

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Welcome to the Appleton Chapel here in our Memorial Church for our daily service of Morning Prayers. Our speaker this morning is Tim McCarthy, who is a lecturer here at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Stanley Paterson Professor in the incredible Clemente Course. I invite you, please, to rise and join in our responsorial Psalm 51. "Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness. According to the multitude of thy mercies, do away mine offenses."

Congregation:

"Wash me thoroughly for my wickedness, and cleanse me from my sin."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"For I acknowledge my faults, and my sin is ever before me."

Congregation:

"Against thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight. That thou mightest be justified in thy saying and clear when thou art judged."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Thou shalt purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Thou shalt wash me and I shall be whiter than snow."

Congregation:

"Thou shalt make me to hear of joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Turn thy face from my sins, and put out all my misdeeds."

Congregation:

"Make me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

"Cast me not away from my presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

Congregation:

"O give me the comfort of thy help again, and establish me with thy free Spirit."

Choir:

(Singing).

Timothy Patrick McCarthy:

Good morning, everyone.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Timothy Patrick McCarthy:

A reading from Carl Wittman, *Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto*, 1970. "Liberation for gay people is defining for ourselves how and with whom we live, instead of measuring our relationship in comparison to straight ones, with straight values. If we are liberated we are open with our sexuality. Closet queenery must end. Come out. But in saying these things, we must be clear about a few things. The fear of coming out is not paranoia. The stakes are high: loss of family ties, loss of job, loss of straight friends. These are all reminders that the oppression is not in our heads. It's real. Each of us must make the steps toward openness at our own speed and on our own impulses. Being open is the foundation of freedom, it has to be built solidly. We must afford our brothers and sisters the same patience we afforded ourselves. They alone can decide when and how." There ends the reading.

As a recovering Catholic who doesn't spend a lot of time in church, I delight in telling people that I am as queer as Christmas on Easter. This makes some people laugh and makes other people squirm. My people tend to have that effect. Today's National Coming Out Day, an annual event now celebrated throughout the globe. Founded in 1988, National Coming Out Day was the brainchild of Robert Eichberg, a gay psychologist from New Mexico, and Jean O'Leary, a lesbian activist from New York. The day, October 11th, was chosen because it was the one-year anniversary of the Second National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Shortly before his death of AIDS in 1995, Eichberg explained the inspiration for National Coming Out Day. He said, "Most people think they don't know anyone gay or lesbian, and in fact, everybody does. It is imperative that we come out and let people know who we are and disabuse them of their fears and stereotypes."

This is a version of what some scholars call contact theory, the idea that direct contact between members of different groups in society can reduce prejudice and discrimination, and promote understanding, and even acceptance. Activists like Carl Wittman were more radical in their personal and political expressions. Coming out to them, to us, wasn't about fixing straights, as fabulous as that would be, it was about freeing queers.

Technically speaking, I have been out for a long time. I knew I was different early on, when I wanted to be Princess Leia because she got to kiss Han Solo, or when I saw that Queen Paul Lynde at the center of Hollywood Squares. Despite having serial girlfriends throughout high school and college, I first acted out with the co-captain of my high school basketball team, which was coached by my father, a story for another time, and my therapist. I first came out to three precious friends, Michelle, [inaudible 00:10:31], and Stacy over the holidays, my senior year of college, this college.

For a variety of reasons, I had a hard time answering the question, I still do, "When did you come out?" Was it when I first knew? When I first, you know, had sex? Was it when I finally told my parents in my thirties? Hell, I came out to an Uber driver last week when he asked about my wife, and I said, "He's fabulous." Around these parts, I am what some people might say, "Very out." I have spent my entire career here advocating for queer inclusion and queer students and queer history and building queer community. One of my colleagues, once lovingly and jokingly referred to me as Harvard's Queering

House, which I have since embraced as both a term of endearment and also a call to action. Personally and politically, I know the power of coming out and being out. I know that representation matters, that we are stronger together than alone, and that we must be able to see it to become it.

But this was not always the case. Growing up the way I did, Catholic and working class, when I did, the midst of the AIDS crisis in Reagan's America, my future felt limited: die from AIDS, go to hell, live a lie. The first and second options scared the bejesus out of me for a very long time, and so I worked hard at the third one. For more than half my life, I lived in the closet. I could not see a way out, because I did not know anyone who was. It turns out there was someone, and there was a way out.

I always knew my uncle was different. A distinguished engineer with a brilliant career here in Boston, he was one of the only people in our family who moved away from home. Though he was my only uncle, we weren't particularly close when I was growing up. We were very different. We still are. He's quiet, private, a man of few words. I am none of these things. But it turns out that we have something very important in common.

I first met my uncle's friend, Jim, in 2006. Jim was a doctor from Tennessee who had gone to Yale and Vanderbilt and Harvard, where he taught on the Medical School for many years. He was sweet and smart and Southern in only the good ways. My uncle was different around Jim, more funny, more flirtatious, more free. Over time, it became clear that he and Jim were in love. I still remember vividly the dinner my husband CJ and I had with them, our first double date, when they told us the saucy story of how they met decades before at a bawdy bar on Commercial Street. They too had fallen in love in Provincetown, a place we all found a home.

The end of August, Jim had a bad fall on Commercial Street, and broke his hip. We were planning to have dinner, just the four of us, the next week in Provincetown. Jim never made it out of the hospital. He died on September 11th, 2023. As it turns out, one month ago today. Our family knew him simply as Jim. Over the years, we heard hints and echoes of what his obituary now makes abundantly clear. Dr. James Ray was a brilliant researcher, practitioner, and teacher who lived a good life and left a long mark. Jim is also my uncle's life partner. We are learning more about this in the wake of Jim's passing. They were together many more years than we knew. They had successful careers, and a wonderful circle of gay friends. They traveled the world and spent their summers in Provincetown, where my husband and I now live.

My uncle never came out to us. I used to resent him for this, for not showing me what a different kind of life could look like. Selfishly, I used to think my struggle was harder because he took the easy way out. But I was wrong. Nothing about his life, or Jim's life, or the lives of gay people of their generation was easy. And yet they found their own ways to become free. When the time was right, my Uncle John and Jim invited us in to the love they shared, and the beautiful life they made together. In the end, they did show us the way out.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

I invite you please to rise for the prayers. The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is discord, union. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is

despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it's in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

And now let's say the words Jesus taught us, praying, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Forever and ever. Amen."

Congregation:

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Forever and ever. Amen."

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Please join in singing our concluding hymn, number 232.

Congregation:

(Singing).

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Please join us in the Undercroft after this service for coffee, and here again in our chapel at 5:15 tonight for a service of Holy Communion. And now, may the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord.

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.