

The healing agape

Grace and peace be with you my sisters and brothers and especial greetings to my nonbinary siblings.

My Name is Nadia, I am student at Pacific School of Religion in CA. Most of my life I used the pronouns she/her but from last year I started using them/they.

Before to start, I invite you to take a deep breath, and as you do, let's invite the presence of the Holy One into this space, this virtual place. God of life, God of love, be welcome. Bless the heart of the listeners, whoever they are, wherever they are.

Poem by Dawna Markova

*"I will not die an unlived life.
I will not live in fear
of falling or catching fire.
I choose to inhabit my days,
to allow my living to open me,
to make me less afraid,
more accessible;
to loosen my heart
until it becomes a wing,
a torch, a promise.
I choose to risk my significance,
to live so that which came to me as seed
goes to the next as blossom,
and that which came to me as blossom,
goes on as fruit."*

I

Today we are going to talk about **Life**, our color is **Red** and the Scripture is in 1 John 3:1-7 (The Voice)

¹Consider the kind of extravagant love the Father has lavished on us—He calls us children of God! It's true; we are His beloved children. And in the same way the world didn't recognize Him, the world does not recognize us either. ²My loved ones, we have been adopted into God's family; and we are officially His children now. The full picture of our destiny is not yet clear, but we know this much: when Jesus appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him just as He is. ³All those who focus their hopes on Him and His coming seek to purify themselves just as He is pure. ⁴Everyone who lives a life of habitual sin is living in moral anarchy. That's what sin is. ⁵You realize that He came to eradicate sins, that there is not the slightest bit of sin in Him. ⁶The ones who live in an intimate relationship with Him do not persist in sin, but anyone who persists in sin has not seen and does not know the real Jesus. ⁷Children, don't let anyone

pull one over on you. The one doing the right thing is just imitating Jesus, the Righteous One. This is the Word of God for the people of God.

II

I partially came out when I was 18 years old, I couldn't reconcile my faith with my sexuality and stopped attending Church. I thought I couldn't deceive myself. My come-out process was full of guilt and rejection. It was impossible to find God's love in the midst of so much homophobia.

Years later, by the grace of God I came to *La Comunidad Cristiana de Esperanza*, the first Open and Affirming Church in Mexico City. The pastor was a gay man who used to say, "**God loves you as you are.**" The first time I heard this, I thought, yes but God's doesn't love my queer identity. Although, I continued attending Sunday services. For several years I witnessed young people visiting the church for the first time, many of them were pastor's children from conservative churches. When they heard the preacher say, "God loves you as you are" they never came back.

Why is so difficult for an LGBTQ folk who grew up in the church, to believe that God loves them as they are?

I worked as computer programmer before entering the seminary. I used to code algorithms for the financial industry. For those who are not familiar with programming languages, coding an algorithm is writing a series of instructions that the computer can understand to process information automatically. Regardless the amount or diversity on data, the computer will always process the information in the same way. Those who have experience in coding know that even the best programmer can code an algorithm wrongly, so this will produce inaccurate outcome.

Something similar happens when we grow up in a conservative church. In my case, my brain was programmed with the wrong instructions like homosexuality is a sin, or God destroyed Sodoma and Gomorra because there were gay men. I also learned a wrong interpretation about Leviticus that the gays and lesbians were abomination before God. So, when I heard that **God loves me as I am**, I couldn't believe it, because the Biblical misinterpretations resonated in my mind. For me was impossible to believe that I deserved the love of God being gay, being queer.

After exhaustive exegetical studies of the Bible. I confirmed that God loves me being queer and there is no condemnation for LGBTQ folks like me. Then I am able to recognize that Jesus loves me deeply.

The Apostle John confirm this love by writing, "**¹Consider the kind of extravagant love the Father has lavished on us—He calls us children of God!**" (The Voice)

The Word translated as Consider has its root in the Greek verb, εἶδω (eído) that means: recognize and understand.

I want to explore the practical meaning of Recognize and Understand the love of God for us, their beloved LGBTQ creation.

How people like me (who grew up in a conservative church) may recognize and understand and embody this love?

In my experience, the first thing I did, was seek for a Biblical-theological training to reinterpret the Scripture in a liberating way. This helped me to believe that **God loves me just as I am**, with my queer identity, my masculine appearance, and my attraction to other women.

I used to repeat a mantra that helped me to reconcile myself with the love of God:

“I accept myself as I am and forgive myself for all the time that I couldn’t bear to be me.”

III

I must confess that believing that **God loves me** was just the beginning of a long healing process that is not over yet.

The Biblical knowledge was important, but it was not enough to heal the wounds that rejection left into my soul. Recently a transgender friend who graduated from seminary, wrote this on social media:

I live with crippling daily grief.

I lost my family when I came out.

I lost my entire community when I came out. (Anonymous)

My friend experience is not unique. The days of shelter in place, confinement make the pain stronger. Many of us have been experiencing dark times in loneliness.

I want to end this talk, reminding you, that you are a chosen child of God. No matter what other people say about you. Recognize *the extravagant love the Father has lavished you my queer sibling*. The full picture of our destiny is not yet clear.

When you feel like you’re no good enough to be loved by God, remember, Jesus’ love is greater, than our doubts.

My prayer for you my queer sibling is that “rooted and established in love...you can grasp how wide and long, high and deep is the love of Christ for you.” Ephesians 3: 17-19 (NRSV)

May the *agape* of God, fulfill the promise of a new life, renewing your mind, healing your wounds, and restoring your soul. In Jesus name.

Amen

