

Glen Ridge Congregational Church
The Rev. John Sampson
“Your Faith Has Made You Well”



“National Coming Out Day”, Keith Haring, 1988.

Luke 17:11 – 19
October 12, 2025

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

There is an ancient patriarch of the church named Tertullian and he once wrote, "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?" What does Athens, the symbol of Greek culture and religion and philosophy, have to do with the faith of the Israelites and the message of the gospel?

Today on this National Coming Out Day weekend, we could tweak Tertullian's words and ask, "What does National Coming Out Day have to do with the gospel?"

Yesterday, there was a small group of us who went into New York City to see a play, and in that play we received an answer to this question. We saw a play called Saturday Church and it's the story of a young black man named Ulysses who doesn't quite know yet that he is gay, but other people suspect.

Ulysses has an amazing voice and all he wants to do is join the choir. But the pastor and the leader of the choir will not let him join because they say his mannerisms are just a little too much. The way he acts is a little too much. The pastor tells him if he just tones it down, which is a euphemism for if he just plays it straight, he can join the choir. And Ulysses asks, "Do I have to be somebody else to sing in the choir? Do I have to deny myself who I am to have the privilege of singing hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God?"

Things are looking kind of bad.

But then out of the blue, out of heaven, comes Black Jesus. And Jesus isn't just black. Jesus is a transgender woman wearing glittering robes and thigh high metallic boots with stiletto heels. And Black Jesus comes to Ulysses and says, "You are perfect just in the way I made you." This leads Ulysses to find another church, a Saturday church, made up of all kinds of people: gay people, transgender people, black people, straight people, all kinds of people who will not only accept Ulysses, but will celebrate his gifts to their community. It also leads to a series of events in which ultimately the hearts and the minds of his Sunday church are opened to accept him. He's allowed to come and sing in the choir. He is able to be a child of Saturday church and of Sunday church.

What does National Coming Out Day have to do with the church? This play tells us that it has everything to do with church because it tells us that we are all already perfect. We are already all the people the Christ and God have made us to be. And the issue isn't with us and the truth of who we are. It is with the narrowness of heart and mind and spirit of those who may be around us.

Today on this National Coming Out Day weekend, we hear this story, a parable of Jesus in which he meets 10 people who are suffering from a skin disease, but maybe they are also suffering from a disease of the heart. And they are cured. And one of them comes back to thank Jesus. And Jesus says, "Your faith has made you well."

Last week we talked about this word faith and where it comes from. Comes from a Greek word *pistis*, which means faith. But it also means trust. Your trust has made you well. In the play we saw yesterday, Ulysses does not ultimately put his trust in his pastor. He does not ultimately put his trust in the leaders of the choir. He puts his trust in a black fabulous transgender Jesus who comes and speaks directly to his heart. That's what coming out is all about. Coming out is about listening to the truth that sits within your heart, believing it, following it, perhaps even trusting that that voice is not just your voice, but it is the voice of Christ telling you, you were made perfectly. You have already arrived.

I wonder about the nine other people who did not come back to thank Jesus for the great gift of healing he bestowed on them. And I think of many LGBTQ people who will not come back to the church because of the image of Jesus that they have heard shared from pulpit like ours. Not just ours, but many pulpits in many places, the experience they have had in

choirs, in their home faith communities, the image of Jesus that has been shared by those who call themselves faith leaders.

It's just a stroke of luck I'm even here. Because growing up, hearing what the church said about me, made me think there was never going to be a place for me in a church, any church. And that not only that, that the church was actually a place of damage and of corrosion. For many of us who have had that experience, we have listened to another voice within us. We have trusted, had faith in that voice that we were made perfectly.

And for some of us, we've recognized that deep within that voice speaking to us in our hearts was not the white dour Jesus of so many images of him. But it was perhaps a 6'5" black Jesus, transgender woman in fabulous gowns, thigh high metallic boots with stiletto heels that was calling to us, to all of us, saying, "You are perfect. And you belong not just in Saturday church but also in Sunday church."

We are an open and affirming congregation. We have made a covenant with LGBTQI people to welcome all people into the life of this church. But as I watched the play yesterday, I wondered how we could continue on our journey to more deeply welcome those who God is calling. To more profoundly embrace and celebrate those who the Christ in stiletto thigh high boots is inviting to this Sunday church.

So, I end today by sharing with you just the refrain of a hymn which is in no hymnal. These are my some of my favorite hymns. This one is a hymn that certainly LGBTQI people know. It's a hymn that we as an Open and Affirming congregation, we should know. It is perhaps a hymn that even Jesus herself sings, and it comes from the boss, Diana Ross.

"I'm coming out. I want the world to know. Got to let it show."

Let us continue coming out. Let us continue welcoming those who are coming out. Let this be the place in which we encourage coming out.

Amen.