention.” Donna M. Prince



“Whenever we rest in our own stability, however that is defined, we cannot make the radical jump into God’s arms. However hard it may be, what a gift it is to finally get to a place where we have no illusions left – only God.” Ann Holmes Redding



“I rejoice in the graciousness of God who keeps coming back – a second time and a third time and as many times as we need – no matter what we have done with the message since the first time we heard it.” Judith Hoch Wray

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Psalm 62:5-12 reminds us that the “bottom line” is not about finances or politics. The bottom line by which all things are reckoned is God alone. When the psalmist poetically recalls that “Once God has spoken; twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God” (verse 11), we are challenged to remember that even though God’s word may appear as a one-time moment, we hear it at different times and in different ways.



What difference would it make in your life if you were to wait for God alone, if you were to put your confidence only in God?

Jonah 3:1-5, 10 calls us to look, not at the prophet Jonah, but at the exceedingly large city of Nineveh and at its surprising acts of repentance. Yes, the political scene can change overnight. The change is so abrupt, so dramatic. Nineveh’s turning moment was certainly unexpected by Jonah. This unexpected mercy will challenge Jonah about his own need for radical conversion in the next chapter of the story.

What does it mean that God changes God’s mind (verse 10)? How easily we forget that human agency is so intertwined with our perceptions of God’s actions that the assertion that “God changed God’s mind” may be the best we can do to explain God’s acts that do not meet our expectations. We envision the time when much of the church reports that “God changed God’s mind” about LGBT persons and non-heterosexual relationships, pronouncing us blessed instead of cursed. Of course, some of us are clear that such is the truth already. God’s mind does not need to change, only people’s perceptions of God’s mind.



When, perhaps, has God’s unexpected acts prompted you to radical conversion or change?

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 speaks to how we as people of faith live in a world that is changing. The answer: hold everything lightly. Don’t try to cling to what you think you have. Stay in the midst of your emotions, your relationships, your business, without allowing those things to define your life or expectations.



How would it change your priorities, actions and commitments if you were to live as if God’s realm was the coming reality instead of basing

your actions on the known world which is passing away?

Mark 1:14-20 seems to call attention to the radical response of Simon, Andrew, James and John when they hear Jesus' call. Yet we found ourselves asking what makes it possible for some to respond immediately while for others the response is more difficult. What kept father Zebedee and the hired workers from responding to the call? The answer may not be as simple as believing that Jesus extended the call only to those specific individuals.

Judith Hoch Wray comments that "When I am tempted to believe that God's call to me to be publicly out as a Christian lesbian is a universal call, I am reminded of the power dynamics that make it difficult, if not impossible, for some LGBT persons to respond to that same call to be out." Not everyone responds at the same time or in the same way. Each of us experience moments of being ready to respond to transformation. Such moments are not always concurrent with the call extended to us. What grace that the call does not go away! God's invitation comes back again and again until we are truly ready to respond (compare with Jonah 3:1 "a second time").



How do our responsibilities and our power in the community either inhibit us or allow us to respond to the call of God? How do we respect and challenge each other's responses without judging another's faithfulness to God's call?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



*Yes, get our attention, God.
In the midst of the mundane,
call us and help us hear.
Appear to us and help us see.
Grant us the courage to embrace change.
From you alone comes the transformation
that creates new relationships and a new world.
May it be so. Amen.*

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3rd Sunday after Epiphany, Year B

Calling Our Attention to God

Each Bible passage this week points us to God – calling us to reverence and praise, to faithful words and action, to clarity about who God is. By focusing on God, and God in Jesus Christ, we better maintain our own integrity and witness.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“In all relationships, especially in our ministries, we are called to *not* impose our spiritual insights upon others or to have those insights interfere with another person’s journey to God.” Donna M. Prince



“The whole book of 1 Corinthians is dangerous unless we account for the power dynamics at work. Every chapter must be read in the context of chapter 13. All gifts and guidance are qualified by love.” Ann Holmes Redding



“Be careful what you ask for. You may get it! In asking for a word from God, we put ourselves in a place of responsibility for the word that we hear, however unpopular that word may be.”
Judith Hoch Wray

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Psalm 111 sets the stage for hearing all the passages for this Sunday. The psalm invites us to focus on the works of God rather than on anything else that may claim our attention. The psalmist calls for people to define their relationship with God by awe and praise.



What difference would it make in your life if you were to approach every relationship based on a foundational knowledge that God's deeds, God's provision, God's covenant were the guiding principle of all relationships?

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 begins by reminding people that the calling to the prophet is in response to the people's need. The call continues by naming the importance of living it out as received from God. God's intention provides the interconnection of mutual accountability between prophets and people. It provides a foundation for discussing how we live out our calling, whether that call is to ministry in the church or to integrity in our lives and relationships.



What have you been called? Who or what holds you accountable to your call?

By establishing the all-encompassing, unique and incomparable nature of God, **1 Corinthians 8:1-13** sets the stage for love as the guiding principle in our relationships. That principle of love is always set in the context of power and responsibility. In our conversations about this text, we resisted the temptation to think that Paul is calling for a “lowest-common-denominator faith.” Instead, we are expected to understand the difference between inconsequential differences and essential integrity in our understanding of faithful living. To say that we are to “take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak” (verse 9) does not mean that we are to stop affirming the essential giftedness of all of our different gender and sexual expressions. It does mean that we are to allow love to govern our attitudes towards people who do not see things in the same way we do.

The implication is that a “weak conscience” comes from a weak understanding of the fullness of God and God's love. In our cultural context, the warning is surely to those who demand denial of the God-given gift of sexual orientation from Christian LGBT folk in order to appear “healed.”

This denial often causes them to sin against themselves and against God by whom they were wonderfully made.



What does it mean to be called to care for those who are “weak in understanding,” when those who are weak in understanding are strong in power in the churches and in the culture?

In these few verses of **Mark 1:21-28**, Mark introduces three dynamics of Jesus’ ministry that will be revisited in more detail as the gospel account unfolds in later chapters. The first dynamic (Mark 1:21-22, 27-28) identifies Jesus as one who teaches with authority – an authority that astounded the people. The second dynamic (Mark 1:23-24a, 26) highlights Jesus’ authority over unclean spirits. At the center of the text (Mark 1:24b-25) lies the third dynamic, Jesus’ silencing of the proclamation that he is “the Holy One of God,” an attribution recognized first in this gospel by the unclean spirit. (Note that throughout the gospel, Mark records that Jesus requires silence about who he really is. For examples, see Mark 1:34, 44; 3:12; 5:43.)

Our conversation led us to wonder to what extent we need to preach against traditional understandings of the power dynamics of this text. We want to challenge the linking of the “unclean” designation and the need for silence, long applied to women and to those who transgress gender and sexual “norms.” While we recognize that Jesus’ authority over “unclean spirits” speak to us of his power and identity, we are cautious about who has the authority to name what spirit is clean and what spirit is unclean. For the purposes of Mark’s presentation of Jesus, the one who has the courage to speak the truth about Jesus (“you are the Holy One of God,” verse 24) is named unclean and silenced. For other purposes, many LGBT people – who have had the courage to name the truth about themselves and their beloved relationship with God – have been named unclean and silenced. After exploring this passage together, we celebrate a call to claim Jesus’ authority for teaching and remaining in our own integrity. We are called to no longer be silenced or to accept the designation of unclean.



Can you think of examples of Jesus being used to silence people whom some believe to be unclean? What are the risks to standing with those who have been silenced in Jesus’ name?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



Alleluia!
We praise you, God,
Source of Wisdom,
Giver of truth,
Ground of all being,
Protector of the weak,
Voice of the silenced,
Lover of Integrity,
Justice and Peace.
May it be so. Amen.

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4th Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

The Politics of Coming Out

The tensions of human agency and “outing” one’s purpose are in play in this week’s Bible readings.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Isaiah 40:21-31 & Psalm 147:1-11; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; and Mark 1:29-39](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“The beauty of these passages is the way they address change in our communities. We reflect on whether these ways empower lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender and other oppressed groups to be co-workers with God in making the world more livable and loveable.” Randall Bailey



“We have the opportunity through these passages to reflect on how we will journey ‘out’ together to create healing and liberating communities characterized by strength and love.” Penny Nixon



This week's passages remind us that a goal of our struggles for liberation must be a re-orientation of communities, lest our efforts result in the re-inscription of oppression." Wendell Miller

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

A struggle for us in today's passages revolves around the relation of human agency to divine initiative. In other words do we sit passively by and wait for God to set everything right (as traditional readings of Isaiah 40, especially v. 31 and Psalm 147 suggest) or do we have a part to play? Although the psalm speaks to building a new community of those who have been rejected, it speaks primarily of what God will do. It isn't about what the brokenhearted, the wounded (verse 3) and the downtrodden (verse 6) are to do to improve their lives and change their communities.

Part of the problem with the traditional reading of these passages is that it can lead to our passivity – a kick-back, do-nothing apathy. One way of not getting trapped in such passivity is to look to the Hebrew verb, *qwh*, in **Isaiah 40:31**. The standard English translation, “wait on the Lord,” does not capture the sense of the pronouncement of Isaiah. This Hebrew verb speaks to an active time where one prepares oneself – so that when God is ready to move, one can fly. Later on one can slow to a run, and later still walk. But one must be ready to fly and the period of waiting is a period of getting oneself prepared to act. In this way the psalm needs to be recast to look at how those in the new community begin to relate to each other in ways that are empowering, as they recognize their interconnections and interdependency and not take that for granted.

Those who are LGBT or from other oppressed groups should not wait until the society changes to be non-oppressive. Rather we must be working to improve ourselves and our conditions, so that when God gets on the move, we are prepared to make the best of the situation. While the psalmist talks about God giving the rain and dew and helping nature work, it appears the psalmist is not aware that society can be oppressive and deny resources to those who are oppressed. For example, consider last November's elections when rights of LGBT people were diminished in several states. Giving rain is not going to help those who were in the middle of adoption proceedings in Arkansas and now are going to lose their children. Waiting on God, when hate mongers are on the run will not work for oppressed people. We must “wait with our feet” and do the work and walk the walk.



When and how have you dealt with the tension of “preparing yourself to be ready for God to act” and wishing God would act more quickly in

addressing community problems?

The epistle and gospel Bible readings give us another contrast of polarities. In the **1 Corinthians 9** passages we hear Paul saying he will dissemble and be what other people want him to be, because he is a “slave to all.” This is a contest of “winning” as he presents it (verse 19). It is interesting that he shows solidarity with the “safe ones” – the Jews, law followers, and weak – but not with the male prostitutes he rails against in 1 Corinthians 6 or the “unnatural ones” of Romans 1. While Paul presents himself in solidarity within a particular context, his language also shows that he is still keeping his privilege of social status. If he gets into trouble he can retreat back to some sense of safety.

On the other hand, in **Mark 1:29-39**, Jesus is struggling over whether he should “come out” as the Christ. He brings healing to Simon’s house. Yet, when people are gathering outside to get in, Jesus slips away to figure out what he should do. Is this the beginning process of coming out where one finds safe spaces to speak and to act? How does the process become complicated when it moves from the private realm to the public? What are the stakes for Jesus in coming out? What are the costs of remaining closeted? What are the stakes and benefits for LGBT people and allies coming out?

Although many see in such healing narratives a comparison between LGBT and other oppressed groups as “the ones with the demons,” this passage could be read as casting out the demons of racism, heterosexism, classism, sexism and xenophobia that infects all our hearts. Instead, we can read this passage as showing Jesus confronted with the oppressive ideologies as they are internalized by the people coming to him. Perhaps he sees his initial task as confronting these destructive paradigms. Jesus knows that the people have to be prepared to do the work of this casting out. They have to be willing to come together as a new community as our reading from Psalm 147 suggests. If we do not do this, we end up recapitulating Paul’s game of playing with people, without confronting the demons that have them oppressed and thus not liberating them.



When have you found yourself in situations when it seemed dangerous to address problems? Have you experienced situations when being “out” is viewed as not a safe or smart response to critical problems of injustice? How have you handled these tensions? Have you been in Jesus’ position of having to retreat to think through what would be the best steps to take in the future?

People are searching for truth tellers and that in a sense is our calling. We help bring things to the light of day. When we come out of the closet, we bring many other “things” out of the closet with us. The demons know us as they knew Jesus. Also, as with Jesus, when we try to stifle such demons as opposed to confront them, we run into difficulties. Jesus changes in his response to the demons. At the end of his reflection in Mark 1:39, he sees preaching as bringing the

needed change to cast out the demons. Yet when we follow him through the entire gospel of Mark, we see that he comes to a different more holistic realization that preaching alone won't do the work. We all have to challenge the systems of oppression in ways that change the lives of oppressed people, especially LGBT people, who are at our door looking for healing from societal and internalized oppression.

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



*God of our present and our past,
Help us to remember how you have empowered people
to work for positive change in our world.
Grant us courage and a vision of the future
to affirm and defend the right to wholeness for all people.
Amen.*

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

5th Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

Agents of Healing

This week deals with unlikely partners in healing and unintended responses to it.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[2 Kings 5:1-14 & Psalm 30; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Mark 1:40-45](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“Revealed in these four ‘epiphany’ passages are clues about accessing the power of healing, discerning the time for healing, as well as looking for unexpected agents who may be the key to bringing it forth.” Penny Nixon



“This week’s texts show that integrity and self-acceptance are important characteristics of community and also of religious leaders who address the human condition.” Wendell Miller



“The interplay of oppressed people hooking up with other oppressed people in constructive ways is modeled in these passages, especially when there are class differences.” Randall Bailey

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

On one level all four of this week's passages speak to bodies which are hurting. Na'aman, the Syrian general has leprosy, which in the ancient world meant any type of skin ailment, anything from a rash to an infectious, to a contagious disease. **Psalm 30** speaks of being healed from illness and promotes what could be interpreted as manipulative prayer used as a trick to heal the body. In **1 Corinthians 9**, Paul speaks of being in a race and torturing his body to win the imperial prize of an imperishable wreath. Jesus heals a sick man and tells him to go to the priest and follow the temple traditions and rituals.

In **2 Kings 5**, we see how class is intertwined with bodily healing. We see, for instance, the role that servants, both female (verse 3) and male (verse 13) play in helping Na'aman to get cured, especially when he doesn't want to accept their advice. Na'aman keeps going to the rulers and upper classes, though it is the people on the bottom of the social scale who hold the keys to getting him what he needs in the situation. On the one hand, one could look at the actions of the servants as being overly concerned with the wellbeing of their captors. On the other hand, it could be that the female slave wanted him gone, so that she and her mistress could have some relief and private time away from him and the other patriarchal challenges to their lives.

There is a stark parallel to Na'aman's actions and the ways in which certain parts of the Proposition 8 campaign, the ballot initiative in California that overturned marriage equality in the state, related or did not relate to other oppressed communities in California. We rarely saw on television lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of varied racial and ethnic groups. People of color, like hip hopper Kanye West known for his confrontation of homophobia in that genre, were not utilized in the Proposition 8 fight. Perhaps, this biblical story can teach us the need to be more inclusive in our strategies for fighting oppression. By the same token the actions of the servants also ask us to challenge oppressed groups who refuse to learn from their oppression to be allies with other oppressed groups.



How have you experienced reaching across race, class, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and age lines to build coalitions to address community problems? Have these efforts worked? What have been some of the resistances to this work?

As with last week, we see Jesus in an identity struggle in **Mark 1:40-45**. Jesus heals the leprosy man but then tells him to go to the priest and pay the sacrifices in accordance with the Mosaic Law. In this we see him making health care accessible in the community, but he is not portrayed as confronting the oppression in the system which requires those healed to pay a great price to the priests. We see, just as in the Na'aman story, that those on society's lowest levels get the

ball rolling in this story. It is the man with leprosy that tells Jesus he can heal the man if Jesus chooses. Jesus states that he will do this, but then Jesus warns him not to tell anyone else. Although scholars have referred to this as part of the “Messianic Secret” motif in the Gospel, it also points to some internal struggles within Jesus himself about when he should reveal himself, out himself, for the one who he is. It seems that in his estimation the time is not yet. Too many of us who struggle and wrestle with, “not now,” keep asking “then, when?” While Jesus does make the move that he must address the physical needs of those hurting in the system, he has not yet come to the point of doing so openly and challenging the system on its forms of oppression.

The end of the story is also troubling. Here we see that the man Jesus saved from leprosy “outs” Jesus throughout the town. This passage raises the question of the ethic of “outing.” Outing both presses one’s own position on sexual orientation, and, at the same time, makes visible same gender loving people in the community. The ethics of this act, however, should be in the hands of the individual, her or himself. One has to come to terms oneself with both the costs and benefits to the self and to the community of the act “coming out.”

Although Jesus is presented as prepared to address the physical needs of those individuals who are hurting, he has not come to the point of openly presenting himself as one who is challenging the system on its forms of oppression and empowering those who are oppressed to seek what is due them. As the story ends, Jesus, having been outed as the one who chooses to address these problems is surrounded by those who are in need. The risk of being true to oneself in relationship with others is that they may take away from you the right to decide when it is time for self-disclosure in the community. But as Jesus shows us, it ultimately is worth the risk of being in relationship with others. Clearly this is preferable to the option in **1 Corinthians 9** of torturing the self to become approved in a game where only one will win.



How might Jesus have felt when he told the man he cured of leprosy, “Yes I’ll heal you, but you can’t tell anyone else”? Have you been caught in this tension? Have you, like Jesus, risked helping a person/group hoping they would be trustworthy in not “outing” you? How have you dealt with the violation of trust, when it has occurred?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



*O, God,
help us to be agents of healing and border crossers,
help us to form alliances with those who are hurting,
help us to bring together coalitions which will address all forms of
injustice,
and help us to risk helping in situations where we may be “outed”
even before we are fully ready to claim our rightful places in the
community.
Amen*

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

Last Sunday after the Epiphany or Transfiguration Sunday, Year B

A Flash of Humanity

As our humanity is exposed in new contexts, we have to connect to both our personal past and the past of our community.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[2 Kings 2:1-12 & Psalm 50:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“The Transfiguration story highlights a direct relationship between full disclosure and fear that may stifle cooperative endeavors for change.” Wendell Miller



“The interweaving themes of loss, identity and intimacy offer us a chance to reflect on our divinely imprinted humanity. As those whose humanity has often been maligned by society, this speaks deeply to our experience of finding our own bright light.” Penny Nixon



“The sway of emotions from Elisha wanting to prevent the death of Elijah through the disclosure of Jesus’ identity in the Transfiguration gives lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender and other oppressed groups paradigms for analyzing our own lives and community struggles.” Randall Bailey

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

This week's readings raise issues of death, discipleship and disclosure in dramatic ways. The **2 Kings 2** passage raises the issue of the upcoming death of the prophet Elijah and Elisha's unwillingness to let him go. Many of us have gone and are going through this phase of the life cycle with loved ones. We have been unwilling to let them go and tell others to be silent about what is transpiring (verse 5), as though silencing them will change the reality. We hope our traveling with our dying beloved, as Elisha does, will slow down the process and give us more time to get from them all that we need before they go.

Interestingly, the path Elijah and Elisha walk (from Bethel to Jericho to cross the Jordan River) retraces the conquest journey of Joshua. For many, this path is troubling because of its reminders of the genocide of the Canaanites. On the other hand, there may be the need to retrace steps so that new learning can arise and can prevent us from getting stuck repeating past wrongs.

As LGBT and other oppressed groups look back at our histories we can see where, even in our struggles for liberation, we have hurt others. In so doing we can covenant to do things differently in the days ahead. The passing on of the mantle becomes so important in these moments of transition, as we prepare the next generation of leaders/disciples to take their rightful places in the movement. This seems a more appropriate metaphor than slaves who have a veiled Gospel, as Paul proclaims in **2 Corinthians 4**. The veiling of women in patriarchal contexts seems not to be the best model of preparation for the next generation of leaders.

The Transfiguration, as found in **Mark 9:2-9**, has varied meanings to us. Some look at this not as an instance of Jesus' divinity but rather as an epochal moment of his humanity. This is what our humanity looks like without our defenses. This is the radiant brilliance of the light of the world in us. We are connected to so much more -- that which has gone before and that which is to come.

On the other hand, another meaning links with the subject discussed last week of the outing of Jesus. This time God outs Jesus as God's Child, God's Son (verse 7), which is a term in ancient Israel for the ruler in Jerusalem. Jesus is not comfortable with this process and tries to control the spread of the new title by telling the disciples not to share it (verse 9). We understand that the process of outing reveals more than just one's orientation. The process propels those involved beyond their capacity to control it and many questions arise and circumstances get exposed than can be anticipated in advance.

The reaction of the disciples is not to engage the discussion between Jesus, Moses and Elijah, since they are fearful (verse 6). This reaction to "outing" by exposing the true essence of another seems to parallel what happens to same gender loving people, who in the midst of community crises stand back and don't engage in the crisis. The costs are high and many, like Peter, want to construct "dwellings" to contain and hide the revelations, as opposed to speaking up and powerfully addressing the community's need for new insight.

When looking closely at Mark 9:2-9 we also noticed that in the collection of individuals on the mountain, women were completely omitted. If Elijah and Moses are both religious and political figures, addressing national crises of their times, why aren't Deborah and Esther also at this meeting? By the same token, since Moses, Deborah, Elijah and Esther are political leaders, does this not mean that Jesus is also being introduced as a political leader of his day? Since "Son of God" is a title for the ruler in Jerusalem, one would think this is the case.

On the other hand, the Greek word for prophet, *prophētēs*, is a masculine noun with feminine endings. It is a transgender noun, so to speak. Perhaps this passage is feminized not by the presence of women, but rather by how men take on eroticized and traditionally-understood female aspects and roles. We see this in other biblical passages. We recall Elijah raising the widow's son by lying down on him three times (1 Kings 17:21); Moses, who wanted to see God's glory, was only allowed to see God's back-end (Exodus 33:23); and the beloved disciple of Jesus lays his head upon Jesus' breast (John 13:23). [Interestingly, the New Revised Standard Version translations of all these passages de-eroticize them]. Linked with the Transfiguration account, can one reimagine this story as including a gathering of men – with a range of sexual and gender orientations – in an encounter with God, the ultimate lover? Could this be why the women are excluded and the disciples who witness it are told not to tell anyone else?



At those times in your life when you are vulnerable, troubled, hidden and veiled, who do you seek and see? Who are your beloveds that surround you? How do you see your own humanity differently?

Death, discipleship and discovery are at the core of all these texts. Although the possibilities of interpretation are varied, and while some of them are troubling to some, the ways in which they can speak to the lives of LGBT and other oppressed groups are richer by these explorations.

We, like the disciples, might be frightened, even terrified by the possibilities explored here, and we, like they, might want to build structures to close down the exploration of possible meanings. We must remember that Jesus objects to that response. As in earlier narratives in the gospel of Mark, Jesus is reticent about full disclosure before the right time, but he does create opportunities for the disciples to be forewarned and fully prepared for the fullness and richness of the disclosure to come in the future. This should give comfort to those who live in fear not only of dying, not only of losing loved one, not only of entertaining the slavery of veiling oneself, not only of being outed in the company of others, but also the thrilling possibilities of God proclaiming to others, "this is my child, listen to her and him!"

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



*O Mysterious Presence, who lights our way between the worlds,
guide us to those places where we might touch our deepest humanity.
May we hear your invitation to come out from behind our carefully
constructed defenses
and radiate the belovedness that is our essence.
Amen.*

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