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Hey, you're listening to the disciples, LGBTQ plus Alliance colors of hope podcast series. What does hope look like in our changing landscape? What color is hope? This is the Reverend Allen V Harris and my color is purple and my word is spirit. I am the regional minister for the Christian Church disciples of Christ Capitol area region. That is the area around and including Washington DC, but also Maryland, Delaware, Northern Virginia, and a small piece of the Eastern panhandle of West Virginia. I'm so glad to be with you today. You might wonder why I chose the selection. Purple spirit. Well, purple is one of my favorite colors and that's just the way it is. You can definitely tell that's the case because I've got tattoos with purple in it. Even my favorite preaching folder that I used for 14 years at Franklin circle Christian Church in Cleveland, Ohio was a bright, brilliant purple and spirit is my favorite facet of the divine.

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My my treasured and cherished persona of the Holy Trinity. Now I can only wish that we had a Holy quartet because then Sophia would definitely give spirit or run for her money, but a spirit, it is now. If you had known me as a child, a youth, a young adult, you would never have guessed that I would one day be in love with this Wiley and wonderful Holy spirit. I was by anybody's standards and uptight, anal retentive, anxious, tentative child. And I always looked for the responses of others to know how I was going to act or feel or think or even speak. Now, who knows exactly why this was the case, but I believe it was in large part due to the absence of my father. My father had left the military and was retiring and discovered that he had cancer of the larynx and died about three months before I was born.

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And I think as a young child and maybe a children who are part of divorces, have the same kinds of feelings. I think it affected my sense of place in the world and my sense of self identity and self confidence. And it would take everything, including years of therapy to finally loosen me up, to trust myself and not tie my self identity to other people's actions and views of me and to, to ultimately follow the winds of the spirit and follow the spirit. I did. Somehow that wonderful spirit emboldened me to come out as a gay man near the end of my seminary days even coming out before the commission for ministry and seeking nonetheless to follow the call to ministry that God had placed within me, confident in the gifts and graces that I and others saw. And even to go to places that I vowed as a teenager, I would never live New York city.

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The spirit emboldened made to be completely an unabashedly out as a queer, same gender loving gay man and remain steadfastly committed to being ordained and then to seek every call I have followed comfortably and proud. And vocally as it was noted of my loves and relationships as a gay man, the spirit emboldened me also to not just claim things but to move on from things to leave things. I left the senior pastor position of park Avenue Christian Church in New York city. I left the senior pastor position of Franklin circle Christian Church in Cleveland, Ohio and now I have announced my leave taking as regional minister of the Christian Church Capitol area. Even though in none of those instances was there necessarily a need or no one had asked or even a hint that I needed to move on, I just looked deep inside and felt like both the organizations I was a part of and I, and my family needed me to move on.

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Now I recognize that as a white male who grew up in a middle class and educated household, that I have privileges that were afforded to me, that are not afforded to everybody. And I recognize that there are

folks who feel the spirits called to move on who cannot take that risk, who cannot leave without another position. Because of their circumstances. I acknowledged that and I'm humbled by it, but I still have to acknowledge that there is a reliance somewhere within my very core being upon the Holy spirit that is a source of strength and courage and allows me to do some risk-taking. Now let's turn to our scripture, John 17 one through 11 when I first saw the scripture next to the word spirit, I presume this would be the section of the farewell discourse that Jesus offers where he tells his disciples he is going to send the Holy spirit the comforter after him.

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Well, that shows you how much I know about scripture. It's not in fact, this is at the end of this discourse when Jesus is offering a benediction to the sermon and doesn't really mention the spirit much at all. Let's read the selection. After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, father, mother, trusted parent, God, the hour has come. Glorify your child so that the child may glorify you. Since you have given me him authority over all people to give eternal life to all whom you have given him, and this is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do so now, father, mother, trusted parent, God, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

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I have made your name known to those who gave, who you gave me from the world. They were yours and you gave them to me and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you for the words that you gave to me, I have given them and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you and they have believed that you sent me. I'm asking on their behalf. I'm not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me because they are yours. All mine are yours and yours are mine and I have been glorified in them and now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world and I am coming to you. Holy father, Holy mother, Holy trusted parent. Protect them in your name that you have given me so that they may be one as we are one.

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In doing a little research on this text, I discovered that one of my friends and colleagues from Cleveland, Ohio, the Reverend Katherine Matthews, who writes a weekly seeds online reflection on scripture ponders this scripture in a way that really touches my soul. She writes, there is much to be said for seeing Christ in each other, but there is also something to be said for seeing ourselves as God sees us with steadfast love and compassion and with hope too for the future and what is yet to be the disciples that night are a band with great promise and Jesus sees that promise within them, but he also knows that they will carry the gospel and in body its message in a hostile and curiously unwelcoming world. A world that doesn't seem to know what it needs most then or now. I just love Kate's turning our perspective on God upside down and thinking about how God understands views sees us.

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It's so much. Reminds me of the kind of upside down look that Alice Walker has in her book, the color purple. You know that moment where Sealy says, I think it pisses off God. If you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it, people think pleasing God is all God cares about, but any fool living in the world can see it. Always trying to please us back. See, taking that other perspective and the confidence, a new hope that that brings. This is the promise that I had to come to believe in me through

therapy and through the people around me that my father's death did not in fact leave me abandoned because my father had been in relationship with so many people who were still with me. The people who would surround me as a child who would pass on his care, his wisdom, his love along with their own care and wisdom and love and others would come in their place. Throughout my life, I am so indebted to the relationships of people in my life that have helped me see myself in a different way

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And eventually in the way of life and inheritance and time. I now discovered that I am the one that am passing on my care, my wisdom, my love to others, and trying my best to empower them to see themselves as God sees them, to not pass by the purple fields of their lives and not be in awe and wonder of their own gifts and graces. Knowing that we are cared for by others by the divine, even when they are not physically present here, even when they are gone gives us the confidence to receive that care, wisdom and love and to make the daring and often risk taking decisions that make new possibilities open up within us and before us.

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That is the work of the Holy spirit, which reminds me of one of my favorite poems about following the whims of the spirit of being so confident in your own skin of being so so beautifully in touch with how beautiful you are. It also happens to be one of the most famous poems about the color purple. When I an old woman, I shall wear purple with a red hat that doesn't go and doesn't suit me and I shall spend my pension on Brandy and summer gloves and satin sandals and say we have no money for butter. Hi. She'll sit down on the pavement when I'm tired and gobble up samples and shops and press alarm bells and run my stick along the public railings and make up for the sobriety of my youth. I shall go out in my slippers in the rain and pick flowers and other people's gardens and learn to spit. You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat and eat three pounds of sausage at a go or only bread and pickle for a week and hoard pens and pencils and beer mats and things in boxes.

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But now we must have clothes that keep us dry and pay our rent and not swear in the street and set a good example for the children. We must have friends to dinner and read the papers, but, but maybe I ought to practice a little now. So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised when suddenly I am old and start to wear purple. Isn't that beautiful? It's called warning by Jenny Joseph, a beautiful English poet. Don't we want that same kind of confidence and don't we want to practice being a that kind of risk, taking confident in our own skin selves as young as we possibly can? Well, part of that is opening up the world for persons who love and live differently from ourselves is from getting our congregations and our communities of faith, our political world, to understand that prejudice, prejudice, and bigotry, homophobia and heterosexism are not acceptable. Thank you for listening to this podcast, and I hope in some way that it has helped you look at yourself as God looks at you. And may the spirit always lead you.