



## **Rector's Essay - Pride and Joy**

By Jarrett Kerbel (06/12/26)

One ministry task assigned to me at my New York City parish was to coach the congregation into embracing LGBTQIA+ members as full and equal members of the body of Christ. The Church - All Angels' - had almost left the Episcopal Church when we ordained Gene Robinson in the 1990s. Gene was married to a man and this offended the congregation to the point that they threatened to take their toys and leave.

Ultimately their better angels prevailed, yet the congregation resisted reaching clarity about the full and equal membership of queer people, which resulted in real spiritual damage to long term LGBTQIA+ members and children of members who were discovering their identity and orientation.

One Sunday, I announced that we would participate in NYC Pride with a group called Kaleidoscope; an evangelical gay-friendly group that helps people discover that the church can be a loving, healing, happy place for queer people who love Jesus and are rightly scared of hateful churches. On the street we often heard, "I did not know there were Christians like you!"

A long time member approached me after church, and said, "But Jarrett, Pride is a sin! It is the worst sin in fact!"

To which I replied, "When can we get coffee and talk?"

To his credit, he agreed and we had an excellent conversation over coffee. My bottom line was this: Pride can be a sin - especially for people who enjoy privilege - however, for oppressed people appropriate pride can be a path of healing. For LGBTQIA+ people who have been assaulted with shaming messages, physically and verbally

attacked, taught that they are fundamentally disordered sinners, had their love reduced to sex acts, in other words dehumanized; developing an appropriate level of pride heals shame and sparks joy. God's grace facilitates this journey just as grace facilitates the journey to humility for the arrogant.

Mid-century white male theologians invested pride as the chief sin based on their experiences. When women, African Americans, Asians, Latinx, and out queer scholars entered the field, the very different experiences of these writers challenged the received orthodoxy. Jesus was healing these traditionally oppressed groups by recognizing their full humanity and dignity just as God had made them. When we know God's love in our soul, we experience the height of joy too!

One mark of Pride Parades and festivals is joy! People from privileged and dominant social groups often do not understand the joy expressed by people who have experienced historical violence and oppression. I do because I learned it at my home church where LGBTQIA+ people were full and equal members way back in the 1970s. Joy comes when you know that you have survived, when you feel the relief of acceptance in safe, loving spaces, when you can be your full-self without shame.

My beloved Harper Collin's Study Bible - 32 years old and stitched together with packing tape - was gifted to me at my ordination by three gay men who I called my clique. Cliff, Tom and Richard were part of my church life from my earliest memories. They shared the Gospel with me. I am still a member of Christ's body because of them. I will not be silent on Queer belonging in the church because of them. To do so would betray their love for me, and my love for them, and our love of Jesus.

Until the day comes that all churches are safe for queer people I will be sure that we are clear and explicit that we are. Silence is complicity with oppression and a barrier to all people coming to know the love of Jesus.