

"What Matters and What Doesn't"

*First Sunday in Pride Month*

*Communion Sunday*

*June 7, 2026*

*Texts: Song of Solomon 8:6; John 14:1-2*

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Our readings today offer two remarkable images.

The first comes from the Song of Solomon:

*"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death."*

For centuries, Christians have heard these words not only as a celebration of human love but also as a witness to God's love for humanity.

Love is strong as death.

Think about that. Death appears to claim everything. It ends programs, kingdoms, regimes, and, we hope, even administrations. It is the great leveler, the great democratizer.

Yet the poet of the Song of Songs insists that death cannot end love.

I learned that truth many years ago when I conducted my first memorial service. The person who had died was the husband of my supervisor from an undergraduate job. A few weeks after the service, I called his widow to see how she was doing. She said, "Gene, I know intellectually that Derek has died. The problem is, I can't stop loving him."

That was when I knew the poet was right. Love is as strong as death.

The Christian story goes even further. In Jesus Christ, love does not merely equal death—it overcomes it.

The resurrection is God's declaration that love gets the final word. Nothing can extinguish God's love for creation. Nothing can conquer it. Nothing can separate us from it—not even the boundaries human beings constantly erect between "us" and "them."

We are always tempted to divide the world into insiders and outsiders, the accepted and the rejected, the worthy and the unworthy. And we are usually convinced that we belong on the right side of whatever line has been drawn.

Until someone challenges the line.

Until someone says, "This boundary matters less than you think."

That is what this service of welcome to LGBTQIA+ children of God is about. It is a reminder that we do not get to decide who is embraced by God's love. God has already made that decision.

That is the message of the cross and the empty tomb. The world tried to say no on Good Friday. God's yes was louder on Easter morning.

And when people respond to God's yes with a yes of their own, that is what matters.

In fact, from this preacher's perspective, that is all that matters.

However you do it—however you understand yourself, however you journey through this life—if you respond to God's love with love for God and God's world, you have grasped the heart of the gospel.

I think that is what the late theologian Jaoslav Pelikan meant when he said, "If Christ is risen from the dead, nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen from the dead, nothing else matters."

The resurrection is God's great yes to the world. Not our doctrines. Not our rules. Not our liturgies or hymns, beautiful though they may be. The resurrection is the church's way of saying that God's love is stronger than every force that denies it.

Many people think resurrection is Christianity's most complicated teaching. I want to suggest that it is actually quite simple.

The resurrection means that God has said yes to you.

Not because of who you are. Not despite who you are. Simply because you are God's beloved child.

You can accept that acceptance or reject it. You can live into it or resist it. But God's yes comes first.

Love is as strong as death, but love does not coerce. It invites. It welcomes. It transforms. It never forces.

And I think that is part of what Jesus means in our reading from John when he speaks of the many dwelling places prepared for us in God's house. Love is not only the destination; love is also the way.

You cannot hate your way to love. You cannot bully your way to belonging. You cannot exclude your way into the kingdom of God.

God's love is God's way.

I believe that not simply because I was taught it, but because I have experienced its power.

I was sitting in the choir loft of my university church beside my best friend, with whom I was deeply in love. He did not love me in the same way and never would. The preacher was reflecting on Paul's assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Then he said something that changed my life.

He said that no one has the power to prevent us from saying yes to God's having already said yes to us.

In that instant, I realized that the faith of my childhood—which had taught me that I needed to straighten myself out before God could accept me—was wrong.

God had already accepted me.

The only thing left for me to do was to accept my acceptance.

And in that moment I became, for the first time, a follower of Jesus Christ. My life changed direction. I abandoned plans for a career in medicine and accepted God's call to ministry.

I discovered what matters.

Responding to God's love matters.

My sexual orientation does not. No one's does.

So I stand before you this morning as a gay Christian to tell you that God's love really works. It changed my life, and it can change yours.

Love is as strong as death.

Indeed, in Jesus Christ, love is stronger.

We conclude our worship by singing together hymn no. 65, "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah."