

A Touch of Pride
Sermon preached at Sunshine Cathedral
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Happy Pride! I have to say, that is an odd greeting when you consider that Pride is one of the seven deadly sins, and the most deadly one at that! We don't go around saying, 'Happy Sloth!' 'Happy Anger!' 'Happy Gluttony!' 'Happy Envy!' 'Happy Greed!' 'Happy Lust!' Well some of us might go around saying that one.....

Theologians and philosophers alike have noted that **Pride is the virtuous vice**. On the one hand we have scriptures like the one in Proverbs that warns against pride because 'pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.' And theologians have been quick to point out that pride is at the root of our alienation from God. On the other hand we know either from personal experience or the stories of others that it takes a certain amount of pride to excel at a sport or career, or to create a good product, and in black communities and queer communities, we know that without pride we cannot survive.

One writer has said, "It is remarkable how rhetorically pliable pride is, how it is linguistically and conceptually adaptable to a vast array of emotional, moral, and intellectual circumstances. There are the sorts of pride one may experience: lost, wounded, hurt, restored, simple, foolish, lasting, injured, false, fatherly, mother's, and justifiable pride. There are prepositional prides that dot the landscape: pride in, of, for, and over. There are the conjunctive prides: pride and joy, and pride and sorrow. There are prides that show action in verbs: shining and beaming pride. There are prides that speak of loss and plenitude: lack of pride, full of pride. There are symptoms and manifestations of pride as well: the badge, mark, sign, and legacy of pride. And there are negative synonyms of pride: arrogance, vanity, and hubris—and positive cognates for pride, such as self-respect, self-esteem, and dignity."

Pride has that double edge to it. Our pride not only separates us from God and each other, but our pride can separate us from ourselves and keep us from our healing. How often have we missed an opportunity for reconciliation with a friend, co-worker or family member because we have been too proud to reach out and begin a conversation? How often have we stayed sick physically, emotionally or spiritually because our pride has kept us participating in the cultural lie that healthy bodies and beings must look and act a certain way.

But how often has pride in who we are as God's good creation caused us to insist on equal and fair treatment? How often has pride been the motivating force behind a desire to live authentically and without shame as a lesbian, gay man, transgender or bisexual person? **Pride has that double edge to it: it can keep us from our healing, or it can drive us to it.**

Our gospel lesson for today is a story about pride. When the hemorrhaging woman encounters Jesus he is actually on his way to heal someone else. A few verses earlier we are told that one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus fell at Jesus feet and begged him repeatedly to come home with him to heal his daughter who was at the point of death. This synagogue leader overcame religious pride by coming to Jesus to ask for healing, and he overcame cultural pride that would shame a man who groveled at another man's feet, begging for the healing of a daughter no less, not even a son.

And as Jesus is on his way to Jairus' house, this woman who has been hemorrhaging for twelve years reaches out in a crowd that is pressing in on Jesus to touch him for healing. She must have been a woman of some means, to be able to keep going to doctor after doctor for twelve years, until finally after spending her last dime, and being sicker than ever, she reaches out toward her healing. **I wonder what sort of pride kept her from reaching out sooner. And I**

wonder what kind of pride was deep down within her that caused her not to give up? Her touch of pride makes her well.

Well, this whole weekend is about pride and as you encounter its double let me share a Pride parable that is based on a true story.

A Pride Parable

When it came time for the annual Pride events in June a leader from a local MCC went to the pastor and the pride committee to inquire about a float for the church in the parade. The leader received approval and began to work hard at planning the design for the float and who would be invited to sit on the float on the day of the parade. When the pastor found out that the leader had only invited people who were close friends to ride on the float the pastor asked the leader to invite other people who would reflect more diversity.

Well by this time there were no more seats on the float, so the leader just decided to ignore the pastor's request and apologize for it later. When the great day of the parade came it was very hot and the church float was near the end of the lineup. Everyone scheduled to ride on the float knew it was going to be at least an hour before the parade got moving to the point that they would need to be in their assigned seats on the float. So they decided to wait in an air-conditioned bar with some adult beverages until such time. Everyone except the leader. The leader had to stay with the float at all times according to the parade rules.

As time drug on in the hot sun for the leader on the float, a heterosexual couple with five children who had recently joined the MCC got excited when they saw their church's float as part of the parade. The children were hot and cranky and at first the mother hesitated because after all they had not been members long, but she decided to ask anyway if the children might ride on the float since they were so tired from standing. The leader hesitated for a moment because there were only so many seats on the float, but decided to let the children ride on the float thinking they could sit in someone's lap.

Then another church member came along—someone the leader had an argument with last year over what color to paint the fellowship hall. This person was walking with a cane after her recent knee surgery. She thought she could make it through the entire parade with just her cane, but she could barely walk, so even though she thought the leader would say no, she asked anyway if she could ride on the float. Well, the leader could just hear the gossip and ridicule if the woman with the cane was denied a seat on the float because of her knee. So the leader figured it would be better to have someone who had been promised a seat on the float mad rather than this woman!

About ten minutes before everyone was supposed to be in their seats on the float, a couple came by who had been visiting the church. One member of the couple was really cute and funny and everyone at church loved him, but the partner was a real pain and had alienated many folks in the gay community by making a scene at public events. They asked if they could ride on the float because the cute one had asthma and forgot to bring his inhaler. The leader just couldn't say no to such a cute guy, so he decided that at worst he might have to give up his seat on the float to make room for two more.

The time came for the folks at the bar to pay their tab and make their way to the float. Half of them decided they were having too much fun right where they were—they would rather watch the parade from their air-conditioned seats than to ride on a hot float and besides that, who wants to be on a *church* float anyway?

So that Pride day there were just enough seats on the float and as the float made its way through the press of the crowd, there was a woman who had been harboring debilitating

hatred and resentment toward religion for twelve years, who looked up and saw the MCC float pass by. When she saw this float with children, and gay people and straight people, people dancing, and one person with a cane...and even that pissy guy who was always making a spectacle of himself at the HRC townhall meetings...she thought, maybe, just maybe, there is room on that float for me.