



Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

Ash Wednesday, Year A

Sound the Alarm: There's Ravaging in the Land

Ash Wednesday is not only a time to look deeply at the reality of our own humanness; it is also the beginning of the season of Lent. It is time when Christian people are called to discern and respond to the principalities and powers that still ravage lives.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Joel 2:1-2, 12-17](#) or [Isaiah 58:1-12](#); [Psalm 51:1-17](#); [2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10](#); [Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“Ash Wednesday is a good time to take stock of just how many ‘afflictions, hardships, and calamities’ each one of us has been willing to endure to bring about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender justice, and justice for all creation.”
Chris Smith



“We have to be very careful when we speak of repentance in relation to the LGBT community. Some have internalized the negative and oppressive views expressed in cultural, political and religious realms. Others may blame themselves for not being more vocal or outspoken in response to these views and their attendant policies.” Dierdre Hinz



“Repentance for the LGBT community has historically been an indictment of sin. Being called to repent and then being denied an opportunity to experience forgiveness within a faith community is the reality many LGBT people endure.”
Douglas Abbott

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

The themes of this week's texts range from judgment and repentance to an attack on self-serving, dehumanizing religion. They also include a personal plea for forgiveness, enemies making peace and the gospel's admonition to humbly practice our religious and spiritual acts. There is much to be said about LGBT lives in relation to each of these themes. Yet the prevailing theme haunting the imaginations and hearts of the writers this week is the horrible plague and ravaging that the prophet Joel points to so vividly. The writers of this week's commentary pretend no objective reading and experiencing of these passages. Rather as two lesbians and a gay man, we invite you to "listen in" on the face-to-face conversation we had in struggling with these texts in relation to our own lives and the lives of our LGBT community.

In **Joel 2:1-2, 12-17** the prophet is calling for repentance in the face of terrible disaster descending upon the land unless the people "tremble" (verse 1) and mend their ways with fasting and with weeping and mourning (v. 12). If the priests and ministers of God weep "between the vestibule and the altar" (verse 17) and the people "rend their hearts" (verse 13) and radically change, perhaps God will turn from punishing them.



How do you understand repentance in your own individual life and in the life of a religious community? What kind of repentance is needed in many of our churches to end the ravaging of LGBT lives?

One of the first things religious people must contend with when reading these kinds of judgment and repentance passages is the way God and God's action was understood at the time the text was written. People often thought: If something terrible happened personally or to the whole people, then God must be angry and the whole people must deserve to be punished. Today, those of us looking at this text might want to think less about God's wrath and punishment in interpreting personal and social tragedy, and more about the violence and oppression that human beings perpetrate upon one another.

Perhaps we might want to think about how we are the "locusts and armies of enemies" (verses 1 and 2). When have we become such enemies in relation to our sisters and brothers, and to the planet itself? We do indeed need repentance in the land and around the globe not as a means to "persuade" (verses 13, 14) God, but as a righteous and just act of accountability for all that humans have done unjustly.

The ravaging that the prophet Joel predicts as impending in verses 1 and 2 has already come across the landscape of LGBT lives. The locusts of hatred and violence are still daily realities in the lives of our community. The ravaging from many arms of the church and society continue to literally destroy the lives of young LGBT people, and have cost many of us our jobs, our family connections, and our intimate, partnered relationships.

The God that Joel describes seems to be both our ally and our enemy. God seems to be on the

side of the ravaging and against the lives of LGBT people. Yet, on the other hand, this same God is also the one to whom we must repent. It feels exhausting to encounter yet again a God who has to be pleased in order for the “plague of violence” to stop, and to come face to face with a God who needs for us to beg for mercy and forgiveness in order for the heterosexist punishing to end.

For the three of us, however, it felt too easy to simply sit and talk about all the ways that the heterosexist church and society has perpetuated this “army of violence” upon our lives. It is abundantly clear that Joel is calling “all” the people to repent (verse 1), not just some of the people. The LGBT community has some repenting to do as well. This repentance is not for who we are as LGBT people, or for our same gender love and sexuality, but for the ways we have not been bold enough and outraged enough about what continues to happen to our own lives and to the lives of our families and friends.

Perhaps we have not always lifted our voices against the self-serving, dehumanizing religious practices that the prophet Isaiah speaks about this week. A part of what is so insidious about abuse and violence is that it drains away a persons’ energy to respond and to act with outraged resistance. We have not always called for the kind of “moral reformation” that **Isaiah 58: 6-8** calls for so prophetically. In reality, many members of our own community are the “naked” (verse 7) and vulnerable ones that Isaiah demands we respond to with our concrete actions. Sometimes it has simply been easier to protect our own “small sphere” of safety in our own neighborhoods and among our chosen family, than to become the ones who “loose the bonds of injustice” (verse 6) and “undo the thongs of the yoke” (verse 9) from members of our own LGBT community who are much more marginalized, oppressed and vulnerable than those of us who have assimilated well into mainline communities and churches.

We have not always prayed for forgiveness in the powerful way **Psalms 51** confronts us to pray. We have had some of the same defensive excuses that the psalmist urges the people to turn from in order to have their hearts and lives renewed (verses 1-17).



For members of the LGBT community, what forgiveness do you seek in relation to other members of the LGBT community? For our allies, what prayer of forgiveness will you offer God for the ravaging of LGBT lives, and how might you concretely loose the bonds of injustice that abound all around us?

As LGBT people we humbly and boldly claim God of the prophets as our God too. Even though we are not responsible for the major ravaging of homophobic and heterosexist violence in our land, as part of the human community we feel compelled to take repentance, turning or returning seriously. We have not always done the work that is needed to stop the ravaging, but have rather done whatever was required of us to “blend in” and just try to live a “normal” life. The constant plague of locusts is painful and exhausting to resist.

The locusts have been coming for a very long time and sometimes members of the LGBT community need to pull back and regenerate and renew ourselves for the long struggle for social and religious transformation. Ash Wednesday is an important time for all people to discern

whether it is a time for decisive and courageous action or a time to pull back from the ravaging in order to renew ourselves.

While encountering **Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**, we acknowledged to ourselves that often we practice our spiritual disciplines in the kind of “privacy” that Matthew urges (verses 2-6, 16-18). We engage in symbolic and actual acts of prayer, fasting and almsgiving in the secrecy of our community’s life. We do this not because this is a good and humble thing to do as Matthew instructs, rather we do this because we are afraid to be more public, to be more visible. We are afraid to be more radical in our “true righteousness” in a world where gay men are tied to a Wyoming fence to die, and lesbian mothers lose their children when they come out. This is not an excuse for being less visible and radical, and yet it always has a particular and unique impact on LGBT lives.

In reading Matthew’s words we realize that the LGBT community often lives out its true righteousness in the private and secret worlds of safety that we create for one another. We are hard to see, hard to spot at times. Often we seem to have no overarching, unifying fabric of culture or reality that holds our community together. So we are forced at times to practice our “true righteous” within the privacy of our community. Yet what is so powerful about Matthew’s mandates is that he counts on the fact that every faithful Jew will simply be praying, fasting and participating in acts of charity and justice, and thus urges them to be humble in doing so (verses 1-6).

The gospel reading from Matthew is one of those texts that demands we take “context” seriously. For LGBT people we might turn Matthew’s words around and instead strive for more courageous public expressions of our lives and our “justice” practices – as well as challenging the heterosexual community to such a just witness as well. Matthew is calling for constant just behaviors and for those actions to always be done with humility.



How might God be calling LGBT people to call all faithful religious people to engage in these profound religious acts on behalf of our community and of other oppressed people – and to do so with deep humility?

When we encountered the words in **2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10**, we were challenged to be the community of God’s new creation. We realized how often we are “unknown and yet known” (verse 9) and treated as “impostors” and yet we “try to be true” (verse 8). Paul is defending the new religious community of which he is a part and claiming that they are to be about acts of reconciliation and peace. He is rehearsing all the oppressive things they have endured in the name of God and in the name of transformed world.

Ash Wednesday is a good time to take stock of just how many “afflictions, hardships and calamities” (vv. 3-10) each one of us has endured in order to bring about LGBT justice, and justice for all creation.



What actions have you taken on behalf of LGBT people that truly have brought hardship or afflictions into your own life? Where do you see examples of God's new creation in terms of LGBT lives being less ravaged and less oppressed?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



God of justice,
Give us the courage to face all
the places in our lives where we have
participated in the ravaging of LGBT lives.
Help us this Ash Wednesday to be honest and repentant
about the oppression that we participate in creating and maintaining
and give us new resolve to truly be communities of faith
who embody your new creation
as we engage in acts of reconciliation and peace.
Amen.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

1st Sunday in Lent, Year A

No Need for Closeting

God invites us to a fully open life, without fear of expulsion.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“These readings reinforce the radical and universal inclusivity of God’s grace and salvation for all. God’s grace, demonstrated to us in the flesh by Jesus’ sacrificial love, is so great, powerful and effective that it gives life and salvation to all, not just some.” Helene Tallon Russell



“The theme that jumps out at me is: ‘Trust in God’.” Michael Miller



“We need not fear to be ourselves — no more, no less, no better, no worse — because God takes us exactly as we are.” Charles W. Allen



“Repentance for the LGBT community has historically been an indictment of sin. Being called to repent and then being denied an opportunity to experience forgiveness within a faith community is the reality many LGBT people endure.”
Holly Hearon

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

When we live and love unconventionally, we're often accused of ignoring God's clear commands. Sometimes it's said that everything went wrong the moment Adam and Eve started asking questions. Because God's welcome, lived among us in Jesus, outweighs any fear of expulsion – God calls us to live open lives.

According to Matthew, when Jesus was baptized, the Spirit of God outed him as God's own beloved. This week's gospel reading, **Matthew 4:1-11**, shows Jesus struggling to discern how to live with that knowledge. Like Adam and Eve, says Charles Allen, Jesus considers whether it is enough to be the fragile creature that he is. Holly Hearon sees Jesus wrestling with whether he will let a hostile other (the tempter of verse 3) define his identity for him, or whether he will define for himself what it means to be a child of God. Likewise, Michael Miller wonders if Jesus is being tempted by the very idea that he should be expected to prove his “belongingness” to anybody else. Who among any of God's creatures has the authority to question Jesus' standing with God — or yours or mine? Helene Russell focuses on issues of power. Jesus is tempted to see God's reign in terms of controlling everything — making the world and himself pain-free by taking all power to himself, and thus making a sham of any genuine love.



When has God called you “Beloved”? How do others' doubts tempt you to question God's words of unconditional welcome? Who says you have to prove anything to anybody?

It is no surprise that stories of Jesus' temptation would be linked to the story of the first temptation in **Genesis 2**. A talking snake tells Eve the truth. She and Adam won't drop dead when they eat the forbidden fruit; instead they will become more God-like. Their eyes will be opened to know good and evil. And that, even God observes (Genesis 3:22), is more or less what happened.

Yet ironically, says Charles Allen, once Adam and Eve knew the difference between good and

evil they misjudged their own nakedness as somehow “not good.” They grew ashamed of their fragility as creatures and “closeted” themselves with fig leaves. They hid from God, and in so doing, expelled themselves from God’s presence even before they were expelled from Eden.

Michael Miller cautions that we can’t always tell the difference between disobedience to God and a legitimate questioning of established boundaries, though either way those who push at boundaries are going to feel exposed and vulnerable. Holly Hearon questions whether nakedness was the issue when the couple’s eyes were opened. Maybe it was their awareness of how easily they could be tricked, their potential for sin. In that, they were still a far cry from being God-like.



How do you tell good from evil? To whom do you listen? When is it good to challenge established rules? When are you tempted to hide who you are?

In **Romans 5: 12-19**, Paul uses the Genesis story to set up a contrast with the story of Jesus. Eve drops out of the story, and Adam gets all the blame. Adam prefigures Jesus, in that both figures’ actions have an effect on all of humanity. Both are universal, Helene Russell observes. But for Paul, Jesus’ faithfulness (or God’s faithfulness in Jesus) outweighs Adam’s trespass.

God’s unconditional welcome in the life, death and risen life of Jesus is the final truth about God, and about us. Indeed, says Holly Hearon, God in a sense “transgresses” our sense of what is just and right because God’s desire is that all might have life. This ever-increasing, “transgressive” gift of grace provides a safe space, says Michael Miller, in which we can struggle honestly with all that is entailed by the explorations, adventures and discoveries of our lives, including our challenging of established boundaries. In fact, Charles Allen suggest, we’re invited to bring even our most skeptical moments into God’s very presence, without fear of expulsion. We don’t have to closet any part of ourselves.



Do you feel welcomed by God, welcomed unconditionally? What do you allow to get in the way of God’s welcome? What are you hiding?

Psalm 32 celebrates the joy of living without pretense. “Happy are those ... in whose spirit there is no deceit” (verse 2). Living without pretense does require confessing our wrongdoing. We need forgiveness, suggests Holly Hearon, not for our same-gender relationships, but for any failing to embody God’s unconditional welcome even in our most life-giving relationships. We lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender folk should never hesitate to admit that we are sinners just as much as anybody else, Charles Allen insists. We fail to love extravagantly, transgressively, the way God has loved us. And perhaps the gravest failure is hiding our failures. Confession is the moment when we realize that God is the true “hiding place” (verse 8), the safe space where

we can live in full openness.



How do you feel about naming yourself as a sinner? Does it feel demeaning, or can it feel liberating?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



Ever-welcoming God,
you invite us to bring all that we are,
our questions and our failures,
into your life-giving presence;
Give us courage to live before you without pretense,
that we may know the joy of forgiveness and renewal
without fear of expulsion.
Amen.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

2nd Sunday in Lent, Year A

Called Out

God calls us to follow an unpredictable path – born of the Spirit from above – and calls this a blessing.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17](#)
[or Matthew 17:1-9](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“These texts, in one way or another, describe ways that we encounter God: through other persons, through faith, through questions, through God ‘coming out’ in Jesus.” Holly Hearon



“Abraham comes out, Nicodemus stays closeted, and Jesus looks fabulous! In each of these readings, whole worlds are turned on their heads.” Charles W. Allen



“The dynamics of growth involves movement beyond the established and normative -- which often undergirds what is considered normal.” Michael Miller



“These readings affirm the power and mystery of faith. Faith is a relational category — it is about one’s relationship with God. Faith is the human response to God’s call. It is the human side of the divine relationship. Grace is God’s side.”
Helene Tallon Russell

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

For those of us who push at the boundaries of “normality,” Abraham’s call in **Genesis 12:1-4a** sets the stage for understanding these Bible passages. Charles Allen is intrigued by the fact that, while Abraham has no Bible to authorize his calling with a few choice proof-texts, he ventures forth from the only family values he knows. He follows a voice that apparently only he has heard. But this is not a choice for private spirituality, for as Helene Russell points out, his decision is meant to bring blessing to all families everywhere. His family may not have gone with him, but they were not forgotten.

Holly Hearon is struck by two aspects of this Genesis passage: First, the passage can describe the experience of many LGBT persons – we leave behind the “house” of our parents (verse 1) to go to a new land (somewhere over the rainbow?) where God shows us our identity as GLBT persons. We are taken to a new land not only in terms of our identity, but also in terms of the communities we belong to and a way of being in the world. But it is a place that God’s own self reveals to us.

Second (echoing Helene Russell’s point), God tells Abram that he will be blessed so that he may be a blessing. It invites LGBT people to consider the particular blessing that they bring to the world. Such blessings include qualities like hospitality, welcoming the stranger, the importance of community, and the capacity to celebrate life with joy and humor. Similarly, Michael Miller finds it important to stress that whatever might have been the familial, social and religious pressures placed upon Abram, his growth involved a new understanding of God and of self in relation to the rest of the world. With confidence in Abram’s new understanding of God and self, he was able to stand against the status quo and set out on a risky journey of self-discovery, other-discovery and further God-discovery



When have you had to strike out on your own, without any guarantees from your family or faith community? What voice did you hear? How might this be a blessing for everybody — even those who did not go with you?

Paul's reflection in **Romans 4:1-5, 13-17** on Abraham's faith has been used by later Christians to downplay the importance of Torah – Jewish Scripture and tradition. But Holly Hearon and Charles Allen both insist on remembering that Paul's attitude toward Torah is complex. Here he is trying to show why non-Jews are and always were included in God's promises.

Abraham, Holly points out, was still in a sense a Gentile when he believed God — he had not yet received the sign of circumcision. For Charles, Paul's point that the promise did not come through the law is another reminder that Abraham had no Bible to back up his risky decision. It doesn't mean that Torah, or the Bible, is unimportant, but it suggests that even they do not confine God's voice. Michael Miller concurs that Torah points not to a constricting orthodoxy, but to an ideal way of being that reflects God's common life with us. It is not meant to confine God's working or God's voice.

Like many of us today, Paul is wrestling with how to honor his own Scripture in a way that leaves room for God to speak in new, seemingly unprecedented ways. God spoke before Torah. God spoke through Torah. God spoke after Torah. And God still speaks.



How do we honor the voice of God in the Bible and still listen for God to speak in unprecedented ways? What room do we make for other voices? What room do we make for God's voice?

The wind blows where it chooses, says Jesus in **John 3:1-17**. God's voice is not confined. Michael Miller hears Jesus telling Nicodemus that faith creates the kind of openness to the dynamic presence of God (depicted by the notion of Spirit) that enables changes so radical that they are only adequately represented by the notion of being born again or "from above" (verse 3). For Holly Hearon, the story of Nicodemus reflects the story of those of us who have not yet come out in whatever way that phrase can apply. It's the story of any who catch a glimpse of their identity, but can only approach it in the shadows because they fear being "found out" or losing status – jobs or positions of privilege. To be born of the spirit (from above) is to embrace our status as children of God. God's intention is that we may have life – even if we have to approach God from the shadows: it is a beginning.

The alternative gospel lesson in **Matthew 17:1-9** recounts the Transfiguration. It is almost too predictable that Holly Hearon and Charles Allen would see this as another story of Jesus being outed by God. Charles quips, "And doesn't he look fabulous!" Helene Russell hears Jesus' "do not be afraid" (verse 7) as an assurance that we do not need to fear our own transformations

Psalm 121 reminds us that God, our creator, embraces us, desires for us abundant life and honors our integrity as children of God.



Where is the wind of the Spirit blowing in your life?
Can you afford to respond with openness? If not, what
other responses are available to you right now? How
can God transfigure your circumstances?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



Call us out, O God, from familiar settings.
Lead us into unexplored regions,
and make our lives a blessing to all whom we meet.
Give us courage to explore you and to explore ourselves openly.
Amen.

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Out in Scripture

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3rd Sunday in Lent, Year A

At Home in our Struggles

God is the living water flowing through every aspect of our lives
— celebrations, hardships, meetings even quarrels.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Exodus 17:1-7](#); [Psalm 95](#); [Romans 5:1-11](#); [John 4:5-42](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“Every journey begins by taking a first step in faith.” Michael Miller



“The readings shout to us of God’s love and acceptance even when we allow the world’s evaluation of ourselves – as shameful or unlovable, not worthy of love and respect -- to get the best of us.” Helene Tallon Russell



“Each of these lessons shows us a glimpse of the God whose relentless love flows not only through our celebrations and dialogues but also our disputes, our struggles even our suffering.” Charles W. Allen



“In these passages, I hear stories about the journey of faith. This journey is never devoid of quarrels. It tests our character and challenges us to move from where we are to new insights and new ways of being.” Holly Hearon

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Water flows from a rock. God's love is poured, like water, into our hearts. God comes to us as living water in the form of a stranger. Clearly we are expected to see this common theme running (flowing?) through all the lessons for this week. But many themes are at work in these passages. All of them speak of God's life flowing through us when we are beyond our comfort zones — when we break with conventional behavior; when we speak with strangers; when we endure suffering; even when we question and quarrel with God.

The conversations in **John 4:5-42** transgress all sorts of boundaries, as Holly Hearon is quick to point out. Jesus and the woman transgress the boundary between Jews and Samaritans – between social restraints on the interaction between men and women (note the disciples' surprise that Jesus is talking with a woman in verse 27). The woman proves a worthy partner in theological dialogue with Jesus.

Helene Russell imagines the woman in contemporary terms wearing tight jeans, a blouse that reveals too much, hair ratted up, chewing and popping her gum or smoking a cigarette. We actually do not know that much of her private life. She may perceive herself as “limited,” in several ways, as Michael Miller suggests. There are a variety of plausible guesses about the meaning of her several relationships. But this conversation violates all sorts of “proper” behavior. Jesus' own behavior must make the woman wonder about ulterior motives. But Charles Allen notes that, as Jesus begins to speak of living water, the conversation itself begins to “flow” and both Jesus and the woman find themselves “at home” with each other in a way that astonishes those who know them.

The woman, in effect, takes on the role of an apostle and returns to her own people proclaiming her delight and astonishment at having been at home with one who knew everything about her. Her people likewise find themselves at home with this stranger and realize that they have met, not just a stranger, but the savior of the world – of Jews, Samaritans, and everybody else. Nobody is beyond God's comfort zone.



What are we looking for when we start talking with perfect strangers? Have you ever noticed such a conversation moving from the everyday to a much deeper interaction? Could this be God

speaking to and through both of you?

According to Paul in **Romans 5:1-11** when God's love flows through our hearts, even our sufferings are transfigured. Our sufferings are not simply obstacles to sharing God's glory, says Michael Miller. Instead they are another way of sharing it. Charles Allen sees a direct connection between our suffering and God's self-giving love even for God's enemies. We can be opened to grow in compassion.

Holly Hearon is struck by the sequence Paul outlines: suffering — endurance — character — hope. We don't think much about character development except perhaps in films, or perhaps when we assume a character (as in drag or cross-dressing). But Paul is referring to character that has been tried or tested. We can laugh at "characters" lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people may put on, but in a sense this character is a response to the trials we are subjected to by society.



When mutual, self-giving love flows in your heart, where does it come from? If friends and family have rejected you, what keeps you going? How has your pain opened you compassion for others' pain?

The lesson from **Exodus 17:1-7** invites us to look at the story from several viewpoints — the narrator's, the Israelites', Moses' and God's. The narrator concludes, "the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'"(verse 2). But in the story itself, all the Israelites' complaints, challenges and questions are directed at Moses. It's Moses who equates their quarrel with him as a quarrel with God (and the narrator goes along with this view). The Israelites get mad at Moses. Moses gets mad at the Israelites, and he just might be getting mad at God. When Moses cries out to and at God in exasperation, God stays surprisingly calm and provides water — from a rock! In this story God does not get angry at Moses or at the Israelites (for contrasting accounts, see Numbers 20:1-13 and this Sunday's **Psalm 95**).

Holly Hearon hears this as a text about the struggle of life in community as the people of God. The riskier the journey, the greater the likelihood of quarreling, dissension and wondering whether "God is among us or not?" The inclusion of LGBT people within communities of faith is risky business. When the going gets rough, the accusations begin to fly (did you bring us out here to kill us?).

Clearly, Michael Miller observes, the Israelites seem to have lost sight of God's ability to provide. Charles Allen, also reflects that Moses seems to have lost sight of God's presence. But God promises Moses, "I will be standing there in front of you on the rock." Everybody is grumbling, and God's response is to pour water from a rock that is harder than anybody's heart could be. God remains an overflowing presence even when God's people are quarreling.



How is God present in your anger at others?
What about others' anger at you? To whom do
you cry out when you are at your wit's end?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



Living Water,
 flow among us and bring us to life.
Pour your love into our hearts
 until our compassion grows
 to embrace our deepest conflicts and hardships.
Amen.

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Out in Scripture

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4th Sunday in Lent, Year A

Seeing God

It's true. We see and experience God through our bodies. That truth brings both healing and challenge. How do the LGBT community and our friends hear this news?

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41](#)



"The body is an occasion for the revelation of God." Ronald Hopson



"While the narrators of these passages seem to place a negative value on the body and the flesh, a playful reading of them shows the interconnection of pleasure over body, David's ruddy and beautiful eyes, and the use of spit by Jesus in the healing act." Randall Bailey

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have often been caricatured as excessively concerned with the body. This week's passages urge a focus upon the body. Thus they may be particularly well suited to be read from an LGBT friendly perspective.

How might one play with the story of Samuel's anointing of David in **1 Samuel 16:1-13**? Here is the great "seer" Samuel, looking over the sons of Jesse to discern whom God has anointed. Here

is Samuel admiring the appearance and stature of Jesse's first son Eliab, concluding surely this is the one, only to be admonished with that memorable line: "for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (verse 7). Yet it is still through the body that Samuel discerns God's choice. God uses Samuel's eye for male beauty, to 'see' who was to be the great king of Israel.

God uses our capacity for physical attraction, our capacity to see and desire, to advance God's purposes in the world. Despite the insistence of the writer of Ephesians **5:8-14** that the sexual body is anathema to the Spirit, the body is affirmed in the story of King David's anointing. David remains unapologetic about God's pleasure in his physicality. When he dances with his clothes off before the ark of the Lord in 2 Samuel 6, he insists he did this for God and not as his wife thought for the slave girls (verses 16-20). The sense through which Samuel knew God's anointed, is the gift of sight.



Have you considered how God might use our attractions to do God's work? Do you know of an example? What is wonderful about this discovery? What concerns or dangers also arise in tending to our attractions?

The emphasis on God's gift of sight continues in our conversation about **John 9: 1-41**. It is the urgent work of the reign of God as revealed through Jesus – to restore humans to our full sensual capability, metaphorically – to restore sight. John's gospel lesson depicts Jesus at work (on the Sabbath!), restoring wholeness (holiness?) though violating a code of righteousness. And the one who is healed is left alone to defend the healing, and Jesus, the healer (verses 13-17).

Is this not the plight of some LGBT and other oppressed persons? God restores us to full sensuality and full appreciation of our embodied selves as racial, gendered, sexual people, yet we are left alone in the community to defend our healing, and those who help in our healing. Surely, some would insist, "God does not heal LGBT people to embrace their sexuality! Surely those ministers, who support the full personhood of LGBT persons, are breaking the law of God – as Jesus was accused of doing" (verse 16). The hope of these people is that we are healed to be rid of our sexuality, race, gender appreciation and celebration.



What experiences have you had where you knew God had freed you, but others questioned your authenticity? Or those you expected to be your support systems did not come through? How did you relate to this?

Yet John insists some who think themselves sighted, indeed cannot see. And those who are thought of as blind are in fact in full possession of their sensual capacities. Is it not the responsibility of the beloved community to support the full expression of our humanity? Is it not the opportunity of the beloved community to defend and stand with those who come into their full humanity by coming out, claiming their healing.

Yet we must insist the blindness is only a metaphor, it is not intended to stigmatize the blind as incomplete human beings. Indeed those who are physically blind can also participate in their full humanity. Believing in Jesus involves experiencing the work of Jesus in one's life, restoring one to full humanity and full community. The work of Jesus, the reign of God, can only be experienced in and through the flesh. LGBT and other oppressed persons need not be apologetic about embracing their flesh, for as Samuel, John and indeed the psalmist insist (Notice in **Psalm 23**: lying down in green pastures, being led to tranquil waters, being comforted by God's rod and staff), it is through the senses that we experience the presence and the anointing of God.



How does the emphasis – that God is experienced and works through the flesh – touch you? What about it is good news? How might it disturb you? What is God saying to you through the emphasis?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



God, who celebrates our bodies and our liberation from oppression,
help us to reach out and support those
who are in processes of coming out and being healed,
who are coming to awareness of the gifts
of your presence in our bodily selves.
Help us also to realize that we, as your defenders, often get it wrong
and end up oppressing those whom you have freed.
Forgive us for these abuses and
help us to accept ourselves as you have accepted and freed us.
Amen.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

5th Sunday in Lent, Year A

Life for Liveliness

The breath of God enlivens the body, and the spirit of God dwells in the body. The body is called to life and liveliness. The body is affirmed. We dare to reject rejection of the body and accept God's acceptance.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Ezekiel 37: 1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11;](#)
[John 11:1-45](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



"We often miss the celebration of the bodily and bodied-self in these passages. It's not that the references are not in the text. Rather we are taught to be ashamed of our bodies and so we ignore the call to celebration of our bodies as signs of God's action in our lives." Randall Bailey



"Life is to liveliness as righteousness is to wholeness and holiness." Ronald Hopson

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

The well loved “dry bones” passage of **Ezekiel 37: 1-14** dramatically illustrates the theme of the texts for this week: God’s desire that we enjoy not just life, but liveliness. It is ironic that this is a Lenten passage as Lent is traditionally understood as a time of disciplined suppression of joy and liveliness. We are to enter into deep reflection upon the way of God, most clearly seen in the great sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross. Therefore we are expected to discipline and indeed deny the body in the service of spiritual growth and development.



How do you typically understand Lent? Why do you think Lent is usually tied to such body-oriented practices as dieting, fasting and abstaining? How might you draw closer to God during these remaining days of Lent by celebrating the body, rather than denying the body?

Ezekiel and **John 11:1-45** offer a different view. Indeed the sign of God’s presence and power is precisely in the body coming back to life. Homophobic culture insists that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people crucify their liveliness (live celibate lives) in order to be deemed righteous by the church. Yet, we must prophesy resurrection to all such persons. Just as Ezekiel summons Israel out of the grave of exile into its cultural life and liveliness, so LGBT people are invited by God out of denial and self-hatred, guilt and thwarted attempts at forced celibacy. We are called into life (authenticity) and liveliness (passion).

In the gospel of John, life comes as we come out from the grave (closet?) and liveliness comes as we shed our grave clothes (unfetter the body). It is interesting that at the end of Ezekiel 37:7-9 the disembodied bones end up with sinew, flesh, skin and *ruah* (spirit), but no clothes. Similarly, Lazarus ends up in the same state with Jesus calling for the cloth to be taken off him (John 11:44). Nakedness is celebrated here as God calling forth new life. Just as when we were born, are bodies are exposed without shame.



How has the view of the body and sexuality in our Christian traditions affected LGBT people’s search for rich, full, satisfying lives within the Christian community?

In this message of life and liveliness, there is a sense of urgency. John unambiguously shows us Jesus’ error – he thought Lazarus would not die, thus he waited before going to attend to him.

Yet Lazarus did die, and understandably Mary and Martha were disappointed that Lazarus' special friend had not come when summoned.

Do we also disappoint when we passively wait in the face of the death-dealing attitudes of condemnation, ostracism and scapegoating sometimes heaped upon LGBT people? Who suffers when we have waited for an opportune time to speak? Or, when we wait for a better time to assert our rights to life and liveliness. We invoke **Psalm 130** to justify our waiting. Yet the waiting (*qwh* in the Hebrew) of the psalmist is instead an active preparatory waiting – as a runner in a relay begins running her leg of the race before the baton is passed. We must not wait for God to arrive, we must begin running before God hands us the baton.

Some use **Romans 8:6-11** to argue the necessity of suppressing the body for the sake of spiritual growth. They point to how Paul embraces the dualism of his stoic opponents – flesh versus the Spirit. Yet despite Paul's tortured insistence on the death of the body, in the final analysis, even Paul has to relent: "He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you" (verse 11). Indeed it is for liveliness that God has called us from death to life. It is our reasonable service to God, to embrace this gift of liveliness.



What questions or discoveries linger in you after reading this conversation about God and the body? What is your prayer?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
We have tried to live as we were taught,
denying our bodies, denying our liveliness.
Yet we have known this is not your way.
We have trembled before the gift of liveliness.
We have tasted it and turned away
to inauthentic repentance and superficial guilt.
Yet you pursue us relentlessly with your embrace,
with your acceptance, with your love.
Forgive us for rejecting your acceptance.
Forgive us for rejecting our body-selves.
We now accept your gift, just as we are.
In the name of Jesus, fully-embodied Christ, Amen.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

6th Sunday in Lent, Palm - Passion Sunday, Year A

Palm Sunday- Inspiring Thanks and Resistance

Jesus, who will soon be rejected, becomes the source of support and deliverance for a people searching for resistance and change.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Matthew 21:1-11; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 \(This year's conversation focuses on the readings for Palm Sunday, rather than those for Passion Sunday.\)](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“We are given a glimpse into the liberating nature of acts of praise and worship which in its essence is truly a holistically somatic, bodily experience.” Leah Lewis



“Because of God, Jesus is able to resist the nations who surround and oppress him. Jesus, who comes in the name of God, is involved in resistance and his actions lead to deliverance.” Jill Marshall



“Even when our expectations of victory do not materialize, the Palm Sunday passage reminds us that our hope is in a Savior who specializes in resisting the status quo and enacting authentic change.” Shively T. J. Smith

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

The two readings for Palm Sunday, **Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29** and **Matthew 21:1-11**, share the imagery of a grand entry into the city alongside thanksgiving, singing and waving branches. A further connection between these two passages is the quotation of the psalm by Matthew: “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 21:9; Psalm 118:26). Historically, this psalm was the last of the Hallel psalms sung at the Jewish festival of Passover. The use of this psalm echoes the celebration of Passover and the collective remembrance of deliverance of God’s people from slavery and oppression.



What are some unexpected “celebrations” in the collective memory of your congregation and the LGBT community that lift up God’s liberating actions?

The strangeness, however, of the Matthew scene in chapter 21 is not mitigated by its connection to the psalm. We see Jesus riding on a jackass and a colt with a large crowd of believers shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” (verse 10). Only believers could envision and venerate this humble man on two meek mammals. Only believers could conduct themselves with such blatant exuberance in the midst of such a materially impoverished Ruler. Intellectually, what an ironic and incongruent impression this picture provides.

But these believers, similar to the psalmist in Psalm 118, demonstrate a sure and euphoric knowledge that their Messiah has come. Both passages address a festive entrance of the Ruler and celebration of our Lord’s goodness. We are given a glimpse into the liberating nature of acts of praise and worship which in its essence is truly a holistically somatic/bodily experience. Interestingly, one’s “righteousness” or lack of seems not to be a bar to praise and adoration. We Christians often miss the mark when we think being free from guilt or sin is the critical standard for relating to the Godhead.

We wonder who in the crowd in Matthew 21 and who participating in the liturgy in Psalm 118

was truly righteous and meek. Only God knows and will ever judge rightly. Sin, real or perceived, does not foreclose on one's ability to approach God. Indeed, sin provides all the more reason to seek God's face, grace and mercy.



How has stereotypes hindered you, the LGBT community, and your own faith community from seeking and praising God? What are some constructive ways for overcoming those negative stigmas?

Ultimately, the community of the psalmist and the community around Jesus rally around their entrances through rejoicing and giving thanks. Jesus' entrance, however, causes another reaction — turmoil (Matthew 21:10). Literally, the whole city of Jerusalem was shaken and stirred. Their reaction sets into motion the events that lead to Jesus' death. The entrance of an individual who enacts resistance and deliverance naturally inspires two reactions — thanksgiving for some people and agitation for others.



How can we be the catalyst for resistance and deliverance and how do we prepare for reactions of both thanksgiving and agitation?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



Perhaps the most suitable prayer and reflection comes from today's scriptural passage from the book of Psalms. As you pray and meditate on Psalm 118, ask yourself: "How does Jesus' movement towards mission and victory encourage me in my own life's mission?"

Psalm 118:1-8; 14-17

[from *The New Century Psalter* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1999) 162-63. Used by permission.]

O give thanks to God, for God is good;
God's steadfast love endures forever!
Let all Israel say,
"God's steadfast love endures forever."
Let those who fear God say,

“God’s steadfast love endures forever.”
Out of my distress I called on God,
 who answered me and set me in a broad place.
With God on my side I do not fear.
 What can mortals do to me?
God is on my side to help me:
 I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.
It is better to take refuge in God
 than to put confidence in mortals.

God is my strength and my might;
 God has become my salvation.
There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous:
 “The strong hand of God does valiantly;
 the mighty hand of god is exalted;
 the strong hand of God does valiantly.”
I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of God.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

Holy Thursday, Maundy Thursday, Year A

The Price of a Meal

The Lord's Supper reminds us of Christ's revolutionary acts of welcoming strangers, socializing with the "other," and taking to task oppressive practices which fail to recognize and honor the humanity of all.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Exodus 12:1-4, \(5-10\), 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; and John 13:1-17, 31b-35](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



"In commemoration of the institution of the Lord's Supper, we are invited to read these passages in communities of celebration and caring as we share our joys and sorrows." Sheena Mayrant



"I hope the church's observance of the rituals and acts of Holy Week can embody a full love for one another and strive to serve one another as equals." Jill Marshall



“In John, we encounter the celebration of the ultimate feast of liberation with the breaking of bread and wine and washing of feet – our assurance that through Christ all will live!” Kim Hearn

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

The presence of a ritual unifies the four Bible readings for the day. The readings push the church to remember the meaning behind the rites or sacraments we perform. Additionally, it provides a lens through which to look critically at who we are in times of crisis and sorrow as we affirm and celebrate life together in community.

The psalm and the reading from Exodus show rituals from which the New Testament writers gained inspiration. In **Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19**, a psalm of thanksgiving, the psalmist “lifts up the cup of salvation” and offers a thanksgiving sacrifice to God (verses 13 and 17). These are images present in our understanding of Holy Communion. The chief concern of the psalmist is how one might repay God for the liberation and restoration which has been realized (verse 12).

Exodus 12:1-4, 5-10 outlines the event and the festival of Passover, which is a communal event featuring “the whole congregation of Israel” (Exodus 12:3). It is also a time of thanksgiving and remembrance (verse 14) for God’s liberating act. In each of these readings the act is an important sign of community, remembrance and the proclamation of God.



What traditional rituals or new rituals will you enact this week to invite a communal and faithful remembrance, lament, affirmation and celebration?

Interestingly, just as the story of the Passover in Exodus is grounded in the story of the exodus from oppression, the story of the Lord’s Supper in **1 Corinthians 11:23-26** is grounded in the story of Christ’s betrayal. Both are pivotal events so profound in nature that a millennial later we continue to draw on their theological claims, imagery and experiences to articulate our understanding of God’s liberating work and the costs of the struggle for justice and freedom. Both Bible passages hold within them story and ritual, accounts of bondage and redemption, along with memories of the past and anticipation for the future. Both invite us to gather together to lament and celebrate. The texts present a radical redefinition of community where people who were previously divided by families and clans are now united as a community of faith and mutual caring.



Name the areas in which your congregation and the wider LGBT community need to be united as a community of faith and a community of mutual caring. What are some concrete signs you will look for as proof that the community is moving towards that end?

In the readings for the day, the instructions that precede the Passover meal and the Lord's Supper remind us that God is concerned about justice where everyone eats and everyone gets an equal portion. God, also, dismantles systems of power and privilege. These texts push against the notion of radical individualism and privilege that pervades our contemporary culture. Both meals place an emphasis on the sign of salvation — the blood. Blood is a reminder that justice, freedom and the struggle for inclusion comes at great cost. People with a deep and insatiable desire to be included in communities of mutuality understand the paradox of blood as a sign of profound sorrow and audacious hope.



Name some social justice struggles with which your congregation has been involved. How has your religious community linked to the struggles for LGBT equality and justice? What are some battles your community has won and what are some that must continue to be waged?

Yet, **John 13:1-17** describes another act of community and mutuality, which we are not familiar — foot washing. For John, Jesus' act of washing his disciples' feet is foremost an act of love: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (verse 1). Jesus' love for his disciples should not be sentimentalized; instead, his love is bold and potentially dangerous. "The end," after all, is Jesus' death. The foot washing is also an act of service. Culturally, Jesus, as their teacher and Lord, should not wash the disciples' feet. His action shows the egalitarian nature of the community. Serving his disciples in this way shows the ideal for service that the community must follow. Jesus wants the disciples to have a share in him (verse 8) and follow his example (verse 15) of love, service and equality.



Who in the community continuously practices acts of love and mutuality without seeking

recognition?

The reading of these texts summons us to deep reflection and deliberate action on behalf of the outcast and oppressed. While these stories are told through the eyes of ancient people, they remain relevant today reminding us that we are helpless and hopeless without one another. These meals mark the beginning of a new way of being in community. They invite us to take stock of how we express care and concern for those on the margins of our congregations and society.

But beware, they are no ordinary meals and must not be consumed in the ordinary way. When we partake of the Lord's Supper we should do so keeping in mind Christ's revolutionary acts of welcoming strangers, socializing with the "other", and taking to task the oppressive policies and practices of corrupt religious and political leadership.

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



God of our salvation and our freedom,
we thank you for this time of remembrance.
We thank you for this time of community.
Help us to find hope, mutuality and renewed faith ,
in the events of lament and celebration we recognize together in community.
Guide us into authentic community
where we express genuine care and concern for one another.
Give us the strength to take off the garments
of individualism, selfishness, self-service and pride
which hinder us from moving closer together.
Allow us to look to one another as you have taught us to do
in your own actions both in life and death.
May we remember your examples and may we be examples to others.
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

Good Friday, Year A

The Roller Coaster of Life

Life dictates in our struggle for justice and life that we experience a range of emotions from dire despair to overwhelming hope. Yet, the factor which remains consistent is the presence and power of our enduring, eternal Mother/Father God.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9; and John 18:1-19:42](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“John shows Jesus – the one sent by God who is not abandoned.” Jill Marshall



“Despite our mixed emotions in the quest for life and equality for all, God remains consistently on our side.” Shively T. J. Smith



“Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community must remember that there are saints, known and unknown, living and dead, gay and straight, who encourage us in our struggle to affirm our humanity.” Michael J. Brown

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

The lectionary readings for Good Friday remind us that the early Christian writers, as well as Christians throughout history, grappled with and interpreted the death of Jesus in a myriad of ways. Why did Jesus, the community's teacher and leader, die? What was Jesus' role in and reaction to his death? How do we interpret the community's existence in light of Jesus' death? The New Testament writers took different approaches to answer these questions.

These authors often turned to the Hebrew Scripture for answers. The gospels of Matthew and Mark interpreted the death of Jesus with the help of Psalm 22. In both gospels, Jesus' last words come from this psalm: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). By saying this, the dying Jesus shows weakness and a feeling of abandonment by God.



When have you or the community been weak and felt abandoned by God? How did you restore hope in those situations? How has the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered community expressed our own sense of weakness, abandonment and hope?

Psalm 22, however, also goes on to affirm that God remains near and continually sustains God's servant(s). At the moment of anguish and the question of "Why me?" (verses 1-21a), the psalmist turns to a colorful verse of praise and thanksgiving in front of the congregation. At the center of this reversal is the recognition and proclamation that even in the time of despair, God remains present and faithful. For people on the social margins such as people of color, women, lower social classes and yes — the LGBT community the psalm articulates a real experience of distress, anguish, hope, thanks and victory. We are affirmed in our own quest for justice and life that while disappointment and pain is real, so is hope and deliverance.



What are creative ways in which your community can affirm both feelings of despair and hope as authentic and Christian?

Isaiah's "suffering servant" continues the motif of understanding victory in death, particularly Jesus' death. The suffering servant in **Isaiah 52:13-53:12** passively endures harm by God and humans. The servant is like a sacrificial lamb (53:7) and an "offering for sin" (Isaiah 53:10) who

bears the sins of humanity and allows for forgiveness. The Bible passion narratives in the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke that emphasize the suffering of the Messiah draw from this portrait of the suffering servant.

The author of the book of Hebrews, likewise, sees Jesus as a sacrifice for forgiveness. **Hebrews 10:16-25** draws from cultic tradition to interpret Jesus' death. Jesus is both a sacrifice (verse 18-20) and the great priest in the temple (Hebrews 10:21; 4:14). The author of Hebrews agrees with Matthew and Mark that "Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission" (Hebrews 5:7). This author sees Jesus as submissive and pained in a sacrificial death, yet not abandoned by God. Interestingly, God's presence is the hope — we dare say, the guarantee — that victory is yet at hand.

Yet, the gospel of John's passion narrative completely alters the picture of the pained, suffering Jesus on the cross. In **John 18:1-19:42**, Jesus is in control of everything that happens to him. When Judas and the soldiers approach Jesus in the garden, Jesus knows what will happen and is the first to speak and question his adversaries (verse 4). After Jesus' self-identification of "I am," the soldiers, Pharisees, and chief priests fall to the ground (verse 6). Instead of crying out to God to "take this cup from me" (Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; Matthew 26:42), Jesus says to Peter, "Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (18:11). Jesus owns his final moments. Jesus replies to Pilate's questions and proclaims that he has always spoken openly, just as he speaks openly and boldly to Pilate. Jesus carries his cross "by himself" (19:12). Finally, Jesus' last words and actions from the cross indicate his control over his situation: "He said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (John 19:30). John does not show a defeated, suffering, or submissive Jesus, but instead shows Jesus, the one sent by God who is not abandoned by God.



In what ways have you and your community publicly owned and acted out your call to love and fight for justice?

The different versions of Jesus' response to his death in our lectionary readings should not be something we avoid. Rather, it should be a welcome break from claim that only one way exists to face our struggles in life and death situations.

As a community seeking to eradicate the injustices of poverty, war, chronic illnesses, oppression, prejudice, homophobia, racism, classicism, sexism among others we understand there exists unlimited options for how we face those challenges and they can feel at times overwhelming. The scripture passages remind us that whether in despair or assurance, we must face these struggles. We must stand for what is just, right and life-giving. Why? — because our confidence does not lie in ourselves. We are confident in the God who is the "I Am," the one is always present. We are confident in a just God who will bring life to fulfillment even in the wake of death.

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



Perhaps the best way to remember that we are not alone in our struggle to love and our fight for justice and equality is to live in community together — even in our confessions. Below, you will find a prayer of confession that is more like a call-and-response. Pray it with others. We hope this builds the courage and strength to continue in God's love even when we all face our time of weakness and doubt.

Our ever-present God,
help us remember you are with us even in despair.

Response: May we remember.

Remind us of your commission to love when
the works of love and sacrifice seem to harsh for us to bear.

Response: May we remember.

Remind us that you have already made the ultimate sacrifice
in the life and death of your holy child Jesus.

Response: May we remember.

Remind us that we are a part of a mission
that has already been endured and won by Jesus Christ.

Response: May we remember.

**We stand together in hope
of the present and future victories
which are ours in Jesus Christ. Amen.**

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

Easter Day , Year A

Belonging and Restoring

This Easter Sunday reminds us of our mandate to create spaces where all peoples can belong and be restored. Part of the resurrection is seeing and acknowledging the pain of others with the hopes of restoring them to full membership to the loving, accepting community.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24;](#)
[Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43; and John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“One of the things we see emphasized in all of the Easter passages for this week is the echoing of belonging and restoration.” Kimberly R. Peeler



“It is in the contested places, those spaces where one’s very humanity and social acceptability are actively and vigorously challenged, that we find Jesus waiting to mediate, console and validate us by way of personal interaction and revelation.” Leah Lewis



“This reversal of fortunes is a sign that God’s desire to save outweighs God’s desire to punish.” Sheena Mayrant

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Tempering the human need to belong to a community with the grief of being shunned or exiled by that very community you wish to belong to is a very relevant social problem in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Biblical passages are replete with requests for role reversals, promises of restoration and outsiders being made to feel welcomed at the banquet table. Social anthropologists refer to a similar phenomenon they describe as “insider/outsider” social status.



Who are the insiders/outsiders in our community?
How can we change those roles or eliminate them altogether?

In **Matthew 28:1-10** and **John 20:1-18**, we are told of Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Christ. What distinguishes the passage in the gospel of John is that Mary is grieving *alone*. She is grieved because she sees the stone has been removed from the tomb. Imagine if you will, what it was that Jesus did for Mary Magdalene. Regardless of what you believe may have been socially unfit about Mary Magdalene; her encounter with Jesus changed her social status from outsider to insider. And he loved her unconditionally.

In the Gospel accounts Mary's grief for Jesus is on full display. She witnessed Jesus die a cruel, vicious and agonizing death. All she can do for him now is care for his body. Imagine her angst when she gets to the tomb, and sees it has been disturbed. She seeks solace from the other disciples. So why don't they give it to her? Why is there no acknowledgment by Peter and the other disciple of her distress? Why do they just leave Mary weeping outside the tomb? Again, Mary is grieving alone. But interestingly enough, Mary can see things apparently the male disciples could not: two angels. And then she sees the risen Christ.



Are we guilty of missing or not acknowledging someone's pain, as the male disciples did with Mary?

In **Jeremiah 31:1-6**, God makes a covenant with the people of Israel that they will always belong to God. The Holy One consoles Israel with the promise to restore the fortunes of Israel and Judah and bring them back to the land they once possessed. Such restoration will encompass community building (verse 1), urban renewal (verse 4) and agricultural abundance (verse 5). In other words, the people of Israel will always have insider status with God just as Mary Magdalene has insider status with Jesus because she saw him alive before anyone else.

We find the notion of Christ's promise of contact and comfort fortified in **Acts 10: 34-43** where the theme of liberation is illustrated as Peter preaches his last evangelistic sermon. Peter opens with the proclamation that "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (verse 34 and 35). With regard to God's love and salvation God exercises no partiality as to race, gender, sexual orientation, profession or any other status. One's particular status or characteristics within the diverse pantheon of God's own creation cannot hinder one from the love of Christ. Nonetheless, the questions we are left with are "what is right?" and "who is acceptable to Christ Jesus?"



What are we doing in our churches to give LGBT brothers and sisters a similar sense of belonging and restoration?

The answers to these questions can be found as we seek God, particularly, in our own private contested places – those spaces where we deem ourselves sinners, where our fellow human beings assert our sinfulness and most importantly where we are confronted by God. In those places where we experience grief, alienation and shame, Christ promised to meet us. If we avail ourselves to Christ and to the bounty of his love we grab hold to the promise of the caveat Peter expresses when he conveys "that everyone who believes in [Jesus Christ] receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (v. 43). All things considered and experienced, it is belief in Christ that ultimately matters. All of the Easter passages for this week echo the call for belonging and restoration.

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



God of the Resurrected One,
Forgive us for the times we have ignored
those who are wounded among us.
Forgive us when we were the ones wounding them.
Forgive us when we were the ones indifferent among them.
Help us to see those we do not see. Help us to feel their pain.
Give us the strength to fight for the rights
of all to belong in our community.
Give us the strength to shout and use our voice
for those who are voiceless among us.
May we be agents of your resurrected life:
seeking to hear, see, feel, and include those whom we have ignored.
May we embrace this day as the beginning of a new time
in the life of this community.
In the name of Jesus Christ, our Resurrection and Peace. Amen.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

2nd Sunday of Easter, Year A

Wherever We Hide, God Finds Us

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have seen and experienced what the psalmist prays to be protected from – the pit and Sheol, the abodes of death – and still boldly proclaim God’s resurrection promises for our lives.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; and John 20:19-31](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“During this season of resurrection may we find ways to celebrate all the ways that LGBT people have been willing to touch the wounds in our own community so new life and resurrection might be possible.” Christine Smith



“When we LGBT people are attentive to our experiences, we are emboldened to come out of hiding, to breathe new life into stale institutions, and to imagine new forms of worship that allow us to bring our whole selves, and our entire community, into a more holy way of being in the world.” Diedre Hinz



“Everyone benefits from thoughtful and critical questioning. To question is a deep act of faith that confronts the status quo. Those called to voice their doubt, especially LGBT people of faith, contribute to the collective development of meaning and understanding in our faith communities.” Douglas Abbott

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

The themes of this week's Bible passages range from who is admitted to the temple, to what happens when the new community receives the Holy Spirit, to praying to God for protection and refuge, to new birth and resurrection, to the reality of fear and closed doors.

All of these themes are connected to the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The dominant texts, however, that captured the imaginations of our conversation were Psalm 16 and the story from the gospel of John. We pretend no objective reading and experience of these passages, rather as two lesbians and a gay man, we invite you to "listen in" on the face-to-face conversation we had as we struggled with the texts in relation to our own lives and the lives of the LGBT community.

The passage from **John 20:19-31** confronts us with the reality of fear and the reality of locked doors. One could hardly miss the connection of locked doors with the "in the closet" reality of so many LGBT lives. This band of Jewish followers of Jesus is afraid of the Romans and the violent crucifixion they witnessed, and they are afraid of their own religious authorities who hold enough power to hurt them. LGBT people know both the fear of violence inflicted by people in our larger social and political contexts, and we fear religious authorities that determine whether we can "enter the temple" (**Psalm 16**) and be fully a part of our religious communities.

Like the persecuted followers of Jesus, LGBT people have been forced into places of doubt and secrecy. And yet this passage from the gospel of John reminds us that wherever we may be hiding, the presence of God in Christ can find us and can breathe the spirit of new life into us. In that Spirit, we have the power we need to come out of hiding, to live fully, and respond to our call as disciples of the Christ. Surely it is a resurrection hope for the LGBT community, that one day all of us will be able to come forth from closeted places of hiding and into the fullness of new life.



What are some of the ways that Christian people continue to force LGBT people into closets of hiding and secrecy? When has the divine presence found you even though you were hiding?

As members of the LGBT community we have a particular regard for the character Thomas. We believe that he is not just accepting what the others say, but rather he is willing to enter into the process of doubt and the process of moving closer to the wounds of the crucified one than the others seem to be (John 20: 24 -25). Many of us have been willing to "touch the wounds" of

members of our community who have suffered and died from AIDS. We have held each other and cried with each other on the other side of beatings, and our families disowning us, and some of us losing our children simply because we are gay or lesbian. Thomas moves with suspicion and rightfully so as a part of a community who has witnessed the violent death of Jesus. Thomas is not borrowing someone else's faith, or simply accepting what others say, he chooses in this critical moment to deepen his own faith by both expressing honest doubt and a desire to believe.



When have you experienced or noticed that faith actually deepens when we express our doubts honestly? When have you actually been willing to intimately draw close to the wounds of others? What impact has that had on your life of faith?

LGBT people have so many reasons we can identify with Thomas. Oppressed people develop an intuitive sense in the world of who is trustworthy and who is not, or who will affirm our lives and who will reject us. Thus most LGBT people understand exactly why the followers of Jesus are behind closed doors (verse 19). And we know that there is not only death behind those closed doors, there is the power of the gathered community present as well. There is holy sanctuary there. There is the presence of our chosen family sitting, grieving and waiting for death to give way to life. We create quilted panels in the privacy of these holy sanctuary places as reminders of those who died with AIDS. We cry with each other when families have turned away in this holy closed sanctuary places. We comfort and empower each other in these holy sanctuary places when the church has abandoned us. We know these closed doors well, both the fear behind them, and the life.



When as a member of the heterosexual community have you experienced being locked behind closed, secretive doors because you were afraid for your life? What experiences in life have you had that have caused you to seek out the holy sanctuary of closed doors where only "chosen family can come in?"

The words of the psalmist in **Psalm 16** also speak a powerful word of truth to us as LGBT people. We have prayed for "admission to the temple" for most of our lives. We, along with the psalmist know and believe that we "belong" to God (verse 2) and yet there is no joyful security and limited new life that comes with this knowing as long as the institutional church continues to reject and condemn us. As we struggled with the text we realized that the relentless persecution we experience often threatens the very presence of God in our lives. We long to feel that presence as the psalmist does (see verses 5 to 11) and to receive the pleasures and the goodness of God's presence and blessing. Yet so often we have gotten more a glimpse of the "pit" and of "Sheol" (verse 10) than we have received God's blessings in the temple.



When have you had a glimpse of “the pit” or of “Sheol”? What impact did this experience have on your life and your faith? What are some of the “paths of life” that express your solidarity with LGBT people?

On the second Sunday in Easter, the church would do well to reflect on how it can become refuge for LGBT people. How might the church be transformed into a place that invites all kinds of human beings into a “path of life” (verse 11) that is for all? Even though LGBT people have often been utterly faithful to the Christian Church and chosen God steadfastly, the “boundary lines have not fallen in pleasant places” for us. We have not received a goodly heritage (verse 6). It is time for these promises and these blessings to be realized by LGBT people and for all creation.

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



We give thanks, O God,
that you always find us no matter
how much injustice and oppression surround us.
We give thanks, O God,
that you are the holy one who keeps inviting us to come
forth from places of hiding and terror into
the newness of resurrection hope.
We give thanks, O God,
that you are able to help us make places
of hurt and danger into paths of new life.
We give thanks, O God,
that your promises of love and justice are
not for a few chosen ones, but for all creation! Amen.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

3rd Sunday of Easter, Year A

The Spirit-Filled Heart

Those who experienced the risen Christ, both on the road to Emmaus and through Peter's sermon, were driven to do new things empowered by a Spirit-led heart.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1:17-23; and Luke 24:13-35](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



"When the Holy Spirit empowers hearts, justice becomes more than an empty dream!" Deborah Appler



"Hearts full of joy are possible for us this moment and every day as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people regardless of the challenges and struggles of our lives." Kathy McCallie

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

In **Acts 2:14, 36-41**, Peter, the disciple of Jesus, is up against great odds. After Jesus'

crucifixion, Peter leaves the safety of the locked room where he hides with the other disciples, including the women and Jesus' brothers (Acts 1:14). The same crowd that crucified Jesus poses a threat to this small, frightened and huddled group assembled in an upper room. Yet Jesus' followers bravely emerge, now filled with the Holy Spirit, and stand before the Judeans in Jerusalem. Peter preaches Jesus Christ as the resurrected Messiah — a message certain to hasten his own crucifixion!

Adding fuel to the fire, Peter holds the crowd responsible for Jesus' death. Perhaps at this point he and the disciples duck to avoid flying rocks. Yet, immediately a miracle occurs. Instead of a violent or even defensive response by the crowd, the Judeans are instantly affected. "Hearing this, they were cut to the heart..." and they ask, "What are we to do?" (verse 37). Peter's response is "repent – make a radical change." Turn away from the corruption of this generation that causes pain, intolerance and all of those behaviors that continue to "crucify Christ." The miracle is that many in the crowd actually change!

Too often many of us in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community find ourselves facing great odds. We live in communities where residents and public officials feel safe maligning us or treating us unjustly. We raise our concerns and these words further provoke hostility or fall on deaf ears. On top of this, change seems to take forever. But the radical change that takes place in response to Peter's sermon is immediate. Sometimes when all hope seems lost, the once unreceptive crowd suddenly opens up their hearts and embraces sweeping changes in society. We see this when more and more states write legislation to protect the gay community.



When in our communities have we witnessed surprising or swift change in society that seemed next to impossible?

The response to Peter's sermon reminds us that we must continue to have the courage to speak out against injustice, even when the odds are against us. The Holy Spirit has ways of changing hearts.

The psalmist in **Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19** proclaims love for God because God has heard and responded to the psalmist's needs. The words of this grateful singer's song remind us about the many ways God provides salvation for us because God continually bends down to hear our deepest anguish and then acts.

In response, the psalmist says, "I vow to keep the practices of the faith" (verse 18). Has the singer been inconsistent in keeping practices of faith in the past? Perhaps the psalmist has been disheartened. As our community knows, it can be difficult to worship when "the pangs of Sheol" (verse 3) ensnare us. Yet the psalmist is now able to sing because God's justice has been tasted.

The heart burns with passion and the psalmist shouts with joy to be God's servant who can loosen bonds (verse 16). When our hearts burn with passion for justice, it is healthy for us to cry out. Speaking out is a faithful response to God's acts on our behalf.



What are ways that we can keep our passion for God and for God's justice burning in the GLBT community?

Matters of the heart are tied together again in Luke 24:13-35 when on the road to Emmaus, the hearts of two disciples of Christ burn from within as they listen to the prophetic words of the risen Christ. This narrative may be the most mysterious of all the resurrection stories. Since the travelers seem to think the one who joins them is just another regular guy. It seems that he looked like any stranger.



Why do you think that Jesus' identity is not immediately revealed? Why do you imagine Jesus did not "come out" to these disciples?

The encounter on this road and the relationship that follows parallel the deepening levels of intimacy that occurs as strangers become friends. When we first lay eyes on one another our information about the other is limited. Clothing and mannerisms might provide some information. Yet nationalities, relationship statuses and sexual orientations are concealed until we engage in genuine conversation. Often, our identity as LGBT people is not recognized by strangers we meet. Then, like the disciples who are still not clued in to the stranger's identity, we exchange stories with one another to discover if we wish to trust or invest more time together. The disciples share with Jesus their experiences in Jerusalem during the crucifixion. Even when Jesus responds to these events by appealing to the prophets, he is still unrecognized. Yet something, maybe the burning in their hearts (verse 32), leads the two disciples to invite Jesus home with them. Jesus accepts the invitation and, while breaking bread together, his identity is revealed.

Breaking bread together can open paths for friendship and intimacy. By breaking the bread, a common meal becomes sacred. Trust can be built, and we can learn to care about each other and feel secure in revealing ourselves in all fullness. The Gospel calls the LGBT and straight community to come to the table — to eat, laugh, cry, love. Our hope through Christ is that, in the sharing of the meal, we can co-create a world that accepts us as God created us. When we open up and truly get to know "the other" — who, like us, embodies Christ — will not our hearts burn with joy?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



Help our hearts to be Spirit-filled, O Christ.
Help us to burn with passion for you and
for your people throughout the world.
May our passion ignite flames of justice and hope
in the midst of hopelessness and pain.
May the warmth of our fire be a sign
of your compassionate presence in the world.
In the name of the Risen Christ, Amen.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

4th Sunday in Easter, Year A

Co-Creating Healthy Community

The joy that shines through these passages is a joy that the world can't give and the world can't take away. The unity, health and safety evident in many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities are examples of such joy. The resurrection hope expressed in the passages today invites us to join God in co-creating such courageous and generous communities.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Acts 2:42-47](#); [Psalm 23](#); [1 Peter 2:19-25](#) (not explored in this week's conversation); and [John 10:1-10](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“As people of faith we accept the joyful and messy work of belonging to communities that hold us accountable, challenge us to keep learning, love us unconditionally and comfort us through hard times.” Kathy McCallie



“The task of co-creating healthy communities takes time and patience--but the payoff is great!” Deborah Appler

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Acts 2:42-47 describes the society that God calls us to build in this world. Through the acts of fellowship, teaching, praying and sharing food, this new community is intimately aware of the needs of its members both locally and globally. This fledgling group, empowered by the Holy Spirit and equipped with their Jewish traditions of justice, righteousness and shalom, sells all of their wealth and distributes the proceeds “as any had need” (verse 46). Our LGBT communities have inspired the wider society by uniting and generously sharing resources in response to the HIV/AIDS struggle. At such times when we pull together, we taste the mysterious joy of the early community described in Acts. The ones who believed in the mission continued this practice with “glad and generous hearts” (verse 46) as they continued to break bread together. News of this spread like wildfire and others joined in (verse 47).



Imagine being part of a group so unified in mission and spirit that it is constantly joyful even while sharing possessions. How does our community co-create this type of community both within and beyond it?

Many shared meals and trips to the Temple in Jerusalem where they interacted with the wider community provided empowerment for this community to act. Perhaps wandering into the city, witnessing suffering, and sharing meals and prayers provided a sacred space for the Spirit to act and move the community toward justice. Those of us who live in relatively wealthy nations are tempted by materialism and radical individualism every day. Yet as LGBT people, we have experienced being disenfranchised. This Bible passage challenges us to be generous in pooling resources for the common good. Ironically, the joy is not in acquiring an abundance of toys but in sharing them!

Psalm 23 reminds us that we are safe and beloved exactly as we are right now. God watches over us, guides us and provides every single thing we need. “God is my shepherd, I lack *nothing*” (verse 1). What great news this is for those of us who have been told we are defective, we need to be straightened out or we are outside of God’s love! The psalm promises the community that no matter how difficult times are, God is present to lead and to provide support even in the valley of deep darkness. The psalm also reminds us that God provides abundantly for all creation. We do not have to hoard wealth for a rainy day at the expense of the global community when we put our trust in God. Nevertheless, some are unjustly denied their daily bread. Often this is the result of the greed by those in power, many of whom would consider themselves to be Christian. God prepares a table of abundance for everyone. It is the responsibility of a just and healthy community to make certain that all are served and, perhaps, even share the table with our

enemies.



What activities or practices help you rest in joy and assurance that you are safe and well loved by God? How can you make more time for those experiences?

John 10:1-10 is addressed to the Christian community and appears, at first glance, quite exclusive. Gates and blockades are all too familiar for those who have been closed out of the community because they did not reflect its dominant teachings, among other things, on sexuality, gender and race.



When have you felt gated out of the community of faith? When have you shut the gate on someone?

There is good news. Church bodies, church leaders or television evangelists do not ultimately decide who is “in” and “out” of the Christian community. If we are honest we too have opinions about who should and should not be allowed into our faith community. By blocking people out, we run the risk of being exclusive. However, there are times when those who are hurtful and death-affirming need to be excluded for the sake of the community’s health. For Christians, the only one authorized to ultimately decide who may enter the gate and join the others is Jesus the Christ. The “thief” (verse 10: the violent and intolerant one, or those who spew hate, those who threaten the health of the people of Christ) might jump the fence but should be shunned so that the work of co-creating healthy and just communities can continue. Jesus promises life in abundance, even for reformed thieves!

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



God of abundance,
With you, help us co-create healthy communities
where all of our resources can be shared —
our possessions, pain, joy, love and concern,
our health and sickness — all that we have and are.
You have promised us life in abundance to all of your people.
Help us not to turn away the marginalized from your tables but,
be ones who co-create the meal with you.
Amen.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

5th Sunday of Easter, Year A

Knowing God, Knowing Strength, Finding Home, Finding Ourselves

Knowing and reclaiming God's saving history as our own, we minister to those who would harm us. We stay persistent in prayer. The identity of Christ becomes our identity. We are empowered to even greater works than we have dared to imagine.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; and John 14:1-14.](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



“Let yourself be a holy priesthood.’ This reminds me that we do have an oft-forgotten innate ability and authority in Christ to be beyond what others might perceive. I can allow myself to be a holy priest. I then am empowered by Jesus’ encouragement that ‘the one who believes in me shall do even greater works than I have done.” Donna M. Prince



“If we ground ourselves only in our successes or in the civil rights we have, we people of faith have missed our greatest sources of confidence. Trusting the fortress that is God, that dwelling which Christ is preparing is where we ground our prophetic voice to speak in this world.” Rich McCarty



"I hear 'the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,' and I know that even though I have been rejected, that is not the final word about who I am. I, too, become a living stone, precious in God's sight." Judith Hoch Wray

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Psalm 31: 1-5, 15-16 reminds us to be persistent in prayer. In the midst of traps laid for us and enemies and persecutors all around us, an assurance of God's keeping power provides assurance of support for the journey.



What spiritual disciplines help you to remain in the present, aware of God's presence in the moment of trial or other tough times?

Acts 7:55-60, the stoning of Stephen, can be read in the context of the rehearsal of salvation history in Stephen's sermon (Acts 7:1-53). That context calls us to reclaim salvation history for ourselves and to rehearse it as a source of encouragement, strength and proclamation. At the same time the stoning of Stephen can be read in the context of the story of Saul (later called Paul), as an introduction to that great persecutor who became a faithful apostle. Here lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender folk can claim their legacy of standing in the prophetic stream, persecuted for being bold about our life and our love.

Reading the verse following today's passage, Acts 8:1, we hear that "Saul approved of their killing him." Who knows what may be the result of our witness in the presence of those who would dismiss us? And some of us, LGBT folk and our allies, having remained silently watching in the past, may yet find ourselves empowered by God's Spirit and a faithful community to speak out boldly for the justice which is consistent with God's expansive love.



What will it take to call forth previously silent allies and others to support LGBT folk who live "out" with integrity – who face discrimination and suffering because of their spiritual faithfulness? What does it mean to respond to hate crimes with the temperament of Stephen found in this text and its context?

The reading from **1 Peter 2:2-10** roots our identity in what we are — rather than in the negative — what we are not. We are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (verse 9). Here the identity of Christ as “a living stone” becomes our identity. Even though (and maybe even because) we have been rejected as Jesus was rejected, we have the ability to allow ourselves to be more. We are built into a spiritual priesthood. Christ is precious to us and we are precious to God. Surely our preciousness calls us to view others as precious. Standing again in the prophetic stream, like the writer of 1 Peter, we too can echo the proclamation of Hosea as we claim and proclaim that “once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people ” (Hosea 2:23).



What might it look like when the Christian LGBT community and our allies allow ourselves to be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood? In this twenty-first century, what are spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ?

While **John 14:1-14** is frequently read at funerals, the admonition is not an assurance of provision after death, but about staying so grounded in our sense of belonging to the Eternal that nothing will deter us from acting with passion and power in the present day. Knowing who we are and having an assurance of “home” allows us the freedom to believe — beyond the stories and traditions — in the One who works through us in ways that the church has not yet been able to imagine. In God’s, Abba’s house, we belong. We believe; we will not let our hearts be troubled.



Where do you find home? Where do you ground your faith and action in times of testing or trouble?

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Prayerfully Out in Scripture



Living God, build us into a spiritual house.
Precious Christ, infuse us with the assurance of our preciousness.
Holy Spirit, help us stand as a holy nation,
called to be light to a world living in darkness and fear.

Abba, be Home to all who are rejected
from their families and churches,
and to us who travel roads unknown.
May we stay persistent in prayer,
stand grounded in our identity as God's own people
and be bold in our proclamation of your love.

Amen.

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Out in Scripture

An honest encounter between LGBT lives & the Bible.

6th Sunday of Easter, Year A

I Will Not Leave You

God not only creates humankind in God's image but continues to care for us through all of life's seasons!

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Acts 17: 22-31; Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



"Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit as Advocate guarantees that we will make it through all our experiences. We can declare that 'God is good all the time.'"
Linda Thomas



"God wants the rest of the church to understand that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are God's gift to the church..." Norman Kansfield



"In the face of hideous violence against the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community – as when an eighth-grader is killed for coming out to their friends – these passages want us to understand that God's love, God's promises, and God's calling are for us." Valerie Bridgeman Davis



"In Paul's conversation with the Athenian, he appeals to what they know from their own experience. This is important for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people." Mona West

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

In **Acts 17:22-31**, Paul is in Athens sharing the good news with intellectuals and philosophers in the marketplace – a setting where LGBT people might be found. He tells them that the unnamed divinity in which they believe is the creator of all life and close at hand.

Created in God's image humans are God's offspring who come to know their God-likeness through lived experience. God is as near as breath and the very animation of our bodies. This reality makes all bodies holy. We boldly declare therefore that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are created by God, holy and in God's image, *imago Dei*.

Paul wants the Athenians (and us) to understand that God not only creates humankind in God's image, but God continues to care for all of us -- "God gives all mortals life and breath and *all things*" (Acts 17:25). Paul is so sure about this that he is willing to say to the Athenians, "I'm prepared to quote your poets, because they, too, are part of God's gift to me" (Acts 17: 28). In the current context, God wants the rest of the church to understand that LGBT people are similarly God's gift to the church and, as with the ancient Greek poets, their insights and experience contribute truth to our conversation.

Paul appeals to what his listeners know from experience. This is important for LGBT people who struggle with interpretations of Scripture and religious traditions that condemn homosexuality. In addition to Scripture and tradition, reason and experience are important for faith. LGBT people's experience of God is valid. One does not need to choose between sexuality and spirituality



To whom and where might God be calling you to share that the LGBT community is created by God – that they are holy and the *imago Dei*, image of God?

In **Psalm 66:8-20**, the psalmist understands both testing and deliverance to come from God. LGBT people are encouraged to share their experiences of the holy.

Sometimes LGBT people and others feel that God is responsible for our burdens. If God isn't responsible, then God certainly lets people lay heavy loads on us. Nevertheless, those who struggle find an uncanny ability to worship God. This is the gift most oppressed communities bring into the church: the ability to worship in the face of fear, stumbling and trials. This psalm assures that God hears prayers in such circumstances and does not withhold love.

The brave desire of so many LGBT people to be a part of the church, their willingness to be identified with the very people who vilified and shunned them, and to do this for God is the most powerful commentary on this portion of Psalm 66.



In the midst of tough times, tests and oppression, what can you affirm about God? What can you declare about God to those who are “enemies”?

In **1 Peter 3:13-22**, Peter's community was suffering intense persecution for witnessing for the gospel. How do we encourage people to face persecution and perceive it as a blessing, especially when eighth graders are killed for coming out to their friends? The virulence of violence against LGBT communities cannot be understated. Members of the LGBT community as well as their allies must struggle to keep a conscience clear of retaliation when they are being smeared, maligned and wounded, literally and figuratively. Is suffering redemptive?

The promise of this passage is that God seals us in baptism and saves each of us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, this text is a landmine for the vulnerable. Often they have been accused of being "unrighteous," and the accuser declares “but God loves you anyway.” This is a form of the "love the sinner, hate the sin" theology that people have effectively used against LGBT people. The antidote to this use is also contained in this passage: be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about your hope in Christ.



What is your answer to those who ask how you have hope especially during times of suffering and persecution?

In John 14:15-21, Jesus promises the disciples that God will send the Holy Spirit, an advocate, who will live among them forever. This is a comfort for the LGBT community to know that the Holy Spirit is unconditionally present to offer comfort! This Spirit of truth is at the core of LGBT people's experience of God. Regardless of what society or the church may say about the *acceptability* of homosexuality, the Spirit bears witness to the holiness of LGBT lives.

LGBT people often feel as if they are orphaned, left without family or friends when they "come out" to the world. Shunned because they are accused of not "obeying the command" (John 14:21), this text lives between the tension of being judged and being accepted as a child orphaned. By the spirit, Jesus promises to come to disciples, reveal himself, and help them be fully alive as children of God.



In what ways are LGBT people orphaned? What comfort or challenge do the words of Christ in John 14:18 ("I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.") bring to the LGBT community?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



Read silently or aloud Brian Wren's song, "Lord Jesus, If I Love and Serve My Neighbor." Let the reading lead you into a time of prayer or meditation.

Lord Jesus, if I love and serve my neighbor
out of my knowledge, leisure, pow'r, or wealth,
open my eyes to understand his anger
if from his helplessness he hates my help.

When I have met my sister's need with kindness
and prayed that she could waken from despair,
open my ears if, crying now for justice,
she struggles for the changes that I fear.

Lord, tho' I cling to safety or possessions,
yet from the cross love's poverty prevails:
open my heart to life and liberation,

open my hands to bear the mark of nails.

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7th Sunday of Easter, Year A

At Peace in God's Embrace

All who seek to follow Jesus will find safety – protected from evil by God's own hand.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Acts 1: 6-14; Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35; 1 Peter 4: 12-14, 5:6-11; John 17:1-11](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



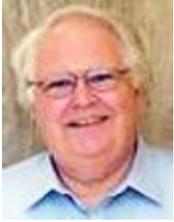
"A God who protects and defends, one that gives strength and joy, is a God worthy of praise." Valerie Bridgeman Davis



"In Luke's account of the Ascension, Jesus lifts his hands in blessing as he is taken from them. Not only are we protected by God's hand, but we are called to lift our hands in blessing. This is important for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as we seek the blessing of our relationships and our callings by the church." Mona West



"The Kin-dom of God means that all the beautiful diversity God created is fully valued. How exciting it is for the church to live into this realm especially for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people." Linda Thomas



"We know no bounds for the love of God. And it is our calling, to the best of our ability, to imitate God's love." Norman Kansfield

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

In **Acts 1:6-14**, the author of the books of Luke and Acts wants us to understand that for 40 days following Jesus' resurrection, Jesus presented himself alive and spoke of the "Kingdom" – the commonwealth of God. It is hardly surprising that "when they had come together" (verse 6) the apostles asked Jesus if the moment had arrived for Jesus to "restore the kingdom to Israel." Jesus responded, "Don't worry about that! That's in God's hands. But *you* will receive power, and you will be my witnesses in Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (verse 8). So seize your power and change the way things are now! LGBT Christians and our allies are empowered, not to reconstitute the power of the old realm, but to share power and use power to establish Jesus' realm. We are called to join God in God's commonwealth on this ordinary earth in this present moment.



When you think about your faith, is it oriented toward now and life on this earth or after death and a world to come? What difference does that orientation make in how you live your faith?

In **Psalms 68:1-10**, God is described as "father" to those who have no parents – to those who have no legal standing, no source of protection, no one to care for them. God gives the desolate a place to live, and leads prisoners from incarceration to prosperity. In this era when more than one out of every hundred citizens of the United States is in prison, these are important words about our calling. God shares the power to care for those totally without power including LGBT persons and their allies. We are empowered to undertake acts of justice for *all people*.



If you truly believe God acts as "father" to orphans and "protector" to widows; provides a home for the desolate, as well as frees those who are in prison, what difference does it make in how *you* live?

LGBT people of faith in Jesus often find their faith counted as nothing by others who follow Jesus. In **1 Peter 4:12-14 and 5:6-11**, Peter reminds us that we are blessed to share in Christ's suffering so that God may supply us with strength and glory. Even when others of faith discount our own faith, we may cast all our anxieties on God, because God cares for us!



Many LGBT people know what it feels like to be "reviled for the name of Christ" (1 Peter 1:14). What good news, comfort or challenge do we hear from Peter?

The sixteenth chapter of the gospel of John concludes with Jesus saying: "I have said this to you, so that you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage: I have conquered the world!" (verse 33). Then in **John 17:1-11**, Jesus prayed the prayer that forms all of chapter 17 – a prayer for those committed to following Jesus. LGBT people, as well as all others who believe in Jesus, are in Christ Jesus made one with God and receive power and eternal life through Jesus. Jesus prays, on our behalf, that we be made one in the same way that God and he experienced oneness. This is a oneness of purpose, a desire for the welfare of each other. This is a powerful, powerful love. This is possible, because Jesus has conquered the world!



In what ways does the inclusion of LGBT people of faith in the "oneness in Christ" challenge the church?

Prayerfully Out in Scripture



Embrace me Jesus. Hold me tight.
Keep me from fearing evil,
and from fleeing confrontation with those who distort your word
and narrow the scope of your love.
Release me Jesus.
Send me from the safety and comfort of your embrace,
so I may, in your name and for your sake,
embrace those whose authentic selves have been threatened
and whose love is forbidden.
Make your joy complete in us.
In your holy name, Amen!

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Day of Pentecost, Year A

Empowerment Intended for Me, For Us!

The Holy Spirit is God's transforming gift to our living – changing anger into concern, loneliness into shared delight, and frustration into vision.

This week's lectionary Bible passages:

[Acts 2: 1-21; Numbers 11:24-30; Psalm 104:24-34; John 20:19-23](#)

Who's in the Conversation

A conversation among the following scholars and pastors



"The power of the Holy Spirit – God's gift to us on Pentecost – is meant to be shared with the powerless." Norman Kansfield



"The unpredictability of the Spirit in these passages humbles us, and reminds us that the Spirit cannot be constrained by our expectations or our theologies." Valerie Bridgeman Davis



"The Holy Spirit is a source of creativity and renewal for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender leaders and communities who may be tired or discouraged in their work for justice." Mona West



“These passages lead us to the amazing power of the Holy Spirit.” Linda Thomas

What's Out in the Conversation

A conversation about this week's lectionary Bible passages

Acts 2:1-21 recounts the amazing day of Pentecost. The gift of this text to marginal communities is the phrase in verse 11: “We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

This is not simply a statement about the intolerance of people who don't want to learn another's language. Rather the statement recognizes that we all want to know the wonders of God in our own culture and context – whether we are foreign nationals in the U.S. or LGBT people in heterosexual-dominant situations.

In the passage, the Spirit lights upon a particular people in the upper room, but is not confined to that closed-door experience. Those who have had a fiery, blustery experience with God, that shakes their very foundations, must share it with others. They must also be pleased that God translates their experience into a language that works for those who also want to know God's wonders in their lives.

In response to people who wanted to understand the spilling out of the upper room and the strange testimony, Peter stands up and says it fulfills God's promise to pour out God's spirit on all peoples (verses 14-21). This outpouring allows those who align themselves with Jesus (those who call upon God's name), experience a saving presence.

The experience of the Holy Spirit always enlarges our mission far beyond anything we might earlier have envisioned. And always calls us to include people within our mission who we might earlier have regarded as "not quite worthy" of God's grace. But, in God's eyes, *no* person can ever be not worthy. The Spirit includes everyone!

Eric Law in the May/June 2004 issue of *The Other Side* magazine asserted that the “miracle of the tongue” is only half the miracle of Pentecost. There is also the “miracle of the ear” and that both the speaking and the listening are needed to make Pentecost happen. For a true community animated by the Holy Spirit to exist we must be about listening as well as speaking. We need to take the time not only to tell our stories of what it is like to be LGBT and Christian, to tell stories of what it is like to be an ally, but we need also to take the time and create space to listen to others stories. In addition to talking across our differences, we need to listen across our differences.



What are the ways by which the “miracle of the tongue” and the “miracle of the ear” can transform our own interactions with others now?

Numbers 11:24-30 really upsets religious hierarchies and authorities because God proves that the Spirit does not have to be in the confines of acceptable religious boundaries. Like religious leaders of today, those leaders in the text didn't get that. They wanted to stop what happened. Joshua perhaps tries to reserve authority for Moses alone among the ancient Israelites, but Moses' response is instructive for allies of and members in LGBT communities. Moses expresses the longing that all God's people would be prophets and that the Spirit would rest on everyone. Both the shaking of conformity and the desire that God would work in these new ways seem like good news to people struggling inside restrictive and toxic structures.

Today, we see the Spirit breaking through institutions and structures that expresses Moses' longing that Spirit rest on all God's people. For example, the Spirit works not just within the church, but also outside of the church and in advance of the church's best efforts. In our current national context there are states (such as Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Hawaii to name a few) which have advanced further than the church relative to the rights and privileges of LGBT people.

According to Numbers 11:14, the whole reason that God's spirit is shared with the elders is because Moses “is not able to carry these people alone for they are too heavy for me.” These are important words for LGBT people in leadership. So often we burn out as leaders in our communities because of the life and death nature of our work. We need to be reminded that gift of God's Spirit is about shared leadership.



Where do you see the Spirit of God breaking through in liberating ways even in structures and organizations that work against LGBT equality and God's justice?

Psalms 104:24-34, 35b-13 testifies that God, in wisdom, created everyone and everything in the earth – a variety that is vast and teeming beyond number! In this declaration, the psalmist asserts a truth that informs communities on the edge of dominant theology. We cannot know how varied and how expansive God's creative love is expressed in creation, including in varied human expressions of creation. This psalm suggests we move beyond unilateral thinking about God's creativity. Human sexuality may be included in that conversation.

This psalm can say some very rough things: "Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more." (These hard words from verse 35 seem to have been intentionally omitted

from today's reading.) Yet Psalm 104 also says some of the most delightful (and playful) things: for example, the sea contains both ships *and* Leviathan -- "that you formed just so it could have fun in the sea" (verse 26).

It is important for those guiding LGBT communities and churches to note that "God's spirit is creative and renewing." This is good news for LGBT people in leadership who may be feeling burn out. It is also good news for LGBT communities and churches that have experienced upheaval.



If Psalm 104 encourages us to include our sexuality in conversations about God's creative love, what difference might it make in how we live and respond to others?

Fear has kept many a person behind closed doors, in closets, and under wraps. **John 20:19-23** has a hint of the anti-Semitic tone in the gospels ("for fear of the Jews"). Having made note of this bias in the text, we want to focus on the reality that the only remedy for fear is peace. This peace is breathed in and through us by Jesus, who grants the Spirit and forgives sin.

Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost are all rolled into one event for the author of the gospel of John. Jesus, in this account, describes our mission in the following important way; "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (verse 23). This suggests that we really have to carefully understand for what we are praying when, in the prayer of our Savior, we say: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

The disciples' fear keeps them behind locked doors. This is a vivid description of "the closet" for LGBT people. The good news of this text is that Jesus is able to break through our closets and breathe peace.

John 7:37-39 led us to reflect that people long for a spiritual life that is vibrant and satisfying, and that will continue to meet our need for strength. People in solidarity and LGBT communities are often left feeling empty in religious settings where judgment and pain are served up in the name of Jesus. At Pentecost, we are reminded that Jesus, not structures or rituals, is the source of a spiritual life that sustains. Moreover, we must remember that the Spirit cannot be contained or kept within ourselves only, but overflows out of us, sometimes even in spite of us. It is haunting to note that verse 39 reads, "as yet there was no Spirit." It is hard to imagine a world, a life, without the Spirit.



What are the "locked doors" in each of our lives that we might wish Jesus would pass through?

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Prayerfully Out in Scripture



Come Holy Spirit; enlighten the dark corners of our living;
that all may clearly see Jesus as God's power to make all new.
Come Holy Spirit; empower our resolve to share the good news;
that all may share the peace of God in Christ Jesus.
Come Holy Spirit; make us instruments of your peace;
that all the world may know the incomprehensible love of God. In the
powerful name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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