

## **"It's Raining Love"**

Rev. David Gregory

June 28, 2020

Pentecost 4



### **First reading**

*John 10:16* from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson

You need to know that I have other sheep in addition to those in this pen. I need to gather and bring them, too. They'll also recognize my voice. Then it will be one flock, one Shepherd.

### **Second reading**

*Your Love Rains Down On Us All*

a prayer by Amy Johnson

Loving Creator, beyond our understanding yet closer than our breath,  
breathe into us your love so that we may love ourselves and others as you do.  
Help heal the fear, hate, and judgment that wound so many.  
Help us know, deeply and certainly, that your love transcends all labels, all categories, all words.  
Your love is.  
Your love rains down on us all.  
Everyone is invited to your table.  
We each bring our whole and broken parts and come together in your love,  
which binds us and heals us all.  
Amen

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In one form or another, celebrations like Pride Sunday have been going on for a half-century, and this year for the first time, they are happening in mostly virtual spaces, and it is our hope that you are celebrating by staying in and staying safe. We are happy to say that a global pandemic has not dampened a global PRIDE. In fact, it is alive and well, and it reminds us to say once again that no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, or where you are on this planet, you are welcome here.

Pride Sunday reminds us of our continuing struggle for civil rights in this country and around the world, and despite the fact that there have been some pretty significant advances over the years, far more remains to be done. Our festivities this year are tempered not only by the pandemic, but also by the

inescapable recognition of continued bigotry, racism, and xenophobia directed at African Americans, at immigrants and at Muslims, to name a few. The “othering” of huge segments of humanity has always been a concern, but it is reaching a fever pitch right now. For many decades we have sung the familiar strains of “We Shall Overcome Someday.” We’ve come to the point where “someday” just isn’t enough. The day has come. The time is now.

We need a revolution of love that can outshine and outlast every expression of hate that it finds, whether it’s on the streets of our neighborhoods or in the highest levels of our government. Our song needs to be, “We Shall Overcome TODAY.” And the good news about this long overdue “love revolution” is that we have a revolutionary example in Jesus of Nazareth, who left us with a consistent blueprint, one that we can revisit time and time again, to keep us inspired to move forward, to keep us fueled for the journey, and courageous enough not to stop until we get the job done.

A year ago, Tripp and I had the privilege and the opportunity to march in our very first San Francisco Pride Parade, something that I would have thought impossible fifty years ago. Back then, I was a skinny, terrified adolescent in rural southern Ohio, unable speak aloud about the growing awareness of my own identity. Instead, I turned to a world of books. My first stop after school each day was the local public library where my mother spent her career. It was there I did my school assignments as I waited for her to finish her workday. And sometimes, I’d wander back into the stacks looking for answers to my questions. What I discovered there, mostly at eye-level, was that homosexuality was a mental disorder, treatable only through psychiatry or maybe even shock treatments, but even then there was little if any hope for real change. Since the library wasn’t helping me, I turned to the church, and in the church that I turned to, I learned to my great relief that I wasn’t mentally ill. I learned instead that I was a hopeless sinner, and that Jesus was the only one who could solve my problems. So I dedicated my life to Jesus, assuming that he would indeed solve my problems. Many years went by before I realized that Jesus wasn’t interested in doing any such thing. When I finally admitted that, I turned in the only direction that was left, and that was toward myself.

To be able to say “I am who I am, and that is who I am supposed to be,” is a source of PRIDE for me today. To celebrate pride is to celebrate *me*. It’s not about religion, it’s not about politics, it’s not about psychology or sociology. It’s not even about a wild and happy parade, though I hope to enjoy one of those again someday. This is about me, and the sense of being a creature of the Divine, entitled to all the love, respect, equality and dignity due any other person on the face of the earth. This is what our ideals are all about. There is no distinction. There is no exclusion. There is no “othering” to be done; just the bringing of those perceived “others” into a single fold with a single shepherd—everyone invited to the table, with this love raining down upon us equally and without regard to any condition of our own humanity.

There is no doubt about it. We are in an extraordinary season of racial unrest, social change, and global pandemic. Our global quest for human rights—this time around—is largely being conducted from the private corners of our own homes, projected into the very public spaces of the internet. Recently in these spaces, we have marked some major victories at the Supreme Court for the LGBTQ community, and while we fully celebrate them, we cannot help but remember that there are many more human and civil rights being denied on a daily basis. What is true for us is encapsulated in the words of Martin Luther King, "A threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." In other words, until there is truly justice for all, there is no justice at all.

Until recently, I might have recognized a number of distinct agendas in the struggle for justice and equality. I might have pointed to the rights of women, the rights of immigrants, the rights of religious minorities, of sexual minorities, of various racial minorities, each group having its own methodology and mindset. But somehow the Black Lives Matter movement unifies and galvanizes all the streams of this struggle in a new way, because it addresses the most persistent, the most pernicious and the most pervasive of all expressions of hatred. It is a painful reckoning of four centuries of enslavement that unfortunately did not end with the Civil War. And until Black people experience equality and justice, there can be no complete equality and no true justice for anyone.

Jesus often reminded his followers that his "flock" encompassed far more than just their little band. He envisioned justice and peace for all oppressed people, and we who hold that same vision must now say that everyone is deserving of PRIDE today. Thanks be to God for the march toward human rights, and may our PRIDE be full, may it be tireless, and may it have enough joy to keep us going, so that we can overcome—today.

