

First, I would like for you you all to take a deep breath. It has been a week. It has been a week Beloveds. I would first like to tell you that your feelings are yours. Please know the ability to feel is sacred and it is true. I myself have been grieving. I am in awe that the generation after me will look at me and shake their heads and ask, "Why? How? What did you do?" And I will respond with, "Power. Ignorance. I fought like hell."

Now, this is Pride Sunday. And I believe this is the perfect time to call or, sorry, Scream for and tackle down action. Because I believe we all can fear that it doesn't end at reproductive rights. I have clergy and seminarian friends who are reminding people that they are ready to marry anyone so that their right to a government recognized marriage can be affirmed before that is taken away.

I needed to name that. People say when they are writing sermons, I want people to feel joy when they come to church. Yes. I do too. Oh, what a feeling it would be to be joyful right now. But today is not a day for joy. I believe it is a day for hope. Hope does not always feel good. After you all, you come to University Lutheran Church of ... Hope. Hope, the anticipation for the good to come. Even in the days of despair like Friday, there is hope.

I hope you can join me in a call and response:

Let us Be proud and you all reply, for we are made in God's imaginative image

Let us be Proud! **For we are made in God's Imaginative Image**

"As the Lord lives, and as you may live, I will not leave you. I will not leave you."

We all have experiences of being casted out, thrown aside, discarded due to who we are. In two days, it will be the 53rd anniversary of the beginning of the first Pride, the Stonewall Riots. Led by the most disregarded people of the queer community; BIPOC trans women. They led with the force and rage that was needed for change. Real change. Genuine, Needed, and Real Change. With the leadership of these empowering daring women, people can run down the street in their respective colors and scream (okay, like we practiced) Let Us Be Proud. **For we are made in God's Imaginative Image.**

And yet siblings in Christ, there is still so much we have to fight for. So much. It seems like it is never ending. From allowing trans children to not play in sports or other clubs due to their gender. From people not being protected from losing housing or their employment due to their identity. From people having doctors deny them from medical service. To the very people who

identify as the leaders of the movement, especially our BIPOC trans siblings being murdered yearly by being their most PROUD self.

Beloveds, there is so much to fight for. And because of this, I will not leave you. "As the Lord lives, and as you may live, I will not leave you."

I find the readings for the Sunday fascinating. This sermon has become a sense of spiritual care for me. I had this image in my head of Elijah and Elisha traveling together, stating their loyalty to each other and Elijah being realistic to his partner that, whatever happens, happens and we just have to be ready for it. When the chariots of fire came and took Elijah away in such drama, Elisha threw his arms and asked where was God? Why was his companion gone? What was to come?

This reminds me of the riots. Fire. Confusion. Lament. Wondering. Not realizing that we are on the verge of something big. Something extraordinary.

Not to sound too destructive but I personally love fire and the complexity it holds within. It reminds me of a person. A little flame in a candle that resembles a prayer seems so little and contained. I think you all have tried to light a candle in the front of the sanctuary and when you can't light it and the stick goes up in flame and you fumble. And you think you will burn down the church with this little stick. No, just me? Okay. And we all have been to a bonfire. I don't know about you but man, that is what my soul needs sometimes. Then we see the fires of a house fire where the destruction makes no sense. And finally, especially in recent history, the fires of riots, fueled by rage and frustration and fear that someone on the margins in our society will be executed next just by existing.

Martha P. Johnson was one such individual who was just plain angry. Anger has such a negative connotation but it is an emotion with such power and sometimes reason that it fuels passion to work against injustice. She let herself be furious and to let those emotions out. She did not give people permission of how to tell her how to feel. She took on her power and it changed the world forever. When the riots broke out, the people fought back; chaos was unlocked for the good. People were separated. Others arrested. People with colorful outfits they hid in the daytime. Wearing them proudly, shining as bright as a star, were handcuffed and thrown into police cars as they fought off homophobic law enforcement. I could understand people shaking their fist at God. So many beautiful people who feel so hated by the world around them that all they could do is say, "Screw this. It's my turn." I see this as a Chariots of Fire moment. The people that night did not know that that night would have been the night of massive change. To be Angry is Holy. To be Lament is Holy.

Elisha. Was Angry. Confused. Elisha tears his clothes in two out of confusion and despair. Where is my companion? My friend? My mentor? We, as a people, are Elisha. We wonder where God is. Martha is a prophet who was angry and asked Where are her people? Her companions and mentors? And she dared to poke the fire. We are picking up the mantle that our mentors, teachers, companions; We pick up what they leave us. Not out of our own asking but out of the circumstances leading to this passing of the mantle. How dare we as a people not pick up where our previous social rights activists leave off. Who are we to deny the fight for action against the injustices that we suffer in this world?

Today I stand proud. I stand proud to know that even though the fight is long and the mass are tired, there is an ember of hope. The fire is not out. There is a song I learned from my camp days, "It only takes a spark to get a fire going."

Beloved, we cannot do this alone. For if the Pride community was individually inspired, we would not have made the stride and radical change we have made today. We would be cold at the fire with no warmth, no hope. And we are people of hope. Hope without action is not possible. Where can you recognize your pride today? Where do you find pride and hope in these times?

In case you have not heard it in a while, I am proud of you. God is proud of you. (Let's see if we remember; Let us be Proud, **For we are made in God's Imaginative Image**. God has called you to this place and this time. God has called it good. Dwell in the hope and Good of the Spirit even when it seems like there is nothing else to hold onto. Let hope be your driving force. Let it be so. Amen.