

So, today is Pride Sunday, a day to celebrate Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Two Spirit, Non Binary, Queer, Intersex, Asexual people, and other people who are not straight and cisgender, but may not be explicitly named. Instead of an acronym, which I think might get me tongue-tied as I use out several times in this reflection, I'm going to use the expression "the Rainbow community". In the United Church, to be Affirming is to be publicly, explicitly, and intentionally welcoming of people of the Rainbow community, and since Oakbank United Church is in the process of exploring becoming Affirming, I think it's important for us to talk about it today.

So, today is Trinity Sunday, and what it means that we worship One God, in three person, is that God's very heart, God's very nature is love and relationship.

We see this in our scripture passages today, not only in how both Jesus and Paul use a Trinitarian description of God, but in what they are asking of the church. Paul tells the church in Corinth to make sure they have good relationships with one another: to encourage one another, live in harmony and peace, greet one another in love. And if we do this, Paul says, the God of love and peace will be with us. Our relationship with God is nurtured and enhanced by our good relationships with others.

And Jesus commissions his followers, telling them to make disciples of all nations, and teach them all that he commanded. Now if you remember the specific commandments of Jesus, they all had to do with love and relationship: loving God, and loving our neighbour as ourselves, doing to others as you would have them to do to you, and loving one another as Jesus loved.

The relationship between the capital "C" Church and the Rainbow community has historically been very hurtful. Too often, the Church has put

a handful of verses that appear to speak against the Rainbow community, over and above the commandments of Jesus, which encourage us to love.

Now, we might say, that's not us. We welcome everyone. But the treatment of the Rainbow community by the Church has been so bad, that if we want to foster good relationships in our faith community, we need to do more than just not be bad.

If we are to love one another as Jesus loved, what does that look like? We know Jesus loved widely and radically. But he didn't just say he loved, he showed his love by welcoming and standing up for people who were marginalized, including people who the religious authorities of his day did not approve of. If we are to love as Jesus loved, it also needs to be wide and radical love, and we need to not just say it, but put that love into action. The Affirming process is meant to help us learn specific things we can do to show love and welcome to people who are part of the Rainbow community. And, at the end of this process, by becoming Affirming, and being public, explicit, and intentional about our welcome, we stand in solidarity with those who have been historically marginalized in the church.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God and love our neighbours as ourselves and similar to this, he also gave what we call "The Golden Rule" which is to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

Loving God is our response to God, who, as Jesus said, is like a loving Parent to each one of us. When we are talking about Affirming the Rainbow community, I think it's important to not think of it as "us" in this church community, welcoming in "them" in the Rainbow community, but recognize, first of all, that we are all siblings because we are children of God. But to also remember that there are people of the Rainbow community who are already part of our church community. It's not an "us" and "them" kind of thing, it's just "us".

That being said, how would it be if those of us who are not part of the Rainbow community heard the commandment to love our neighbours as ourselves, to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, as speaking about our siblings in the Rainbow community?

How would we want to be treated if we were marginalized because of our sexual orientation or gender identity? Sometimes people talk about “tolerance”, but would we want to be merely tolerated? Or would we rather feel that we are cherished for who we are?

Knowing how many churches don't accept people of the Rainbow community, would we feel comfortable going to a church that said “everyone is welcome” and didn't say anything specific about people like us, or would we feel more confident if that church was to say specifically that we are welcome, that we are loved just as we are. In a world where we are in the minority, and where even well-meaning people say things that hurt us, how much would it mean to be in a church community that may not be perfect, but is actively trying to do better, to love us better?

For all of us, whether we are part of the Rainbow community or not, remember that when Jesus was questioned about who is this “neighbour” we are supposed to love, he told the parable of the Good Samaritan, to teach us that everyone *should* be considered our neighbour, and that everyone *can* be our neighbour if we treat them with love and compassion. Actively loving our neighbour makes them our neighbour- it is the way we treat one another with love and compassion that brings each of us unique individuals, together in relationship, in community.

Following these commandments, actively loving, being in relationship, is not easy, especially in our divisive world today. Thank goodness that we have this love modeled to us by our God whose very essence is love and relationship, and who reaches out to us in love first.

Blessings to you all. In the words of Paul:

The grace of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all! Amen.