

Wesley Celebration

June 7, 2009

Unless you have been hiding under a rock or are new to the GLBT community it's pride month and yesterday Fresno celebrated their 19th annual pride parade and festival. Where were you 19 years ago? What were you doing? Were you there at the first parade or maybe you were like me- still in high school with no clue what it meant to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. As I was writing this talk the other day, I realized something kind of funny that my parents actually saw a pride parade before I ever did. They were visiting my aunt and uncle in Eugene, OR and they happened to be downtown as the parade was going on. They even took pictures because they couldn't believe their eyes and knew that their friends back home wouldn't either. So, this makes me think. What is pride all about? Is it about how crazy drunk and over the top you can be? Or how much you can show off and get away with? Or is it about what first started this whole movement in 1969? For those of you unfamiliar with the history, let me give you a little background. Early in the morning of June 28, 1969, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer persons rioted following a police raid on the Stonewall Inn — a gay bar that was heavily patronized by people of color, including a high percentage of drag queens — in the Greenwich Village section of New York City. This was not the first of the police harassment, on many occasions the police would raid the bar several times a night and hassle the patrons and when I say hassle I mean beat them up and terrorize them. They finally got fed up and fought back literally. On the one-year anniversary of the riots, the Gay Liberation Front organized a march, in New York City in commemoration of the Stonewall riots. On the same weekend gay activists on the West Coast of the United States held a march in Los Angeles and a march and 'Gay-in' in San Francisco. In later years in New York and Atlanta the marches were called 'Gay Liberation Marches', in San Francisco and Los Angeles they became known as 'Gay Freedom Marches.' In recent decades they have become "Gay Pride" marches. This is a very simplified version of the story if you would like to know more, there is quite a bit of information out there. The point I want to make with this is- I think we need to get back to what pride is all about. It's about standing up for yourself and not allowing anyone to consider you less than and not allowing them to treat you that way. On May 30th at Meet in the Middle, I felt like the fire had been ignited in some GLBT persons that may typically be on lookers, this is the kind of standing up I believe we need to change people's minds and hearts about the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community, not to mention about same sex marriage. Back to

Stonewall, I am not an advocate for violence in any form but it seemed that in 1969, that's what was needed to finally take a stand.

So, what kind of stand are we taking today? I wonder how many people were surprised that a church would want to be a part of the pride parade. I also wonder how many people didn't think we belonged there. But to me that is where we need to be. We need to be anywhere where there are people who need to hear the truth about God and his unconditional love and acceptance. We are, in my mind, the balance to what pride has become. We, who have reconciled or at least are on the journey to reconciliation, with our faith and sexuality can be as it is said in Matthew 5:13 **"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage."** That was from the message a more traditional version of that verse is, **"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."** I think that some people think that we are or can't be "salty" because of who God created us to be: gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning. But we are here and we are queer and love God, so they need to build a bridge and get over it!

But going back now to why we need to be at places like the pride parade and festival, the reel pride movie festival, or even The Express or the North Tower Circle. It is the people who go to these places who need to hear the truth. They have been told so many lies and have been so beaten down by "God's People" that I believe they have resigned themselves to the lies. The lies that say they are going to hell; they are an abomination- so they figure they might as well have fun while they are here. But is it fun? Many of you have been out there, you have experienced the "fun" and realized how empty and lonely it really is and have come searching for more and have found it here at Wesley. I think so many times, us as Christ followers forget why we are here. We become like the Pharisees of Christ's day and think that we are better than those who are still out there. But Jesus did not come to heal the well. As he told the Pharisees in Luke 5:31 **"Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? I'm here inviting outsiders, not insiders—an invitation to a changed life, changed inside and out."** I don't want to imply that those who are not here with us tonight are "sick" but if you are without Jesus you are hopeless, lost, and essentially alone in this world. But Jesus is here to bring in the outsiders, to change them inside and out! But how will they know about him if we stay locked up here every 1st and 3rd Sunday and never let them know about the peace we all have found?

I can remember growing up and learning bible verses as a kid and there was one particular verse that has always been with me. I think it might be a Baptist thing because it was the mission statement of my university, **“Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Mathew 28:19-20.** This has always stuck with me and I think this is my motivation for doing what I do. I want everyone to experience the freedom, love, hope, and grace that I have received through Jesus Christ. That’s why every chance we get, we need to be out in the community, wherever that is—the festivals, parades, bars, or wherever to ensure that people know that God loves them just as they are. No matter if we feel out of place or uncomfortable we have been commissioned, we have been told by Jesus himself to go out into the nations. To me this doesn’t mean, some remote village or Africa or something like that, it means our community, where we live, eat, and work.

So, how do we do that? To be proud of who you are everyday of the year, not just one day in one certain month. Be proud and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, or straight. To me this means being authentic and open about who you are and what you stand for. Over 3000 glbt people and their straight allies stood in the middle of California and spoke up. You could feel the energy and pride that people felt, there wasn’t any shame but a sense that people were finally holding their heads high standing together and letting everyone know that we are equal, we are worthy, we are love. It was powerful. That is what we need to do as glbt Christians, share and show the love of God with all that we meet. The second part to the Matthew 5 verse, I read earlier is in verses 14-16, **“Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.”** When was the last time you let your light shine before all men? When have you gone public with sharing who God is in your life and what a difference he has made? It says that we are here to bring out the God colors of the world, to me those colors are:

red: life
orange: healing
yellow: sunlight
green: nature
turquoise: magic/art
indigo: serenity/harmony

And there are two more colors hot pink for sexuality and violet for spirit. These are the colors of the rainbow flag that were originally put together by Gilbert Baker in 1978. He dropped the hot pink and violet because it was difficult to find those colors to make the flag. But think of how fitting it was that he used a symbol that God used to represent the covenant he made with the earth and all its inhabitants. In Genesis 9:12-15, **“And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.”** This symbol is to remind us that physically and metaphorically God will not allow the waters to destroy all life. It is a symbol of life. It’s a symbol of our lives- to be proud of who we are and stand tall in what we believe in. We are the light, now it’s time to let it shine!

What will you do to bring out the God colors this week? Do you need your light charged again? As we end this pride weekend, if you need a charge or a renewed source of the light, I encourage you to come and let the leaders pray with you. If you feel uncomfortable with that, give us a sign and we can come to you. But don’t let another day go by without being ready to shine like a city on a hill.