

Hi, my name is Shandya Jha my pronouns

are she and they. I'm an anti-oppression consultant in Oakland,

California and an ordained Disciples of Christ pastor.

I am really thrilled to be a part of this project.

I am really thrilled that spirituality and particularly our faith as

queer and affirming Disciples is being connected with a historic

resource, like the lgbtq + flag and I found myself captivated by

Gilbert Baker's story of how this came to be the symbol for the lgbtq

+ movement when he was back in the 70s visiting the

winterland ballroom, and he says,

"The crowd was as much a part of the show as the band.

Everyone was there. North Beach beatniks and Barrio zoots.

The bored bikers in black leather, the teenagers in the back row

kissing. There were long haired, lithe girls in belly dance get-ups,

pink-haired punks safety pinned together,

Hippie Suburbanites, movie stars.

So beautiful

they left you dumbstruck, muscle gayboys with perfect mustaches, Butch

Dykes and blue jeans and fairies of all genders in thrift store

dresses.

We were all in a swirl of color and light. It was like

a rainbow.

A rainbow.

That's the moment when I knew exactly what kind of flag I would make.

Gilbert Baker's flag has evolved a lot over the years. A version that moved me very deeply a few years ago was one that added a black and a brown bar and my favorite one of today includes on the side black and brown and pink white and blue for the trans Community edges.

And a few colors of dropped out one of which is from the original flag the bright hot pink that Gilbert Baker chose to represent sex.

So I thought I would start with the elephant in the room that I am doing a liturgical reflection on the lectionary passage and connecting it to sex. You and I know that that's a real challenge because you know, the old joke that the church's stance on sex is: sex is dirty save it for someone you love. And so for us to be engaging in a lectionary reflection on a passage from the book of Acts that seems to have nothing to do with sex... It's Tricky.

But I don't think it's inauthentic.

And so what I'd like to do is to briefly read that passage and then see where we go from there. The passage for the upcoming week of the liturgical calendar is at Chapter 4 verses 32 through 35.

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them.

all. There was not a needy person among them for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.

They laid it at the apostles feet and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Now some of my friends who have inappropriate senses of humor would be able to tell you exactly how that line about how everything they owned was held in common was exactly about sex, but that's not you.

That's not me.

That's not the direction

we're going to take with the passage.

There is however something very profound about this passage, which grounds me in what

I want the church to be what I long for in the church. What despite some disappointments with our inability to achieve it.

I keep aspiring to: an experience real absolute Joy.

But I do encounter glimpses of it.

This passage from the book of Acts in many ways is why

I wanted to be a minister in the first place. To be a part of a
community like this.

And it might be hard to see what that has to do with sex, but bear
with me.

I have recently received a little tiny writers residency to research
into any subject

I wanted to as a queer artists of color and I chose to research
what the lives of South Asian immigrant lgbtqia ancestors
would have looked like that could offer a source of encouragement and
inspiration to those of us navigating that experience today.

I wanted to connect with ancestors interestingly enough the
ancestors whispered a word that a lot of the research was going to be
painful.

And they wanted me to focus
on Joy and resilience and Power.

So I wanted to share with you a documentary that I recently got to
watch was called Kush. Kush is a word that in Hindi or Urdu translates
to happiness or really to ecstatic pleasure.

And it's a word that in the 70s and 80s the underground lgbtq +
movement in India claimed as their self-defining terminology men and

women alike and people across the gender spectrum. Kush. And they were

at what is good about being Kush?

And I remember one man in the documentary saying

two things:

the desire

and the siblinghood.

the desire

and the siblinghood.

Now what strikes me as profound about that is the same

longing the same passion the same seeking Joy

that members of my community of ancestors named as what brought them

Joy about identifying as queer.

It's the same experience.

I have as I dream of what church could be.

Those longings are not so different.

The other thing I think is really important

Is they got to experience a freedom

in being who they were.

And I think something we forget about the early church

Is that while they were persecuted while they were countercultural

while they were under threat.

They were willing to risk all of that because of the freedom to

finally be the community

they had always wanted to be.

A longing got fulfilled.

It got fulfilled in community.

There is something about Gilbert Baker's pink stripe, which actually

he got rid of not because it was too controversial,

but because when the demand for rainbow Flags spiked after the murder

of Harvey Milk hot pink was too expensive and too rare of fabric to

find that was the logistical reason that the hot pink stripe has

disappeared from our rainbow flag.

When Gilbert Baker made sure to include sex.

as part of the Proclamation of what lgbtq + folks got to be proud of

it was the thing that we were shamed for wanting.

It was the thing that we were shamed for pursuing.

And so by proclaiming it boldly and unapologetically Gilbert Baker was

offering us freedom. Not freedom to do whatever we wanted whenever we

wanted no matter what with no consequences, but freedom to be a part

of a community that was Unapologetic about its desire and about its

willingness to show up for each other.

I don't think

that the Ballroom in San Francisco with the North Beach beatniks and the hippies Suburbanites and the butch Dykes in blue jeans - and I include that one again because I resonate with it -

I don't think that Gilbert Baker's experience of the winterland ballroom

was all that different

from the persecuted and joyous

the countercultural and thriving community in the book of Acts.

I founded a nonprofit called the Oakland Peace Center and at our very founding, at the very launch of the Oakland Peace Center,

We had a panel of leaders of color from the community across several Generations who were giving us advice on how to not burn out in the midst of the work of Justice.

One of those people was the Reverend Phil Lawson a key leader in the nonviolent resistance movement that you might know if the civil rights movement that the leaders of it called the USS Freedom Movement.

And Reverend Phil said to the group,

"I need you to remember.

The opposite of slavery isn't freedom.

The opposite of slavery is community."

I am really proud to be representing one of the hardest to explain

colors in the rainbow flag.

Because I'm proclaiming my desire.

I'm proclaiming my community.

In proclaiming my desire,

I'm proclaiming my freedom.

In proclaiming my desire,

I'm claiming the church in a whole new way.

And I hope you'll join me in that reclamation.