



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

"We Say Yes: Pride Sunday"

Delivered 9 June 2024

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One:

"O sacred one

Untangle my feet
from all that ensnares
Free my soul
That we might
Dance
and that our dancing
might be contagious."

Two:

"carousing in ferocious affirmation"

Three:

"Sweetcakes God said

who knows where she picked that up
what I'm telling you is
Yes Yes Yes"

Every June, on Pride Sunday, we try to name and live into our own identities as best we may. Our personal identities, yes - and also our collective identities, the way we feel empowered to feel fully ourselves when surrounded by our beloveds, when dancing and carousing in ferocious affirmation with our beloveds, and when saying YES.

And these identities are ever-shifting. We gain new language, we gain new understanding, we gain new perspectives, we grow in our ability to see the

places we have fallen short of our ideals, we grow in our ability to gracefully accept the need both to forgive and to apologize, and the need to live without either of those things sometimes, too.

The first Pride was a riot - not just a t-shirt, a fact. It was a rising-up against the pile of "NO" that society was placing on the identities, the lives, the choices of people who - in that moment - were there to dance. To carouse in ferocious affirmation. They wanted not just to say yes but to shout it, YES, their YES rising in the streets not just outside the Stonewall Inn in late June, 1969, but in all streets everywhere for the rest of time.

Yes to living.

Yes to loving.

Yes to choices that are different from what we have been taught or told.

Yes to a chance to live a life that feels genuine, yes to a chance to try out things that might scare us or intrigue us, yes to a chance to maybe go home with someone different than the one that brought you.

Yes to mistakes that break sacred relationships and yes to the chance to repair them.

Wait. Am I talking about being queer or about Unitarian Universalism?

Yes.

Three:

"Sweetcakes God said
who knows where she picked that up
what I'm telling you is
Yes Yes Yes"

What I love so much about Kaylin Haught's poem "God Says Yes To Me" is the way it upturns, in seventeen lines, everything I was taught about God when I was growing up. More than a pronoun swap, this poem sketches out a loving God in a way that feels like a warm hug, not the cold and distant God that I was

taught about in the Catholic churches of my youth, whom I was told was loving, but was rarely shown.

What I'm telling you is yes, yes, yes.

The faith that I was raised in focused a lot more on "no," is what I mean.

And this faith is not that faith. I felt called to Unitarian Universalism because of that yes. That yes turned what I was taught upside down.

Queer theory arose out of gender and sexuality studies, but "queering" is a term now used not just in social, legal, or literary spaces, it is also a term used in theological spaces. To over-simplify greatly, "Queer theorists' contention is that there is no set normal, only changing norms that people may or may not fit into, making queer theorists' main challenge to disrupt binaries in hopes that this will destroy difference as well as inequality." ([source](#))

When we disrupt the binaries of good and evil, of gay and straight, of male and female, of God themselves - when we know there is more than yes/no, more than on/off, more than one/zero - we open ourselves and our imaginations and our identities to so much more. It can be really hard to turn away from the guideposts that made us feel safe, that made life feel understandable, when we were in a different head- and heart-space in our lives.

That, dear ones, is holy work. That is part of why we talk about Pride in church.

Two:

"carousing in ferocious affirmation"

Imagine my surprise when I learned that the strict dictionary definition of "carouse" means "to drink freely and revel noisily." In fact most of the definitions you'll find involve the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Here is more of poetry turning things on their heads! When June Jordan wrote her "Poem for South African Women" to commemorate the more than 40,000

women and children who used their bodies to protest apartheid in Pretoria, South Africa in 1956 - I don't think she was imagining their spirits being drunk in any literal way.

To carouse in ferocious affirmation is a reminder of the way that action taken together can affect our minds, our bodies, and our spirits in an intoxicating way. When we gather to put Love in the center of our lives and as the basis for our actions, when we do that with others who share our values, we can create such a powerful force of Love that it truly changes things.

That can feel remote in these times, beloveds. But it has happened before and it will happen again.

This is another part of why we talk about Pride in church. Together, with Love at the center of all we do, we can align our energies and actions and can restore the faith in our hearts. Whether your faith is in something you name God, or your faith is in nature, or your faith is in your community, we are bound together in knowing we are part of something larger than ourselves.

One:

“O sacred one
Untangle my feet
from all that ensnares
Free my soul
That we might
Dance
and that our dancing
might be contagious.”

When I found Unitarian Universalism, I found a way to untangle my feet - and I hadn't even realized how tangled they were. I was bound up in the pain and confusion and guilt and shame that the lessons of my childhood had taught me; I had been separated from the dance of joy for far too long.

Here's something many of you may not remember: The very first sermon that I delivered here, on September 12, 2021, was titled "Saying Yes." This one is called "We Say Yes." Because when I arrived here, you were y'all and I was me and we were at the start of learning how our journeys might align and become one, for a time.

Three years ago, you said "yes" to someone fresh out of seminary, someone who wasn't ordained until two months after she became your minister.

Three years ago, I said "yes" to a ministry job in the middle of lockdown, geographically constrained due to external circumstances, and entirely unsure of how to actually live this day to day, the reality of being your minister.

Our mutual "yes" helped to grow this church and it helped to grow me. I will be forever grateful that you said "yes" to me, this ever-searching, imperfect, "late-blooming GenX queer" (to quote my last partner) who was then and is still learning how to be fully myself, to be a spiritual leader and a seeker still, to be the person in public that I am in private and still to have those realms distinct within myself and my life.

You have helped free my soul to dance. This faith has helped free my soul to dance. May you find the spiritual discipline to keep you on the path when things get hard, and to dance and carouse in ferocious affirmation of one another, and to listen for the yes that the Spirit of Life is not just whispering to you, but shouting, not just now but for the rest of time.

This is why we talk about Pride in church, beloveds. And this is why we dance.

So may it be.