

Sermon by the Rev. Detra Evans

Amistad Chapel

Cleveland, OH

June 25, 2014

Topic is-"The Call to Affirm"

The text I chose for today is Psalm 139:13-16, which reads....

13 You are the one who created my innermost parts;
you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb.

14 I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart.

Your works are wonderful—I know that very well.

15 My bones weren't hidden from you

when I was being put together in a secret place,

when I was being woven together in the deep parts
of the earth.

16 Your eyes saw my embryo,

and on your scroll every day was written that was being
formed for me, before any one of them had yet happened.

In this month of Gay Pride celebration, I question what exactly is our Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender and Queer community proud about. Not that we don't have gifts that we were given while being formed in the womb , not that we haven't had personal and financial success, not that we don't have family and friends who love us...all things in which God new before our first appearance on earth. The question is, without God being an INTEGRAL part of our lives where is the pride rooted? Not all people of the LGBTQ community is defunct from the church but the wider population, suffers from a post and present traumatic

stress created by some Christian denominations. Most LGBTQ people have been subjected to hate, discrimination, violence and exclusion from paramount social justice laws of protection and the pursuit to happiness. In fact they are treated like a disposable population, people who need to be worked on if you will.

Do you remember the day when you decided to follow Jesus? Do you remember the day that it became your decision and passion and not that of your parents? The overall LGBT community that was raised in a community of worship can translate that experience to the day they were told that God himself was not please with them and that they would be severely punished in the last days, that they must change or parish, or that they can't be Christian without changing their wicked ways. Some of this information was given by the people they had come to love and respect the most family and congregation, so there was a buy in; after all we had no affirmation to argue.

Some of you might be thinking, Minister Detra, why such a dismal sermon? A. Because it's the facts, B. because I work daily with people who suffer from this plight, and C. So I can prepare you for the message from the still speaking God. There is a call on our lives.

The call is to affirm everyone, even those we don't understand. The call is to lift up the trampled and bring them in the church and take care of them like the wounded soldier they are. How can we do this? Let me tell you about the most liberating sermon that I as a lesbian woman have ever heard. One day by chance I

visited Archwood UCC and there was a Black Pride celebration going on. I looked around and there were other people I knew, so I felt a sense of ease but it was still strange being in a house of worship dressed as I dress, instead of in the usual cover up of lipstick, skirts, dresses and pumps that hurt. I felt as though I was going to hell for sure for playing with God, by being in his house. Soon after that a visiting pastor from Detroit, Mi. began to preach a sermon on John 3:16 and I was affirmed by her message of Whosoever, by the time I left that day I had a new outlook on life, I was loved by God I don't care what you say! I was PROUD!

If we read the Bible literally it tells us Pride is bad. Sinful even, Like the "look at me" pride, or the "see what I did, aren't I great" I would agree certainly is, But consider the parable of the talents. When the Master says "well done, thou good and faithful servant", how do you think the Master feels? Happy, joyful, maybe even a little proud of the servant? Or, how about the servant? How does he feel when the Master praises him? Well done thy good and faithful servant? I bet joyful was not enough, and I'm betting he felt a little pride in the fact that he was able to please the Master.

So how about us? We were created as individuals, each uniquely different by the Master. Each of us where given talent(s) to use for His glory. How should we feel if we please Him?

I think the difference is that pride turned inward is sinful, pride cast outwards to others maybe a good thing?

Again, I say the call of the Church and us as individuals is to affirm! It's not just to have an open door policy at the church and leave the wounded, and marginalized to their own to figure out how they can fit in to the kingdom. It is our place to be welcoming, open and AFFIRMING, to be teachers and friends, to get to know the individual need and meet it. To affirm them, and go beyond the usual greetings, and salutations, to the book of salvation. Our Holy Bible. In 33 years of being a gay woman, I have seen the world during its transition to equality. Places where I couldn't have been able to go comfortably before, I can go now, and not feel the tension. I have been fortunate to join a church and denomination that believes in social justice for all people.

We have to affirm. I don't want us to continue to row over to Gilligan's Island every Sunday and say to the castaways that we accept everyone, that no matter where you are on life's journey you are welcome here, then go back to our land of abundance leaving them still marooned on the island. I want us to invite the people on the boat and to make as many trips as necessary to bring them out and to that place of security, in the bosom of the Lord. My work isn't done until I can tell God who I helped save. He won't be proud if I can't share the escape route to from bondage and the pathway to love. Will God say well done my good and faithful to us? I sure hope so. When someone takes that sometimes terrifying step across the threshold of our house of worship we need to be prepared to repair, heal and set free them. Even if the person can't walk across that threshold alone we need to rescue them, and help erase the harms done. We

need to show a different Christian than the ones they've known before.

Today I accept the call to affirm all of Gods children, to bring them into the fold and then tell them the words from the affirming mysterious process of creation in Psalm 139:13-16. For it was you who formed my inward parts, I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made, wonderful are your works that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret,, intricately woven in the depth of the earth. Your eyes beheld my uniform substance, In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

Onward Christian soldiers, join me in the call to affirmation. Will those of you who accept this call today do so by saying amen!

The Rev. Detra Evans is founder of LGBT Ministries of Greater Cleveland and minister for pastoral care at Mt. Zion United Church of Christ.