

Pride Sunday Sermon by Timothy “Timm” Dobbins

June 26, 2022

May the space between what I say and what you hear be filled with the Holy Spirit. Amen

For freedom Christ has set us free, Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1

“A yoke of slavery” in Paul's letter refers to going back to Jewish laws, from which he felt Christ had released the people of The Way. Obviously slavery also meant forced servitude, being in submission, or carrying a burden.

If you have never seen a yoke, they are heavy wooden and leather cross bars, fastened over the necks of animals to make them pull a cart or plow. Yokes keep the animals' heads down and chafes their necks if they try to rise up or break away. The piece of the cross which Jesus was forced to carry to Golgotha was meant to be a humiliating sort of yoke. Slave traders in the Americas also used yokes to transport slaves, as they were a lot cheaper than metal chains.

Last Sunday, we commemorated Juneteenth. The US Civil War had been over for two years, when an officer arrived in Galveston, Texas with Union Army Order #3, proclaiming that all enslaved persons in Texas were now free. They needed to submit no more to the insidious yoke of slavery. Of course, we have never fully integrated the descendants of those slaves, but we celebrate the effort nonetheless, and the Body of Christ continues to try to heal.

And today is Pride Sunday (Happy Pride to you all!). Today commemorates a series of riots in late June 1969, in New York City, centered around a bar called The Stonewall Inn. The bar was a favorite haunt of transvestites, lesbians, transsexuals, and everyone else who felt they didn't fit in. One might consider it 'the St. John's of bars.' On a hot summer night when the police raided the bar, bringing the very real threat of arrest and jail time to almost 100% of the patrons, some drag queens and lesbians, mostly people of color, decided they had had enough of being under the yoke of shame and fear, and fought back against the police. The police were absolutely astonished that these 'pathetic queers' [their words] had the gall to stand up for themselves, to no longer be bent down by harassment. Soon many others decided they would no longer wear that yoke either, and a series of nightly riots changed things forever. Of course, we have never fully

integrated the descendants of those reviled LGBT folk, but we celebrate the effort nonetheless, and the Body of Christ continues to try to heal.

San Francisco, usually in the forefront of these type of things had actually already had our own riots outside the Tenderloin's Compton's Cafeteria in 1966. Drag Queens and Transsexuals fought back against the police who had harassed them nightly. We also celebrate their effort to cast off that yoke of shame and fear.

In the 1990's we had buttons and signs saying, "The Body of Christ has AIDS." It was our way of saying that if the church is REALLY to be the body of Christ, then it must address the health crisis which was killing hundreds of men and women every day. Christ's Body was neither whole nor well, and we could not let that be the state of normalcy. We could not be in whole health until AIDS was addressed by the church. The yoke of certain death was a heavy one.

The Body of Christ can never be whole as long as there are any people who bear a forced yoke of any kind. Unfortunately, the stigmatizing is coming back at a hateful speed, in laws which seek to punish LGBT people on every level.

Before May graduation, the Louisville Christian Academy made every student look up Bible verses to convince LGBT people they were sick, and going to hell, and needed 'saving' so the students could go out and 'fix' LGBT people.

Any books which mention LGBT themes continue to be pulled from libraries and bookstores in 18 states. Even the book about the two male penguins who adopted and raised a chick together was just too provocative. Idaho lawmakers threatened to jail librarians who let minors check out "harmful" materials (the only content mentioned was LGBTQ+, of course.) Here's your yoke of silence.

Florida's "Don't Say Gay Bill" means kids cannot talk about their two moms or dads at school. On May 28th, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration also asked the state board regulating doctors to essentially ban transition-related care for transgender minors. The Health Department of Florida made the request hours after another state agency issued [a](#) long report to justify banning Medicaid coverage for transgender people of **any age** who want puberty blockers, hormone therapies or gender-reassignment surgery. If you are trans in Florida, you will wear the yoke of shame and ostracism, and your very health could be jeopardized.

Last month, Indiana banned transgender women and girls from competing on public school sports teams consistent with their gender. On June 3rd, the Ohio House of Representatives passed a bill banning trans girls from school sports and requiring a check of genitals if gender is called into question. Here's your yoke of humiliation!

Texas now has a law which can prosecute parents if they participate in helping a child who feels they are trans to begin counseling for transition or medical care for transition.

Rep. Paul Gossar (R-Arizona) finally deleted a disturbing and offensive tweet that falsely claimed the gunman who [killed](#) more than 20 people at a Texas school on May 24th was a "transsexual leftist illegal alien." And several other far right politicians parroted him in tweets and posts. Why they promoted the shooter as a trans person is to once again try to foist the yoke of shame onto a group of people who had nothing to do with the shooting.

On Friday night a gunman in Oslo fired into a nightclub popular with LGBT people. The June 2016 Pulse massacre at an Orlando nightclub gave a shooter who wore the yoke of gay self-loathing an easy way to kill 49 LGBT people in one place. And trans men and women continue to be shot or beaten to death with impunity in El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Texas, and Oakland. Wear your yoke of fear every day.

Did you know there are over 200 anti-LGBT bills being considered in statehouses across the USA right now? With all this focused hate going on is it any wonder that the Trevor Project released its annual survey last month showing that 45% of LGBT youth seriously considered committing suicide in 2021?

It has been over half a century since Stonewall and yet LGBT citizens are still not guaranteed justice and equal rights by law in this country. The push for an Equality Bill stalls every year, yet we are ever hopeful it may happen, removing the yoke of unequal treatment.

But we need not have to wait for that law because we are already baptized to do justice work on our own, continuing to help lift off the yokes we see burdening our sisters and brothers, reminding them that they are all God's beloved children and subject to slavery no longer. We are called in our baptismal vows to respect the dignity of EVERY human being. And respect requires action. We are capable of that because as Audre Lorde, activist and poet said, "*We are powerful because we have survived.*"

No, the Body of Christ can NEVER be well and whole as long as any people bear a forced yoke. *For freedom Christ has set us free, Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.* May our love lift yokes today and always.
Amen