



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

"Who Do You Say That I Am?"

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According to a PBS NewsHour interview on March 1, 2023 by William Brangham and Dorothy Hastings, I share the following information: "Across the country at least 150 bills have been filed by Republican legislators targeting transgender Americans. Roughly 100 of those bills specifically restrict doctors and other providers from offering transition-related health care for minors."

In this same transcript parents shared the following responses:

From parent Ken Inskeep: "It is just so heart-wrenching as a parent to see your kid in such agony and hopelessness. And it was through gender-affirming care with good doctors and mental health professionals and the like that he saw hope."

From parent Beth Clawson: "As soon as we started affirming her as a girl, her mental health increased greatly."

From parent Nathaniel Clawson: "The idea that the state of Indiana wants to take away our rights as parents to make medical decisions for our kid with our doctors... it's really painful."

These are just a few examples of what is happening today. These issues speak to the importance of creating safe places for celebrating and affirming but also serve to wake us up to the reality of the importance of human rights, human expression and human diversity.

From a historical, societal, political and religious perspective, Jesus posed an important question that up to today still places a metaphoric crown of thorns on the heads of the other and puts people on crosses every day.

Jesus posed the question: Who do YOU say that I am? From a historical and religious perspective, that question has been debated, questioned, canonized, institutionalized, analyzed and even legalized throughout the ages. For so long, the emphasis has been placed on the question instead of the answer. Decisions by political leaders, the Jewish high priests, societal rules and laws, religious dogma have all been set up around the opinions and perspectives of the ones who are being asked the question. Not necessarily considering the authentic lived-out truth of the one who is asking.

If political systems, religious institutions and societies continue to focus on the question of who do YOU say that I am and build our rules, constructs and expectations around that question then the truth of the answer cannot gain back its power.

What I am alluding to here is the answer of the I am. No matter how you think, believe or feel about Jesus, his ability to focus on the answer of the I am, placed an emphasis on his existence, how he lived into the world, influenced polity, created a movement and changed societies. Keeping the truth of who you say that you are, not who other people say that you are, is where your power truly lies. It's the type of voice that can move mountains, transform lives, and create victories and freedoms for humanity. I want to be a part of this celebration today. I want to be a part of affirming the answer, not wasting my energies on the question. What would history, politics, legislation, schools, churches, and even families look like, if built upon the acceptance and affirmation of the value of existence, one's authentic truth and holding it up as the most highly respected commodity?

I happen to be a mom of four adult children and when I was pregnant with each one, I remember dreaming about what their personalities would be like and who they would become and what their lives would be. But what I tried

not to do is have a pre-set mold or expectation for them that they would have to follow. I had experienced that in my own life's journey, and I tried hard to come at parenting from a different perspective.

It was so important for me as a mom, to let them show me, for me not to fill in the blanks or pose the expectation of my own ideals on the essence of who they were born to be. I promised myself, I would let them explore and support their interests as much as I knew how to do. But looking back, I realize, I was still trying to do that within the constraint of a religious construct that my adult children now will tell you did not necessarily fit their truth of the I am.

If you take a look at the screen, you see I picked a picture of a baby. The birth of a baby is a time of celebration. It recognizes new life and the potential within that life and its impact in the world. I picked this picture too because the paint brush is in the hands of the one who is created and this baby is surrounded by the colors of the rainbow.

Who that individual is created to be is yet to be discovered, yet to be revealed, and even in all those unknowns is still celebrated. Today is about affirming and celebrating this individual even more once the discoveries of the I am have been made and the revelations of the I am have been proclaimed. I propose that we as a community choose to value, love, nurture every discovery, revelation and contribution and embrace all the possible colors, outcomes and expression bringing affirmation and joy to the idea of human diversity that strengthens society as a whole.

So, what as a community can we do to affirm and celebrate the LGBTQIA+ community? I decided to ask a few people in the community, and this is what they had to say:

From James who blogs at the gaylynerd.com:

“Create scholarships or grant opportunities for queer individuals and queer-focused organizations or projects.”

“Reminding society of amazing people who happen to be queer both honors

awesome humans and reinforces that fact that queer people are people first.”

“Recognize that discrimination is draining. . . and queer folx may ask for more help along the way.”

“Speak up when you see injustice, though it may still be the right choice if it is not safe to stand up.”

“Do not normalize discrimination that is happening. Don’t forget the anger and fear. Normalization leads to complacency and action is essential.”

Another member of the community Kris shares:

“Each person is unique in what and how they celebrate. . .asking the individual . . . what their opinions are and including them in the celebration is important. . .”

“Don’t assume that you know what we need or that all our needs are the same.”

“Be willing to learn-educate yourself.”

“Let us know you are a safe person to come to.”

Tesla who has been a part of this community shares:

“The best way for allies to celebrate and affirm the community is to rally around them, to respect their identities and orientations, to advocate in the struggle and fight for equal civil rights. There’s also a need to hold one another accountable, to lead by example, to be inclusive and supportive of all human beings.”

Last but definitely not least as I look at the picture of the baby on the screen, I read the words of my own transdaughter, Mel. She says:

“I struggle with celebrating myself.”

“Give me space to explore without judgment.”

“Trust that I know who I am and don’t question that.”

“Treat me as I am. See me as I am!”