

Good morning, First Parish. It is an honor to be speaking to you today, on this first Pride Sunday in your history.

I often find myself reflecting on what my former pastors and Bible teachers would think if they heard they way I teach and preach today. That is especially on my mind this morning. I was raised to believe that God created human beings as strictly male and female, and that romance and sexuality were intended to be expressed solely between two members of these “opposite” genders. Six years ago, this message would have reflected that way of thinking.

I think it’s important to name that I used to think this way, and preach and teach this way, because I can’t just quietly change my mind about something that had such impact on the lives of others without acknowledging the harm my beliefs and actions have caused them.

It’s easy to just start saying the “right thing” once you realize you’ve been wrong about something in the past. It’s harder to follow up on those words with meaningful action that helps to dismantle oppressive structures and contributes to the creation of a better world.

As the spread of the coronavirus these past months has shown us, and as renewed media attention on the perpetual reality of antiblack racism in America has amplified – we are on the cusp of the creation of a new world. Things will never be the same again – at least they don’t have to be. There is a new creation on the way, but the question remains, what sort of new world will it be, and how will First Parish have a hand in the co-creative work.

In order to faithfully engage in the work of new creation, it is vital to be able to name who we are and think through how we communicate our identity.

And so we come to Pride Sunday, and *how appropriate* it is for us to be talking about and celebrating the lives, loves, and identities of LGBTQ people in our congregation and community at any time, and in particular at this time.

Because one of the many beautiful truths that LGBT people embody in this world is the power of self-naming – of saying “this is who I am” whether that be through a parade or a drag show or through the quiet and mundane moments of daily living and loving.

For First Parish, one way that we can embody our identity as an open and welcoming community church is to listen to and celebrate the ways in which our members, friends, and neighbors name themselves.

The ancient sacred texts I was raised with show the importance of naming. Often the divine is pictured as bestowing a new name on a person – Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Simon to Peter.

The way these stories are told, it's easy to think this process is an outward in renaming. God is some external being telling the human who they are. But what if we reimagined this declaration of a new name and new identity as an inward-out process that begins with our own sacred, embodied self-knowledge?

As Audre Lorde said, "All knowledge is mediated through the body...feeling is a profound source of information about our lives."

Our self-naming begins in our bodies. Audre Lorde was a Black Lesbian poet who spoke to this truth. In her essay, *Uses of the Erotic*, she speaks to this resource as embedded within each of us, "firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" and once we have "experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves."

Our bodily knowings about who we are, what we desire, where our joy and our passion come from are not only valid – they are a sacred power that let us know just how much we are capable of. They provide the energy to move through a world that for some of us, is built to work against us. A world that tells us that who we are, what we look like, or who we love is wrong. A world that wants to interrupt our access to bodily knowing and rely on some external authority's judgment about our bodies or desires.

But humans have long known the body to be a source for sacred truth.

In one ancient story of human creation the substance of the body was interpreted theologically, the flesh said something about what it meant to be human and how humans were meant to live in the world.

In Genesis 2 the divine is described as creating the human from the dust of the earth. The Hebrew word human is *adam*, Adam, and the word earth is *adamah*.

Ancient peoples looked at their bodies and what happened to them as they went back into the earth after death, and they made a judgment about what it meant to be human. We are connected to the earth, and thus we are to care for it.

So it is nothing new for us to look to our bodies, to listen to the feelings that flow through them in order to name who we are and what we are here in this world to do.

In this way, listening to your embodied knowledge by coming out – saying this is my true name, these are my pronouns, this is how I identify – is a sacred act. And the way the community responds to that act speaks to how limited or expansive that community's view of the sacred is.

I want to be careful not to imply here that coming out must look the same for every queer person. For some making a public statement feels superfluous. Their daily living is their self-identification and doesn't require comment. For others, publicly self-identifying is not something that is safe for them. Still for others, the act of publicly coming out and sharing their identity is a key step in self-healing and living authentically.

However your process of self-naming looks, it is a sacred act of self-love; may First Parish be a community in which your self-naming is welcome.

Some might wonder why we must talk about identity at all. Aren't we all human?

Explicitly naming one's identity and the identity of one's community, when it comes to sexuality or gender identity, or race or ability, or body size, or class, and so on... isn't about cutting humanity up into groups as a means of division. Naming identity is actually a step along the way to meaningful unity.

Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of humanity being woven together in a single garment of destiny, by which he did *not* mean "let us erase our differences to become one." In context he explained that what affects and troubles you also affects me. I cannot become what I need to be unless you also become what you need to be. In order for us to survive as a species, I must listen to you and try to understand your experience of the world.

Again, Audre Lorde put it this way, “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own. And I am not free as long as one person of Color remains chained. Nor is anyone of you.”

If a community silences or ignores the identities of some of its members, it becomes impossible to listen to the unique experiences of those members. And if we are not listening to those unique experiences, then it becomes all too easy to assume everything is fine, and the oppression of those members is not, in fact, occurring. That the shackles that still bind our Black siblings, and Queer siblings have all been taken care of.

It's easy to assume, when we see the annual Pride Parades each June and the presence of queer characters in certain media, that the Gay Rights movement has prevailed and there is nothing left to talk about. But before there were rainbow cups at Starbucks, Pride was a riot against racist and homophobic police brutality. The marches and protests moving through our streets today are the descendants of the marches, bus boycotts, and sit ins of the Civil Rights movement, as well as the riots at the **Stonewall Inn** – where in 1969, after years of being targeted for violence and arrest by civic authorities, a group of queer and transgender Black and Brown women, and many others, said ENOUGH. Pride Month, and Pride Marches are ongoing ways of saying enough to oppression by saying, I'm still here. We're still here. And we will still be here pushing for liberation for all peoples. As **Marsha P. Johnson** said, “No pride for some of us without liberation for all of us.”

And so, this Pride Sunday at First Parish, may you experience the power of self-love that takes place when you listen to and find words for your inner knowings, whether you choose to speak them publicly or in the quiet of your heart. May your self-naming be a resource for living fully, and for liberation—both your own, and of all peoples.