



Liberated Pride

A PENTECOST DEVOTIONAL

SAINT JOHN'S CHURCH
The Beloved Community

**LIBERATION
LECTIONARY**

FATH FOR JUSTICE

Liberated Pride

2 CORINTHIANS 3:17

*Welcome to the Pentecost devotional of the Liberation Lectionary:
A Black Liberation Worship resource for Progressive Christian communities.*

WHAT IS A LECTIONARY?

The word lectionary has come to mean “daily lesson”, and it lets people know that they are using something they can return to over and over again. Repeating readings and lessons helps us to remember important ideas and strengthen our connection to God and to our community.

THE LIBERATION LECTIONARY USES WHAT IS CALLED A THEOLOGICAL LENS.

Just like all writings and ideas from any person, what we believe about the world shapes the ideas that we share. The writers of this devotional believe that God favors people who are oppressed and gives special gifts of faith and promises to them. In much of the history of the world, Black people have been oppressed and exploited for our gifts. So when God’s word talks about freedom, victory and healing, that promise includes Black people in a special way.

WHAT IS PENTECOST?

We believe in the Trinity. This means that the one true God is three people. Yahweh, the God who created us and the universe, has had company since the beginning. Yahweh is God Almighty who created the universe, Jesus our Savior lived with us and brought the gospel of love and justice, and The Holy Spirit is our guide, comforter, and advocate who lives inside each of us. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God’s people formed the church. Pentecost is the celebration of the Holy Spirit filling us with power, teaching us how to love and communicate with each other, and directing us to build God’s church.

Sometimes called the Holy Ghost, especially in our tradition, we often refer to this divine being as They, and sometimes He or She. The Holy Spirit’s physical body is your body and my body. It is everybody in your faith community. Pentecost is technically the day when the Holy Spirit came to God’s people, and gave them the unified purpose of founding the church. But we celebrate Pentecost as a season, at least four weeks, just like Advent, or as long as six weeks - just like Lent. We do this because everyone who believes in the Trinity should learn about the Holy Ghost. Living with the Holy Spirit is what helps us to live with each other. Learning godly love through the Holy Spirit is the reason that we love and care for each other. That’s worth a whole season of learning and celebration! And oftentimes, the season of Pentecost happens at the same time as another season of celebration, called Pride.

WHAT IS PRIDE?

Pride month happens during the month of June. During this month, we celebrate people who identify as Queer. Maybe you have heard or seen this abbreviation: LGBTQIA+ - do you know what this stands for? Do you know what each letter represents? These letters stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and plus is an acceptance and embracing of identities that did not appear in the thread, or have yet to be named even though they exist. These identities are ways of self-expression and ways of love.

Many of our neighbors who hold these identities also use the term "Queer" to describe themselves. The queer community has been active and present in every part of the world, for every era in time. Queerness is an important part of God's church. The Holy Spirit came to show us new ways to love, based on the great love of Jesus. The Spirit lives inside of each of us, to free us from assumptions about each other. The Spirit lives in us so that we can love each other the way God does, no matter what our identities are.

LIBERATED PRIDE IS OUR THEME THIS MONTH.

This term refers to sharing God's joy in queer people without using queer people to gain popularity off of the cultures they build. Queer pride has been misused by capitalism, exploitation, racism and more. Some companies and groups who claim to celebrate pride just do so in June, then they go right back to excluding people because they have judged them or feel afraid of what they value, how they live. This is hypocrisy and bigotry, and it seems to happen in churches more than anywhere else. We need a Pentecost event. We need the Holy Ghost to show up in pride month.

This season is a great opportunity for families, churches and groups of friends to talk about Pentecost during Pride month. We believe that the Holy Spirit is God, and there is no gender assignment given to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also is the founder of the Church that worships the Trinity. And the Spirit teaches us to welcome people across all kinds of boundaries which would usually divide us. It is our calling, and our responsibility to respect and care for everyone that God loves. That includes our neighbors and ourselves. We will learn about queer people who have been liberated by the Holy Spirit, and found their purpose in serving God and building Holy Ghost power with and for their people.

Liberated Purpose

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” Has anyone ever asked you this? Do you sometimes think about different kinds of lifestyles you’d like to explore? Maybe you have a lot of experience working a job, or you see yourself committed to a vocation. Vocation is a word used to describe the place where your life’s purpose connects with life’s activities. It is usually what people mean when they say “do what you love.” Someone who gets a paycheck to work at a grocery store might also be a dancer. The grocery store is their job, dance is their vocation. Sometimes work and vocation are the same thing, or very close to each other. For instance, people who love caring for elders might work in a retirement facility. God wants us to be proud of our work. God wants us to find our vocation, no matter what work we do, because humans were made to live for a purpose.

God has given us a Guide to find the purpose of our lives, the Holy Spirit. When we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus, we think about the way that God has given us life. When we celebrate Pentecost, we think about God’s purpose for our life. The Holy Spirit was sent to set us free from assuming that our purpose has to be popular or lucrative (the word lucrative means “producing much wealth”). We also do not need to look the same, or live the same way. We can all be united in God’s purpose without holding one type of vocation. Jesus showed us how much he loved how different we are by living among many different kinds of people. The Holy Spirit shows us that God loves our differences by living within us.

THEME SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 8:27-28

And God who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Them, who are called according to Their purpose.

LIBERATED PURPOSE IN THE BIBLE: MELCHIZEDEK

First mentioned in the story of Abraham, as recorded in Genesis 14, Melchizedek’s mystique can also be found in Hebrews 5-7. Melchizedek lived in ancient times. He was King of a land called Salem, and a High Priest for many more. Is it possible for a person to be both? The Bible tells us that priests are servants, leaders, and ministers to God’s people. Hebrews 5 says they are “able to deal gently with people, as they themselves are subject to weakness”. Biblical tradition says that priests were supposed to be able to trace their heritage to an ancestor named Levi. Melchizedek was not related to the people of Levi. Technically he did not qualify to be a priest. But God appointed him as a priest, a very special role called the High Priest. The king of Sale, was appointed apart from the rules that God Himself had set in place! God calls him a High Priest forever. That means no matter what happens in his work as a king, his life’s purpose is in ministering to God’s people. There is a Liberated Purpose in King Melchizedek’s story, because his life is not defined by only one activity, and he is not arrogant about having a powerful title. In fact, what makes him important in the scriptures is his life of serving and ministering in a way that didn’t fit the rules, or the expectations for someone like him. When the Holy Spirit guides us, God shows us that even great titles cannot diminish our purpose.

LIBERATED PURPOSE IN HISTORY: REVEREND BOBBIE JEAN BAKER

When Bobbie Jean Baker was a child, she lived as a boy, someone who has or was given the gender identity of male. Bobbie Jean's real gender identity is feminine. Bobbie Jean is Transgender. That is why we use the pronouns "she and her" when we talk about this advocate, artist and pastor of her people. Bobbie Jean discovered her purpose as she discovered her identity. She was a singer at City of Refuge United Church of Christ in San Francisco, then became an advocate and ordained minister there. She worked every day to care for her neighbors and friends who were battling AIDS. Eventually she became West Coast Regional TransSaints Minister of the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries and was lay minister at Transcending Transgender Ministries. Transgender people are special to God, because God's collective identity transcends gender. Bobbie Jean's liberated purpose was to be proud of who she was. She lived to welcome everyone like her to a church where the Holy Spirit empowers us to tell one another - in every language - "God is proud of you."

BREATH PRAYER: PURPOSE

Inhale: *Fill your whole self with breath*

Then say: *Shape my identity, O God*

Exhale slowly: *According to your purpose*

Inhale: *Protect my life, dear Jesus*

Exhale slowly: *According to your purpose*

Inhale: *Guide my way, Holy Spirit*

Exhale slowly: *According to your purpose*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does identity mean to you?
- How would you answer the question "Who are you?"
- What are a few things that are important for your identity?
- How is the Holy Spirit showing you God's purpose for you? Talk about both your special, specific purpose, and the way your identity and purpose has a place in God's church.

QUEER PEOPLE OF FAITH

**LIBERATION
LECTIONARY**
EVERY SEASON HAS A STORY



Rev. Pauli
Murray



Archbishop
Carl Bean



Rev. Bobbie
Jean Baker



Rev. Dr
Pamela
Lightsey

PRIDE X PENTECOST

Liberated Faith

Faith is how many people live and identify when they choose to follow a religion, or commit to a cause. Faith is the seventh principle of Kwanzaa. While it is often defined similarly to the word belief, the two words are different. Belief means feeling sure, acknowledging or accepting something as true, with proof or without proof. Faith means having such confidence in a set of values, a person or outcome that it impacts what you do, and who you are. Belief happens about many things in life. Faith is a way of life. We believe that the sun will rise and set each day, that rain and heat and cold will happen every year. But it takes faith to plant seeds in a garden, or make plans for the future, because climate can literally make or break our plans. It takes faith, because even though we believe the sun and the rain will come, we have no power to make it happen. The Holy Spirit came to assure us that our faith is powerful. No matter what we can or cannot control, no matter what we can or cannot see.

When you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can move mountains. This is what Jesus said to his disciples when they were trying to help someone, and nothing they did seemed to work. "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." That message was sealed by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. People who could not understand each other were all of a sudden sharing and receiving God's promises in their homeland tongues. Groups of people who would never socialize with each other connected in spiritual and material ways. By faith, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be our whole selves, and change our lives. Faith is the proof of what we believe. We believe that God designed a welcoming world where justice brings peace. That world is not yet built, but by faith we will work with the Holy Spirit to make it happen. We believe that God loves people of all identities. We believe that God's church includes people whose identity is LGBTQIA+. But we must have faith because not everyone who loves Jesus loves queer people. We need the Holy Spirit to free us with Jesus's love. We need the Holy Spirit to liberate all of us from believing that we can control who God loves.

THEME SCRIPTURE: HEBREWS 11:1-3

Now faith is the substance of what we hope for and the evidence of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

LIBERATED FAITH IN THE BIBLE: ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

In the New Testament, the book of Acts tells the story of a global movement that took place after Jesus was taken up to heaven. The eunuch from Ethiopia, whose name we do not know, appears in Acts chapter 8. Eunuchs (pronounced you-nuk) are historically male persons who guard important women, sometimes queens. Eunuchs were commanded to change their bodies because of the conditions of their work, which was often enslavement, in which case they had no choice. This could cause an identity crisis, emotional and mental distress; and no doubt it made many people like our brother from Ethiopia question God's power and love. In our story, a disciple named Philip was led by God's Spirit to meet the eunuch and travel with him for a while.

The eunuch had great faith. He was a devout worshiper and he used his resources to travel and worship God. Though he had not heard the story of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, he had faith that God wanted him. He had traveled a long way to worship God, and he was reading God's word with a desire to understand. The Holy Spirit brought someone to spend time with him, and to baptize him. Philip welcomed him into God's family, he did not judge him for being different. The eunuch was a powerful person who was given a great responsibility by his queen. By faith, he received information and instruction from someone he had never met before, someone he met on the side of the road. We learn liberated faith in this story because the Holy Spirit builds God's church with no rules about changing our bodies. Because Jesus took all the hurt upon his body, we can experience healing and God's Holy Ghost power in our bodies.

LIBERATED FAITH IN HISTORY: PAULI MURRAY

Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray was a civil rights activist, a poet, preacher and legal scholar - especially about government policy. Pauli co-founded the National Organization for Women, and drafted multiple strategies for education justice and gender equality, which eventually resulted in the historic Brown vs. Board supreme court ruling, and extensions to policy protections for LGBTQIA+ people. Rev. Dr. Murray was the first woman and first Black person to be ordained as an Episcopal Priest. Pauli's many marks on the culture and history of Black liberation have been preserved at the Pauli Murray Center for History and Justice.

One important part of Pauli's legacy is the fact that the Rev. Dr. Murray identified as queer in a time when it was illegal and dangerous to be queer. She was also known to her close family and friends as both he and she, which today we associate with non-binary identity, or transgender. Further explanation from the Center: "When the Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray lived, language about LGBTQ+ communities, gender expression, and gender was different than it is today. We don't know how Pauli Murray would identify if they were living today or which pronouns Pauli would use for self-expression."

Liberated faith is very present in Pauli's story. She - or he, or they - lived in a time when even what they believed about the self was not understood, not explored, and not seen as godly. Pauli had faith that her life was precious to God. Faith liberated Pauli to feel God's pride.

BREATH PRAYER: FAITH

Inhale: *Fill your whole self with breath*

Then say: *Faith is the substance of things hoped for*

Exhale slowly: *Faith is the evidence of things unseen*

Inhale: *Faith is proof of God's pride in me*

Exhale slowly: *Faith is the evidence of things unseen*

Inhale: *Faith is proof of God's welcoming world*

Exhale slowly: *Faith is the evidence of things unseen*

Inhale: *Faith gives us power, for being and becoming our whole selves*

Exhale slowly: *Faith is the evidence of things unseen*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Discuss some of the ways people of different identities are important in your culture, and in your home.
- What are places in your faith community that would welcome queer people? What are some places where you think queer people would not be welcomed? How can your community help to make every place a picture of God's welcoming world?
- Who are the queer people in your life? Pray the second breath prayer above, and replace "me" with their names, including yours if you are queer too.
- Learn about Pauli Murray: paulimurraycenter.com

Liberated Community

When the Holy Spirit appeared to the people of God on Pentecost, God was sending a person from Their community to live permanently in our communities. God did the same thing during the time that we now call Christmas, when Jesus came to live with humans. And God did the same thing during Creation, when Almighty God made the entire universe then put people on earth to take care of all created things. The scriptures tell us that God enjoys fellowship. The Old Testament has stories about Creator God taking walks and sharing meals with people. They established rules about caring for neighbors, and sharing our goods so that everyone in our communities has life's essentials like food to eat, clothing to wear and a place to live.

At Pentecost, God's Holy Spirit founded the Church, a place where people of faith serve their communities out of respect and love. In God's Church, there are rules about loving our neighbors and repenting when we cause harm. In God's Church, there are no rules about everyone in the community looking the same or living the same way. Our lives look different: we are queer, straight, curvy, tall, dark skinned, olive toned. Our homes look different. Many families have only one parent, some have more than two. Some households have two mommies or two daddies, some have young people and elderly people, some have no children. The Holy Spirit liberates the hearts and minds of God's church so that we can love like God loves, so that we can love everybody God loves.

THEME SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Jesus, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship with the Holy Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

LIBERATED COMMUNITY IN THE BIBLE: JONATHAN

In ancient history, King David must be one of the most well known people of Jewish and Christian tradition. David's most beloved relationship was with a prince named Jonathan. It can be found in 1 Samuel 18, one of the scrolls in a section called "historical books". Jonathan and David were so deeply connected that you could say they were in love. The Bible tells us that their hearts were closer to each other than those of married people. Sometimes this kind of connection is physical, sometimes it is not. The Bible does not mention it, which tells us something very important! However David and Jonathan expressed love is not our concern, and it is not our business. That is because we are not in David and Jonathan's relationship. It is especially not our business because we are not God. When God shows us loving relationships, we have the opportunity to see how God's love is reflected between people who bear Their image. Sadly, Prince Jonathan's dad mistreated David, so they were apart for years. Jonathan lost his life during a war before he could reunite with David. But David never forgot him, even when he became a king. He remembered his love for Jonathan and brought Jonathan's last living descendant to live in a king's house and to eat at the king's table. Jonathan's story shows us a liberated community: he shared love in the way that fit with how God made him, and it built a lasting love that blessed the generations after him.

LIBERATED COMMUNITY IN HISTORY: ARCHBISHOP CARL BEAN

Archbishop Carl Bean lived from 1944 to 2021. He was an artist and a pioneer of AIDS-informed support ministries and amplifying queer faith leaders. He survived a suicide attempt when he was a teenager, which happened because he felt that he could not express himself as a gay person without being harmed. He was also not sure God loved him or welcomed him as he was. The Holy Spirit and his community helped to heal those hurts, and Bishop Bean lived! He would eventually be known as a “beacon of light” for queer people. He was called “Pops” by his community, because of his caring nature and his constant pastoral support. He founded queer inclusive and queer centered community outreach organizations, he mentored dozens of faith leaders and founded the Unity Fellowship of Christ Church that grew into a national network, and became his legacy work. Archbishop Bean was also a singer songwriter, he wrote a hit song for Motown called “Born This Way,” and it was performed widely during the disco era. The song became an anthem for queer people power that later inspired Lady Gaga to write her own version of the song.

Carl Bean’s story is a beacon of light for everyone looking for a liberated community. He embraced people who were overlooked by other churches because of their gender, how they love, or what kind of illness they had. He built a community where nobody would have to be in the same pain he suffered as a youth. When he described this calling to a non-queer friend, he said “We love you just as you are so we hope you’ll love us and accept us just as we are.” God’s liberated community welcomes queer people with great love.

BREATH PRAYER: COMMUNITY WITH GOD

Inhale: *Fill your whole self with breath*

Then say: *God loves community*

Exhale slowly: *Oh Holy Spirit, let us love with God*

Inhale: *God builds community*

Exhale slowly: *Oh Holy Spirit, let us build with God*

Inhale: *God lives in community*

Exhale slowly: *Oh Holy Spirit, let us live with God*

CHILDREN’S BOOK IDEAS

- *This Day in June* by Gayle E. Pitman, PhD, Illustrated by Kristyna Litten
- *When Aidan Became a Brother* by Kyle Lukoff, Illustrated by Kaylani Juanita
- *Sewing the Rainbow* by Gayle E. Pitman, PhD, Illustrated by Holly Clifton-Brown

View a summary of these books and a full list of recommendations at bit.ly/epicpridebooks

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The historical books were made in a time when two men loving each other so much was punishable by death. God shows how proud They are of Jonathan and David by blessing their relationship with a mention in the holy scriptures. Read the story of Jonathan and David.
- What questions come to mind?
- Share some thoughts about the story of Jonathan’s love and loyalty.
- Name some of the conversations about queer love you hear about in your community, and in your home.
- Have you ever judged someone - or yourself - for being part of a community that God loves?
- Pray about those thoughts and assumptions every day this week.
- What are ways that different communities could be liberated to love each other?

Liberated Action

We believe in a God of action. Black Liberation is not only our theological lens, it is the goal of all our spiritual and political activity. And it is not the only lens that we use to interpret the Bible and define our values. We also use a political viewpoint. We hold to the ideas and values of Black feminism, which embraces queerness as a beautiful part of humanity. Black feminism is also known as Black queer feminism. A collection of values like this is called a politic. It's the set of activities that make up the foundation of how we move in life: from self-care to raising children, voting and protesting, donating money, goods and time. A theological lens is how we perceive and relate to God. Our politic joins our theology to help us better perceive and relate to humanity.

Many people believe that feminism and liberation theology are unholy, not acceptable to God. Some people are certain that queerness is scary. They condemn anything having to do with queer life, and they condemn queer people. They take action to intentionally harm queer people and they believe these actions are holy. Actions such as voting to make queer marriage illegal, abusing queer people in the military, mocking queerness in sports and ignoring the needs of queer students in schools. We believe that any religion which commands or allows harm to happen is not godly faith. We take action to protect people who are attacked, judged and segregated. We believe that God wants us to take action for the safety and benefit of queer people.

We teach the scriptures to prove that God is proud of the queer people that They have made. Everyone who hates queer people can use scripture to teach that God despised queer people. Black queer feminism directs our basic actions as a community. Being able to talk about our politic helps people to get to know us, and it helps us to recognize how we can best relate to, encourage or provide accountability in relationship with our neighbors. The politic of Black queer feminism does not require religion, and this is important for our religious views. Neither faith in Jesus nor membership in a church is required for living in community or working in hope for justice and change. We believe that our religion helps us to be better neighbors. We do not believe religion decides who we get to call our neighbors. The Holy Spirit is the source of our right actions, and the power that keeps us going. While some people of faith think that God's justice is only for people of a certain politic, the Holy Spirit liberates us so that we can take action to stand against harm wherever it is happening, for whomever is being wronged.

THEME SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 61:1-4

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. God has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, planted by God to display divine splendor. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities and return blessings to future generations.

LIBERATED ACTION IN THE BIBLE: VASHTI

The book of Esther begins with a protest of harmful powers. In Esther chapter 1, Queen Vashti protests mistreatment by her husband, King Xerxes, and she loses her home and position as queen. King Xerxes hosted 180 days of showing off his treasures, and ended with a week long feast to impress people of status and power from nearby regions, many that paid tribute to him already. The king wanted to display his wife's beauty at the end of the feast. He was hosting a feast for royal men while Queen Vashti was hosting a feast for royal women. The king sent word that Queen Vashti was commanded to undress herself and then make an appearance at his feast in the nude, in front of all of his guests. Queen Vashti said no. The king and his minions decreed that she was disobedient, they made a rule that she could never be in his presence again. She was accused of despising King Xerxes and sowing discord. She was called disrespectful. She was seen as a problem that had to go away. The king and his men thought that certainly if the queen refused a command from her husband, every woman who heard about it would begin to refuse their husbands too. Vashti is a hero of liberated action. She was an example of resistance that scared men in power, because she was a powerful woman who refused to be mistreated, no matter the cost.

LIBERATED ACTION IN HISTORY: PAMELA LIGHTSEY

Minister, organizer and journalist, Rev. Dr. Pamela Lightsey is an associate dean and clinical assistant professor of contextual theology and practice at Boston University School of Theology. She is a self-identified queer ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. As she is a living example of Liberated Action, she is actively making Black history every day! Here is her bio in her own words: I grew up in the 60s - a passionate activist for justice; among the first to be placed on a bus to desegregate an all white jr. high school miles away from my neighborhood. The fight for civil rights gave me skills that I have continued to use as a multi-vocational queer lesbian woman: theologian, ordained elder, social justice activist, faculty and associate dean. When I write about queer theology, just war, homiletics or African American religious history, it's in conversation with people who have experienced oppression and with those who fight for its eradication." Pamela was also present during the Ferguson Uprisings, after teenager Michael Brown, Jr. was murdered by a police officer. She recorded stories of people who were there; oral histories to pass down which were focused on the real narrative, from the most impacted people. We can see liberated action in the ongoing work of Rev. Dr. Lightsey because God's power in her is undeniable, and nobody can challenge her work. She is proof that the Holy Spirit does far more than welcome queer people into God's church. The Holy Spirit guides queer people into lives committed to working for freedom.

MEDITATION PRAYER FOR DIRECT ACTION

Pray this week's scripture over your actions and your community.

Oh Holy Spirit of the Sovereign Lord, come and rest on me, and on my people. Anoint us to proclaim good news. Send us to bind up the brokenhearted, That we might work for freedom for the captives, and release for the prisoners; Bless us to proclaim and prepare for the year of your favor and the day of your vengeance.

Let us be a comfort to all who mourn, O God. Show us your provision for those who grieve in Zion—bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. Holy Spirit, name all your people the oaks of righteousness, display our divine splendor. Teach us to rebuild the ancient ruins and restore places long devastated. For we believe that you have called us to renew ruined cities, to bring liberation and abundance for our future generations. Amen. Ashé.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Are there times when you have felt sure you should resist an idea or a belief that causes harm?
- Read the story of Queen Vashti resisting the harmful command. Describe the thoughts, questions or feelings you have as you read this story. Does this story bring to mind similar situations? What would you do in a situation like this, and why?
- What do non-queer people need to do in order to move in liberated action?
- How can people of faith move in liberated action?
- Do you have a politic? Do you see God through a theological lens? What does working for justice look like for you? What does it mean to you? Discuss the value of action in your life and community.

Pride and Pentecost: Liberated to Love

*Now the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering,
kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control.
Against these things there shall be no law.
Galatians 5:22-23*

The fruit of the Spirit is a scripture that shows us something special about ourselves, and about one another. Have you heard the expression, "You are what you eat?" The same is true about the Fruit of the Spirit. God feeds us these fruits, and teaches us to produce them. So when we share the fruits of the Spirit with each other, we are being and communicating the kind of people God wants us to be. And God wants us to be like them. See how the fruits of the Spirit are all attributes of God?

People who produce good fruit, and are willing to share it, teach us more about God than we think. Meekness and patience shape us into good neighbors. Jesus showed us meekness more than anyone. Love, joy and peace aren't reserved for people of any particular class or color. God loves people from every nation and from all walks of life. God wants us to grow and to give, using the same nutrients. That's why God gives us a taste of the same fruit we share - so that we are truly connected to one another. We are meant to share in one another's nourishment. The Holy Spirit established the church so that we can work with God as God works in all of us.

But when we act like we are God, instead of doing everything with and for God, we confuse comforting people's bodies with controlling them. When people judge and exclude our neighbors in LGBTQIA+ communities, they are making the mistake of playing God. When we lack the fruit of the Spirit, we think we know what's best for someone else's body. That is God's business and a person's decision. It has nothing to do with sharing the fruit that feeds us all we need.

Pentecost during Pride Month is an exciting opportunity for all God's children to learn how to communicate with each other, and to receive the Holy Ghost power to build a church together. The Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost and opened up minds, hearts, and languages in order to bring many different people together. God did not use one person's body to do this. God wants Their Spirit to live in all our bodies! God has built a church full of different ways to express ourselves, name ourselves, and show love to each other.

We will know our love is godly by the presence of the Holy Spirit's fruits. If love feels like abuse or harm, then it is not love. We need to protect the love that comes from God, and bring healing to people who repent of causing harm. We have the opportunity everyday to learn more about each other, to learn how to love each other. We have this opportunity because the Spirit of God is within us. When we love each other, we are loving God.

God's love is our primary example for embracing queer people as God's children. The one God whom we worship is three persons, who all love each other so much that they identify as one! This is beyond ordinary, it is deeper than different. It is a reflection of queerness as divinely designed. This is liberated love: building communities where every household is welcomed, where every image bearer is loved, because the Holy Ghost has already come to free us from places where we could not love ourselves.

A special message to our queer and non-binary neighbors: No one gender represents God's image more than the other, no gender is required in order to reflect God's image, you only need to exist. And we are so glad that you do. Keep on loving and listening to the Spirit. God is proud of you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you for learning, reading and praying with us through this season of Pentecost. Join us at faithforjustice.org/blog for a new lesson with daily scripture readings every Sunday.

This devotional was written and produced by Faith for Justice organizers and staff. It was made possible by St. John's Church - The Beloved Community, and The St. Louis Association of the United Church of Christ. Artwork and design by Timothy Cooper.

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