

**Pride Sunday**  
**25 May 2025**  
**Sixth Sunday after Easter**

*Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14:23-49*

Sermon Preached by The Reverend Matthew Bowman  
Guest Preacher at Holy Trinity, Winnipeg

In the name of the one who creates, who comes close, and who never stops making a home in us. Amen.

Today's readings speak to us about *home* — about where God chooses to dwell, and with whom. On this Pride Sunday, I invite us to think about *home* with particular attention to the lives and experiences of people in gender and sexually diverse communities who all too often experience a longing for home: the longing to belong, to be welcomed, to be *at home*. At home in their bodies. At home in their churches. At home in God.

I invite us to pay particular attention to the lives and experiences of gender and sexually diverse communities, which I'll refer to as GSD for the rest of this sermon, because despite progress, GSD folks in Canada still face staggering challenges. Over three-quarters of GSD youth report being bullied, and more than a quarter of those bullied have considered suicide. Though they make up just 4% of the population, members of GSD communities account for 13% of those experiencing homelessness. Nearly a third report poor mental health, compared with less than one in ten among the general population.

Many Canadians still recognize the stigma these communities face — especially trans, queer, and intersex people — including family rejection, harassment, and being misunderstood.

Behind this stigma is often fear of difference, discomfort with what is unfamiliar, or the false belief that queerness is somehow unnatural. And yet, as I hope you'll see in this morning's sermon, it's in these very lives, that God makes a home.

And while on this Pride Sunday we centre gender and sexually diverse voices and experiences, it's important to remember that this is also a message for all of us – because every person knows what it is to long for belonging, to yearn for a safe community that sees them fully, and that loves them completely; and that each of us has a role to play in bringing about a society – in bringing about a Church – where every single human

being is safe, is loved for who they are, and know deep within themselves that they are a beloved child of God.

In our reading from Acts, the Apostle Paul receives a vision in the night -- A man from Macedonia pleads with him: "*Come over and help us.*" It's a moment of divine interruption. Paul wasn't planning to go there, but the Holy Spirit has other ideas. "Come over and help us." -- A call that doesn't come with clear instructions or well-expressed theological arguments. It's just a voice crying out from across the sea: "*Come. Help. Show up.*"

And Paul listens -- he sets out for Macedonia immediately, convinced that God is calling him to go and preach the gospel to this man, whoever he is. But when he arrives, he doesn't find the man from his vision but instead finds a woman. Lydia is her name. She is a seller of purple cloth, a worshipper of God, and a woman of some means and independence. She doesn't quite fit into the expected categories of the day. She's not Jewish, but she seeks God. She's not married, but she's the head of her household. She doesn't meet the early Church's expectations -- and yet, she becomes a central figure in its early history.

On the Sabbath day, Paul, Silas, and Timothy are outside the gate by the river, speaking to the women who had gathered there. Lydia sits listening to the conversations, and we're told that God opens her heart. And then -- as if echoing that same spiritual openness - she opens her home to Paul and the others. "If you judge me to be faithful," she says, "come and stay with me." Without hesitating she becomes Paul's host; she opens her door and welcomes the three men into her home.

Reading this passage in 2025, Lydia's hospitality might not strike us as unusual, but in her time, it was groundbreaking. There is something profoundly queer about Lydia's hospitality. Not necessarily in her identity — we don't know that — but in her posture: She's subversive. She crosses boundaries. She steps out of the expected role expected of first century women. She creates room and offers welcome where there wasn't any before. She's brave. She doesn't ask permission to belong — she just *belongs*, and then extends that belonging to others.

This is something that GSD communities have done for generations. When we've been pushed out of churches, we've created our own sacred spaces. When our families have rejected us, we've built chosen families. When we've been told that we are strangers to God's grace, we've dared to believe that God's grace has found us anyways. We've opened our homes, our hearts, our lives -- and in doing so, in company with so many

others who have existed outside of society's predefined boxes, we've become Lydia's spiritual descendants.

At its heart, this is what Pride is about: not just visibility, not merely survival - but about making space, and boldly declaring that God's Spirit is already here, already working, already dwelling queer folk and within queer bodies. As Christians, when we honour and celebrate gender and sexually diverse lives and bodies during Pride we're invited to widen our theological lens to acknowledge that GSD communities haven't somehow moved the goal posts by demanding equity and inclusion in the full life and witness of the Church, but instead to realize that God has always moved in unexpected ways. When we foreground voices from GSD communities, we're not excluding others -- we're saying, *"Look! Look here: God's Spirit is alive where you might not have thought to look."*

For her part, Lydia could have easily kept her faith private. She could have listened to Paul's preaching, believed quietly, and gone back to her business of selling purple cloth. But instead, her home becomes the first gathering place for the church in Philippi. "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." Lydia does this not with fanfare or demands for accolades, but with great courage.

And notice: Paul doesn't hesitate. He doesn't correct her or say, *"Thanks but no thanks. That's not your role."* Instead he accepts her invitation. He stays. He recognizes the Holy Spirit at work in her.

How many times have GSD folks offered that same kind of spiritual hospitality and been turned away? How often has the Church refused to receive the gifts that members of GSD communities bring: creativity, compassion, resilience, and fierce joy; and have instead become targets of spiritually abusive proof-texting based on bad theology, or shoe-horned into not living into the fullness of who they are because they've been told they're only truly welcome if they fit into the boxes the Church has determined they should fit in?

Paul gets it right here. He receives Lydia's gift. He abides in her welcome. And because of that, the Church grows.

This story of Lydia serves as a blueprint for what it means to offer a hand of welcome. It shows what it looks like when the Church listens to voices on the margins, and receives what they offer. And it reminds all of us, queer, gay, bi, straight, cisgender, trans, two spirit, that we, too, are called to be Lydias - to open doors, to listen deeply, and to see the Holy Spirit in unexpected places.

In this morning's reading from John's Gospel, Jesus says something that sounds so simple, but is deeply profound: *"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."* *Make our home with them.* Jesus isn't talking about heaven or some future reward. He isn't talking about a temporary visit, or coming for High Tea. He's talking about God -- Creator, Word, and Live-Giving Spirit -- taking up residence. Move in. Staying. Where? Not in a church building. Not in the people with flawless theology. Not in folks with the right credentials or social standing or reputation. But in those who love God, and who keep Jesus's commandments.

And what are these commandments? To love God with all our heart, all our mind, all our soul, and all our strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

If I've learned anything from being part of queer communities since I came out almost 25 years ago, and the many years that I've strived to be a fierce advocate of gender diverse communities, it's that love -- real love -- often shows up precisely where the world isn't looking: in quiet acts of care; in bold self-expression; in truth-telling; in relationships that don't fit society's conventional boxes that are rich with tenderness, honesty, and fidelity; in the struggle to be authentic in a world that constantly asks us to shrink; that constantly tells GSD folks that everyone else's life would be so much easier if we'd just agree to fit their boxes.

God sees that love. God honours it. And Jesus says, plainly, that *that* is where God makes a home.

Which means: God makes a home in gender and sexually diverse bodies and lives: in gay and lesbian and bisexual relationships; in the bodies of cisgender and trans folks who are quite comfortable with their gender and all the wonderful complexity gender entails, just as much as in the bodies of trans teens and nonbinary folks figuring themselves out; in asexual folks who are still learning what romance and intimacy to them; in older gender and sexually diverse folks who've been burned again and again yet still show up with love; in the bodies of two spirit folks oppressed by the perceived inconvenience of Indigenous personhood in settler colonial societies; in the lives of queer and trans Christians of every age and shape and size who have sat through too many sermons telling them they don't belong — and still hold on to the hope that they do.

God doesn't wait for the church to make room. God moves in already.

And then Jesus says this: *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid."*

So yes: God makes God's home in queer lives, and also in all lives where love of God and neighbour abides. In every person who dares to show mercy; who strives to extend grace; who boldly tries to live truthfully. Whether you are gay or straight, trans, cisgender, two spirit or gender non-conforming, black or white, single or partnered, confident or still figuring things out -- God makes God's home in you -- not because of your standing in life, but because of your love for God, no matter how tenuous, no matter how frail, simply because you are made in God's image and likeness.

Jesus continues: *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid."*

We need that assurance of peace today. Because too often the peace that the world, and too often the institutional church gives is a false peace. It's conditional. It says, "We'll accept you...if you tone it down. If you behave. If you blend in. If you stop bringing your boyfriend around. If your relationships look like our do. If you don't make us feel uncomfortable."

The peace that Jesus gives is a different kind of peace -- it's a peace that says, "You are already loved. You are already enough. You don't have to hide. You don't have to edit yourself to be worthy."

It's the peace of coming out to ourselves. It's the peace of being truly known. It's the peace of taking up space in your own skin, using your own voice, boldly speaking your own truth -- and know that God is right there with you.

This is Pride. Not just the rainbow flags or the glitter -- though as a gay man, I must say that those really do add a certain "je ne sais quoi" to the festivity. Pride is the peace of knowing deep in your bones that you are a beloved child of God, and that nothing -- no law, no slur, no doctrine, no rejection -- can take that peace away.

Pride is the hospitality of Lydia, saying, *"There is room for you here."*

Pride is the promise of Jesus, saying, *"We will make our home with you."* Pride is the peace not as the world gives, but as only God can give -- peace that comes with being fully alive and fully loved.

And it's worth saying, too, that this isn't just about gender and sexually diverse folks. This is for all of us. Because we all carry pieces of ourselves we fear are unworthy. We all have moments when we wonder if we are truly welcome, if we're really lovable, if we're enough.

And amidst it all, Jesus says, *"Yes. We're moving in. We're making our home in you."*

So today, let us rejoice. Let us remember the saints known and unknown, who like Lydia made room, who offered welcome where there previously was none. Let us remember with deep gratitude gender and sexually diverse trailblazers, who dared to act with boldness in extending welcome and safety to others, often amidst great risk, with zero promises that things would get better any time soon, and whose shoulders we stand on. Let us honour the voices still crying out: "Come and help us." Let us be a Church that listens, that crosses over, that makes space.

And above all, let us strive to be the kind of community where God feels at home, because *everyone* feels at home.

In the name of the One who comes close and stays with us. Amen.