

Blessings Beloved. I am the Reverend Chaim Rodriguez, but most people know me simply as CJ. My pronouns are he/him/his, el. I am a proud queer Puerto Rican currently serving as the pastor of Iglesia Cristiana Nacional (Discipulos de Cristo) in Washington DC and soon relocating to begin my journey as a PhD student in the area of Systematic Theology at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

I want to begin our time together with a reflection on the word harmony that I found in the Daily Word, a publication of the Silent Unity Movement.

The word *unity* is synonymous with harmony. When I consider the world as a unified whole, I know that harmony does not require sameness.

In a world of diverse life, climates, and land, I feel connection and harmony to all things through Spirit within. Love is everywhere present, and within all life there dwells a unity beyond differences. Whenever I feel a spark of love, inspiration, or wonder, I remind myself I am love, as are all people.

I commit to living as a member of the family of humankind with respect for all life. I take time for stillness, meditation, serving others—practices that keep me aligned with love.

The biblical pericope from which I will be reflecting is from the letter to the Ephesians, chapter 1 verses 15-23. It's a prayer attributed to Paul. I am reading from the New Revised Standard Version with some changes I've made to the text. It reads:

I have heard of your faith in Jesus and your love toward all people, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our way shower Jesus gives you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know the divine within. So that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which you have been called, what are the riches of your glorious inheritance among creation, and what is the immeasurable greatness of the power you've received, according to the working of the great divine power. God put this power to work in Jesus the Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him in the heavenly realm, far above all rule and authority and power and stewardship, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And God has put all things in his care to watch over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

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Reflection

In reading this text I am intrigued with Paul's notion of the visible body of Christ in the world. I say notion because it seems rather utopic, especially if we consider this passage in connection to the relationship between the LGBTQIA+ community and the wider Church in modernity. Maybe its better seen as what the Church can aspire to be rather than try to make it what it has and even currently is. To this there are three ideas I would like to share:

According to Karoline Lewis Paul's notion of power, stewardship, rule, and authority are re-imagined through the life of the follower. That is, God's power at work in Jesus is also God's power at work in and through us. It's the power that makes known the gift of God's grace. It's a power that is all-encompassing, all-embracing, and all-in-all. In other words divine power is not outside of us but within. It's a power that is birthed within. Jesus himself in one of the gospels tells the disciples that for those who believe greater works than he they will do. And this wasn't just for those in the First century. I truly believe that today we are called to those greater works through the indwelling presence that is the Christ power within us. And yet the text is clear, this a power in and for all of us. Except, in many instances the Church has historically and continues to be unable to fully see and embrace the indwelling power that is also within those of us in the queer community. We are not excluded from the text yet we have been excluded from full participation in the church; it's all embracing, all encompassing, all in all. And when we say ALL we mean ALL. And so how is this connected to harmony? Well, as the meditation I began with reads, harmony has everything to do learning to live as a member of the family of humankind with respect, love, and acceptance for all. When the Church, that is all of us, learns to live in true harmony we are then able to see, embrace, and celebrate the power that is in every person including those in the LGBTQIA+ community who for far too long has been left at the margins of the ecclesial institution. And might I add we cannot continue to exclude ourselves as queer people from this power either. We must first and foremost recognize that we too have a divine power within and not be scared to use it.

A second point in this text is the power that first raised Jesus from the dead. Its a power that makes us servants and able to realize the the depth of the love and fullness of God. Wow! The other day in a Bible study this question about us having the power of Christ within came up. One of the participants said, "I don't have divine power, I can't resurect anyone from the dead." I invited this person to open their heart and mind to a reinterpreted idea of resurrection. I believe that we certainly have the power of resurrection. We do it everytime we participate in helping keep each other up, helping others that are in need or simply need a hand. We resurect our community when we stand up for justice and speak truth to power. The queer community has been in the resurecting buisness for as long as I can remember and even before. The work and legacy of those such as James Baldwin, Marsha P. Johnson at Stonewall, Bayard Rustin, Troy Perry the founder of MCC, just to name a few. These individuals all form part of a collective movement, a collective memory that has allowed for the resurrection of the queer community each and everyday. Yes resurrection, because each and everyday we continue to be crucified by the Church and by society. And yet each and everyday we continue to lift each other up through the resurecting power of love. We exert the power of resurrection when we believe in and practice love.

Finally, it is a power at work within us, "able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine." If we, the collective that make up the body of the living Christ in the world, in all our various hues of the rainbow, in all of the fabulousness that is found in our diversity were able to live and work in unity and harmony just imagine what we would be able to accomplish. Imagine the power that would come forth for the good and well being of all Creation. The author

of Ephesians couldn't have said it any clearer. If we truly came to understand the power that is working in and through us we would accomplish even more than what we could ever imagine possible. As I prepared for this podcast John Legend's song, Imagine came to mind. It sums up the meaning of this passage and its relationship to the word harmony means to me. And while I can't keep a note to save my life. I want to end this podcast with the words from this song:

Imagine there's no heaven

It's easy if you try

No hell below us

Above us only sky

Imagine all the people living for today

Imagine there's no countries

It isn't hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion too

Imagine all the people living life in peace, you

You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one

I hope some day you'll join us

And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions

I wonder if you can

No need for greed or hunger

A sibilinghood of all people

Imagine all the people sharing all the world.

Oh, You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one

I hope some day you'll join us

And the world will be as one.

We must remember the power that we as the church, we as the queer community, we as communities of color and allies have. Not only within the church but in the world. And It's a power and a force for good. So let us go forth this day and use our power to change and transform the world in the power of love through the Christ presence that is in each and every one of us. Amen and Ashe.