

SERMON:

Our sermon this morning is the story of a man's journey out of the closet and of St Thomas Wesley becoming his church home

David grew up in England. He knew from the age of five that in some respects he was different from the other children. He didn't know how, just knew he was different. When he was eight years old, his father passed away and life changed dramatically for him. At age 11, he started attending Bilston Boy's Grammar School which meant that he lost all the friends he made during his growing up years. During the years at Bilston, he was constantly tormented, especially when his classmates found out that he came from a single parent household. They would go as far as putting their face right into his and saying things like "You are a dirty, rotten stinking bastard! Did you know that?" "You are a queer!" "You are a faggot!" "You are a woman!" He put up with that for five long years! He had no choice as the law of the land stated that he had to receive an education. He did, however, play hooky a lot.

When David was 19, his mother passed away and since he was not yet 21, which was the legal age of majority at the time, he was invited by his mother's younger brother to come to Saskatoon. Even though he had never met this uncle or his wife, he accepted and came to Canada.

David married in 1972. It turned out to be a marriage of convenience for both partners, both trying to escape what was in front of them.

It was during these years that David made friends with a co-worker. As time went on they become best friends and after two years they finally came out to each other. They usually deemed Tuesday evenings as guy's night out and one particular Tuesday evening, they had gone out for supper and then decided to walk around the University and Broadway Bridges. When they got back on Spadina Crescent, his friend decided to head for home and David decided to walk along the path behind the Bessborough Hotel towards where he had parked his car. As he walked along, he was jumped on from behind and brought to the ground. He was punched in the stomach, kicked in the ribs and head. He received two black eyes, two fractured ribs and required forty two stitches to close wounds on the inside of his mouth. He reported this incident to the police but was told that the police don't send their men in that park after dark and he should have expected it to happen, even though he had been walking at nine o'clock on a summer evening!

Finally, after twenty-eight years of marriage, David and his wife agreed that their marriage was over and they separated. Twenty-twenty hindsight told him they should have made this decision years before. Later, when he suggested a partnership to his best friend, he replied, "Why not, I have never cheated on you in the twenty-three years that I have known you."

When marriage ended, David and his ex-wife were still attending the Anglican Church. The priest ignored him. Friends gave him curt hello's. During coffee after church he was left standing alone with his coffee and cookies so he began to leave immediately after the services.

One day he was in a coffee shop in downtown Saskatoon where he met an elderly gentleman. They picked up on each other's vibes and began to chat with each other confirming to each other that they were both gay. David shared with him what had been going on and how he missed being in the church choir. This gentleman told David about the Bridge City chorus, a Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Trans-identified chorus and David joined the chorus that fall.

The chorus rehearsed at St Thomas Wesley United Church and David decided to check out this church that was open enough to allow a gay choir to rehearse in their sanctuary. The first Sunday he attended at St Thomas Wesley, he felt as though someone had given him a good hard slap across the back of his head and said “What took you so long to come home?” That day, he encountered two people in the congregation that he knew previously, one asked him if he had noticed the pink triangle on the board outside the church. He hadn’t and the person explained that it was the sign of an affirming congregation and what that meant.

By the second week, David was singing in the church choir. On the third Sunday, he was one of the communion servers! He shakes his head at that memory, “Only at St Thomas Wesley...” On the fourth Sunday, he was away visiting his partner in Regina and when he returned home Sunday evening, there were four messages on his answering machine wanting to know if he was okay and to tell him that he was missed. He was indeed home.

David was soon nicknamed David III as there are three Davids in the congregation. All three are gay. All three were born in December. All three serve on the Worship and Christian Education Committee and all three serve on the Affirming Congregation Working committee.

On the Affirming Congregation Sunday service a couple of years ago, the Bridge City Chorus was invited to participate in the Sunday service. The chorus performed a mini drama that brought both members of the chorus and the congregation to tears. They had all experienced the name-calling and the hurts depicted in the drama and to have the drama end with an affirmation from the Christ figure that each and all are “beloved” was powerful and deeply moving.

For David, St Thomas Wesley is a sacred and holy place and at no time was it more evident to him than on that particular Affirming Congregation Sunday. As he said it: “Many tears were shed. Many hugs were exchanged. Emotions were high. But the most important thing of all was the love that we shared with each other on that day.”

May God continue to guide and bless us one and all.

Invitation to Worship

Come Holy Spirit; be with us in this place.

Come tender Spirit, and guide us in the way of love. (Open Hearts – Resources for Affirming Ministries)

Come wise Spirit, and fill us with your truth.

Come Spirit of justice, and stir us to compassion.

Come Holy Spirit; be with us in this place.

Come let us worship God.

Opening Prayer

For the gift of your Spirit set deep within us, we give you thanks, O God. For voices that sing, hands that pray, feet that walk in your way, and minds that see vision, we give thanks. That you have seen fit to reveal yourself in such diverse ways in humanity - we give thanks. Teach us to worship in ways that are inclusive of different ways of understanding, and mindful of the needs of bodies that behave in differing ways. In each nuance of the human - your way is revealed. As we come together in community, may we truly share the love with which you brought us to birth. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Creating and sustaining God, your great commandment in Christ is that we love one another as Christ has loved us. But we confess that:

- **we fail to embrace your liberating love,**
- **we divide where you would unite,**
- **we exclude where you would embrace,**
- **we choke the breath from your Word when its truth does not accommodate our fears.**

Forgive our hardness of heart. Mend our broken human family. Breathe into us the Living Word of all-inclusive love. We pray in the name of your child, our brother, Jesus, the healer of our souls. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

God's love and patience for all of us is never-ending.

We are in God's hands. Thanks be to God.

(Original material and adapted material prepared for St. Martin's UC Affirming Sunday service April 2011 by Maryann Scott and Ken Glover)

Learning Together (Children's Time, Theme Conversation etc)

The following is a story which can be shared during worship with young and old alike, a time when all present can be Learning Together.

Rainbow Bay--submitted by A Friend of Affirm United

My name is Ahmed; I am 7 years old and I live in Complacency, Saskatchewan on a street called Rainbow Bay. I like living here and today I want to tell you about my neighbourhood.

Rainbow Bay is a curved street in the older part of Complacency. It is a very short street with only 6 houses on it. No one really knows how it got its name, but I always think of it as God's promise that we will always be safe and happy here.

The first house is a big red brick house. It belongs to Mark and Brent who live there with their children Myriah and Chance who are eight-year-old twins. They also have a big golden retriever named Noah.

Our house is next--it is a very small house that is sort of a funny orange colour. My Mom (Mintee) says that it has permanent siding on it and that the colour was probably on sale when the last owners decided to side the place. Mom and I thought it was an odd colour when we first moved in, but now we like it. Mom and I live alone--I wanted to get a dog, but my Mom has allergies so I am glad that Myriah and Chance let me play with Noah whenever I want and let me take care of him when their whole family goes away.

On the other side of us live Mr. Whitehawk and his daughters, Becky and Bailey and their little black kitten, Jaden. The girls are teenagers and they sometimes baby sit us younger kids--I especially like Bailey because she plays the guitar and dances and puts on shows for the rest of us to watch in the garage next to their yellow house. Mr. Whitehawk is a surveyor and he is often away for weeks at a time.

Next on the street is a long, low green house with a flat roof. Scott and Dorrie live there with their kids, Chris who is also 7 and is my best friend, and his sisters, Amy, who is 10, and Nancy, who is 6. Dorrie is expecting another baby soon and Chris is really hoping for a brother. His Dad says that maybe next year they can get a dog or a cat which they are going to call Jody.

The Browns live in the next house. The old Mr Brown, Jim, owns the house and his son, Josh, and Josh's son, Aaron, live with him. Aaron is in high school and plans to go to university next year. They used to have a really old Jack Russell terrier, but she died last year and we had a funeral in the backyard. The Brown's house is blue which we used to think was really funny because their name is "Brown" and their house is "blue".

The last house used to be white. It is home to two friends, Cordelia, who is retired, and Sarah, who is a minister, and their two cats, Marcus and Portia. One day Sarah decided that if our street was really to be a rainbow, it needed to have a purple house so she bought some purple paint and the next weekend the whole street turned out to help paint their house purple.

That is the kind of street we live on. We are all different people living in different houses but we all are friends and we all help each other out. When my Mom broke her leg last year, I stayed with Cordelia and Sarah while she was in the hospital and after she came home, we ate supper at a different house every night until she felt like making meals again. We share a lawn mower with the Whitehawks and Aaron Brown always rakes our leaves in the fall and shovels the snow in the winter; I should be big enough to do that next year.

One day some men came to our street ; they said that they were representing the Mayor's office. They said that our street was a terrible jumble of colours and that we were going to be ordered to have all our houses painted the same colour. We were allowed to pick the colour as long as it was not purple and as long as we all agreed.

No one knew what to do so Mr. Whitehawk suggested we have a meeting at Brent and Mark's because they have the biggest house. I could not believe my ears at that meeting. For the first time in my life I heard my neighbours yelling at each other; everyone wanted their colour to be the one selected; my Mom started to cry because she said that we could not afford to buy new permanent siding in another colour. Finally Sarah suggested that we all go home because we were getting nowhere and people's feelings were getting hurt.

Two nights later we met at Sarah and Cordelia's house and, to our surprise, the mayor was there. Sarah asked him to explain why he wanted us to change the street and he told us that most other people in Complacency lived on streets where all the houses were the same sizes and colours and that the city council thought that we should be the same. This time it was Cordelia who spoke; she said, "The town named this street Rainbow Bay and all we are doing is living up to the name. We have different kinds of houses and different kinds of families and different colours of houses; every home is pretty on its own but together they make a beautiful rainbow. A rainbow is only beautiful because of the different colours and if we changed to any one colour, our street could not be called Rainbow Bay anymore. Rainbow Bay is not like the rest of Complacency, but we are beautiful and happy --why do you want us to change?"

The Mayor said that he had to agree with that and that if we really were that happy with our many-coloured street it was really not right for him to change things.

So we continue to live on a street where there are many different colours, each pretty on its own, but together we create something truly beautiful!

Prayers of the People

One: Creator God, You called your people out from under the yoke of Egypt,

leading us through deserts and floods, dangerous valleys and dry plains,

carrying us in love across the foot of the cross, and bringing us to this time and place.

All: A long time ago, a loving God called us. Faithfully, from age to age, our God has carried us.

One: You call us today – out from closets into which others have placed us,

from institutions where we are segregated from our neighbours,

and from those places where we are afraid to stand on the side of love.

All: We hear you calling us out into the world. Carry us, Creator, into spaces where you are not seen and into lives where you are unknown.

One: Where there are members of our global family without the security of food or the safety of home,

All: God, help us to carry each other.

One: In our efforts to free our brothers and sisters from prisons built from the shards of racism and prejudice and homophobia and hate,

All: God, help us to carry each other.

One: As we seek to act with justice, to live with kindness and to go humbly where you lead us,

All: God, help us to carry each other.

One: Call to us on the winds of change. Carry us, O God, in your arms of love.

All: Amen.

(Prepared by Michelle Rowe)

Hymn Suggestions

“Come In, Come In and Sit Down,” *Voices United* 395

“God, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing,” VU 425

“To Show by Touch and Word,” VU 427

“May the Blessing of God Be upon You” VU 429

“Will You Come and Follow Me,” VU 567

“O for a World,” VU 697

“Let Us Build a House,” *More Voices* 1

“Creator God You Gave Us Life,” MV 27

“If I Have Been the Source of Pain,” MV 76 (also in Spanish)

“Love Is the Touch,” MV 89

“Don’t Be Afraid,” MV 90

“My Love Colours Outside the Lines,” MV 138

“Draw the Circle Wide,” MV 145

“Deep in Our Hearts,” MV 154

“I Am a Child of God,” MV 157

“I Have Called You by Your Name,” MV 161 (also in French)

“There Is a Time,” MV 165

“Soil of God, You and I,” MV 174

Scripture suggestions

Isaiah 11:6-9

Mark 1:9-15

Psalm 27