



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

"We Are Who We Are: Pride Sunday"

Delivered 11 June 2023

Rev. Jen Raffensperger

“And don’t all children deserve to be protected? To be loved and nurtured so that they may grow and shape the world to make it a better place? In that way, they are no different than any other child in the village, or beyond. But they’re told they are, by people such as yourselves, and people who govern them and our world. People who put rules and restrictions in place to keep them separated and isolated. I don’t know what it will take to change that, if anything. But it won’t start at the top. [It’ll start with us.](#)”

Here in June of 2023, 54 years after the uprising at the Stonewall Inn that ushered in the modern era of the fight for equality for LGBTQIA+ rights in the United States, I wish we weren’t back at these basics. Protecting our children. Learning to love our differences rather than perceiving them as something to fear, to hate, to lash out against.

But we are here.

It won’t start at the top. It’ll start with us.

And it didn’t start at the top. It started with the community itself, it started with a growing dissatisfaction and anger with the unjust and inequitable treatment that New York’s laws meant for the patrons of the Stonewall Inn. And one group of people taking action to protect themselves and ones that they loved spread, and grew.

It has not been a perfect arc of justice and rainbows, leading from Stonewall to Obergefell to the Pride section at Target - and even that little commercial Pride display has been subject of fear, hate, and lashing out.

No matter who you are, no matter your gender, your sexual, affectional, or romantic orientation, your gender presentation, or your uncertainty or shifting relationship with any and all of the above - you are whole, holy, and good. The world is better with you in it. You are a blessing. And none of you, none of us, should have to live as the subject of fear and hate and outlash.

Unitarian Universalism calls us to the value of Love inherent within all our principles - and challenges us to honor and acknowledge the worthiness and dignity of each human. And can't that feel HARD? Can't it feel easier to hide out, to hate, to lash out at what we don't understand or what we perceive as a threat? Especially if they threatened us first?

But we are called, each of us, to love fiercely, and to find the path of love within. Yes, even now.

I'm going to share with you a brief prayer that a friend and colleague, the Rev. Juniper Meadows who serves one of our congregations in Omaha, Nebraska. Rev. Juniper wrote and shared this prayer upon the death of Pat Robertson, whose poisonous public theology shaped a tremendous amount of the toxic public dialogue centered ostensibly around Christianity today. Rev. Juniper is a trans woman and a powerful force for love and good in the world, and if she found this in her heart, I want us to hear it. We may not all be there, I know. But please hear her words now:

"May the small spirit of Pat Robertson be met with a Love after life so big that it dwarfs all of his cruelty as his wrinkly body is folded back into the sea of matter to be remade into something better, like a dung beetle or a rock. May the wounds he left in his time begin to heal and may his hateful interpretation of scripture pass on soon as well."

This congregation is a Welcoming Congregation and has been certified as such almost since the beginning of that program, allowing congregations to solidify and certify their commitment to being welcoming and affirming spaces for all members of the LGBTQIA+ community. In the coming year, Rev. Kathy has agreed to help lead the effort for us to REcertify. Now our current certification isn't going anywhere - no one will take it away. But the UUA began a program, inconveniently right before the pandemic, to allow congregations to grow and deepen their learning about what it means to truly be Welcoming and Affirming.

We know that times have changed. Language has changed. More of us feel threatened, and even as we feel threatened we also know - although perhaps we do not understand - that we are perceived as a threat by those that do not know us, those who choose deliberately NOT to see the inherent worthiness and dignity of all. No matter who we love, no matter what harm has been done to us by painful and toxic theology, I hope you hear today words to reassure you that you are loved. That you are sacred. That you are whole, holy, and good.

So may it be.