

**Hinde Street Methodist Church**  
**Sunday 27 June 2021**  
**11.00am Rev Peter Cornick**

## **Psalm 139 and Luke 3: 21-22**

### **Introduction**

You may think, with good reason, I am not the best qualified person to speak on the subject of Pride. But come with me if you will, to Edinburgh, in 2006, where the Methodist Conference discussed whether it should be possible to bless same sex civil partnerships. I spoke at Conference to support such blessings. Speaking at Conference is nerve racking on any occasion. Whether what I said influenced the vote, I have no idea. But it had an effect.

Two friends of mine and ministerial colleagues approached me.

The first, a gay man, thanked me. It is all very well people from the LGBT+ community speaking in debates, he said, but, he went on, it needs people like you – allies – to speak out too. What I had said, clearly supported and affirmed my colleague and friend.

The second friend and colleague who approached me, was disappointed in me for what I had said. I felt a brief sense of discomfort – but knew I had spoken the truth as I saw it.

So, perhaps I am qualified to speak.

Fifteen years on, Methodist Conference is, this week, on the brink of approving same sex marriage in Methodist Churches. We know that for some, they will celebrate – perhaps get married; others feel this is too little and too late; for others, it is too much and too far. But, celebrating what Pride means today, to us as Methodists, we can hardly ignore the momentous decision in hand.

As we reflect on Pride and affirm the LGBT+ community, I want to try and do three things:

1. to thank God that Pride month has enabled us at Hinde Street to celebrate the diversity of humanity
2. to recognise the past and continued pain many feel – and lament the church's part in that
3. to set the forthcoming Methodist Conference debate on same sex marriage, in the context of radical Christian loving.

### **1. Thank God for Pride**

The personal reflections on human sexuality from members of the church this month in the Hinde Street Weekly, have been moving sources of inspiration. Affirmation that the Hinde Street worshipping community is one of a diverse and faithful people. How different we all are; all the colours of the rainbow; there is a Pride in that; and a thankfulness that we can share it freely in our Weekly publication – which is not the case everywhere as Steve Lowe makes clear in this week's article; he notes repression in Hungary, Poland or China. Thank you to all who have contributed – and to the stewards who initiated it as part of our growth

plan. I feel I have grown this month in understanding; appreciating the breadth of the people God calls to follow Jesus. Perhaps we have all grown too, in our objective of inclusivity.

So, Pride has enabled us to grow, richly; 'to speak openly, positively, and joyfully ... about relationships and sexuality ... of God's gracious goodness and of who God has made us to be.'<sup>1</sup>

I asked last week, if anyone wanted to say, what Pride meant to them, by way of reaching out to the LGBT+ community to find first-hand testimony. The reply I received from Steve Lowe was a personal reflection which I felt was inspirational, as well as challenging. It has been printed in Weekly with his permission. But listen to how Steve begins:

Pride Sunday reminds me of the first time (still not yet a decade ago) that I confided to anyone that I was gay. It was at Hinde Street – yes, within that very building! – as I welcomed an unfamiliar and clearly diffident individual who discreetly displayed a rainbow tag.<sup>2</sup>

I'm not pretending that we or I always get inclusivity right. But you can hear from that testimony, the vital importance of the atmosphere we all create; the welcome and equality that is extended; such that people – all people – are enabled to be who God made them to be.

Psalm 139 is clearly not written with Pride in mind. But Bible passages take on new resonance when read in a context, such as Pride. Reading Psalm 139 this week, I felt it spoke about the rich diversity of humanity. But more, it spoke of our coming into being, just as we are, as very much the intention of God.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Psalm 139: 13-15

These words speak of each of us, being created with purpose and intention; made in God's image. Yet, clearly, all so different.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Psalm 139: 6

All of the contributors to the Weekly articles this month, have alluded to gradually discovering their identity – sometimes in the face of fear or opposition. In the end, whoever we are, we cannot escape who God has made us to be.

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

Psalm 139: 1-2

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<sup>1</sup> TMCP, *God in Love Unites Us*, 2019 [www.methodist.or.uk/MandR19](http://www.methodist.or.uk/MandR19)

<sup>2</sup> Lowe, Steve, *Hinde Street Weekly*, 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2021

And the Psalm seems to indicate, that in the searching, and struggling, we eventually discover the God who made us, who we are.

Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?

Psalm 139: 7

Once we have discovered that God knows us intimately already, there is another step; and it is to be found as Jesus hears that he is 'beloved'.

Bishop Gene Robinson, who I was fortunate enough to hear speak a few years ago, writes about that searching and finding delight in who God had made him to be. He recounts the rejection of the church many LGBT+ people will recognise. Bishop Robinson writes:

And yet – and here's the miracle – I heard God saying to me the words God said to Jesus at his baptism: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3: 22). It may not make any sense to anyone reading these words, but I swear to you that despite what my church was teaching, I heard God's voice in scripture saying to me – *to me!* – "You are my beloved." And it saved my life.<sup>3</sup>

How very Wesleyan! Through testimony, through encounter, through scripture, we thank God that the celebration of Pride helps us to hear a Gospel truth: that we are all 'fearfully and wonderfully made' – 'beloved'.

## 2. Recognising and lamenting the hurt

I was very moved by Richard Shepley's article in *Weekly* – it deeply saddened me. In his own words, which I repeat with his permission, he says of his younger self:

I was terrified that if anyone discovered I was homosexual, they would reject me completely.<sup>4</sup>

What must it feel like, to fear that you might be rejected at the next turn? I experienced a brief rejection at Conference in 2006, but I know nothing of the hurt and pain LGBT+ people have felt down the years, to which Richard alludes.

Steve Lowe, in his article, profoundly challenges us to hear or feel the hurt. He writes:

London Pride typically shares this time of year with the Methodist Conference. For me, that's been an annual reminder of our tradition's hypocrisy towards LGBTQI+ people.

Hinde Street proclaims that it is an "inclusive church" which doesn't discriminate on a range of grounds, including sexuality and gender identity. I don't doubt the sincere desire for this assertion to be true, but for those in same-sex relationships it – well – just isn't. To those people an honest welcome would have to admit: but we can't recognise the love you have each for the other by marrying you, or even by blessing

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<sup>3</sup> Robinson, Gene, *In the Eye of the Storm*, London, 2008 p52

<sup>4</sup> Shepley, Richard, *Hinde Street Weekly*, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2021

your civil marriage or partnership. As for your sexual expressions of love, we teach chastity for all outside marriage (and, for the avoidance of doubt, civil marriage or partnership doesn't count), which means....well, you know what we're thinking of, but just don't do it.<sup>5</sup>

When we ask for personal testimony, which the national church encourages us to do, we need to include and hear that which is uncomfortable and raw. Steve's conclusion is that there is a long way to go, so he says: 'Pride will have its place.'<sup>6</sup> I am very grateful to Steve for his response to my request.

Perhaps the Psalmist speaks to us freshly when placed alongside an actual context.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.  
See if there is any wicked way in me –

(sometimes translated 'see if there is any *'hurtful'* way in me'),  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalm 139 23-24

To reflect on Pride, calls us to recognise and lament the pain felt.

### **3. The Methodist Conference and the vote to allow same sex marriage in Methodist Churches.**

I am not about to rehearse every argument here. The document *God in Love Unites Us* will do that for you. I voted for it in District Synod.

But remember my brief foray into Conference speaking in 2006: I had two friends, one thanked me; the other didn't. How do we move forward as a church, enabling same sex marriage to take place, whilst at the same time, keeping my two friends and me – and they are still two of my friends and colleagues – in the same church?

Some of you will say, in the name of justice and equality, we can't keep all those people together. Equally, I read a paper this week, which agrees you can't keep all those people together, but agrees for an entirely different Biblically conservative reason.

I offer a third way – which is the way before Conference – a Mixed Economy.

*Dignity and Worth* is a grouping of Methodists committed to act for Gospel justice in the church and society. In a paper called, *Getting to the Mixed Economy*, they argue that there are three ways forward:

1. An 'uncomfortable fudge – this is, more or less where we are now, with rules that are vague or unenforced'. No-one is satisfied.
2. 'Winner takes all – one side goes for broke'.

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<sup>5</sup> Lowe, Steve, *Hinde Street Weekly*, 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2021

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

3. A 'Mixed Economy - where we acknowledge our contradictory (and non-converging) convictions and try to find a modus operandi with which we can all live in good conscience, and continue to be in dialogue.'<sup>7</sup>

The modus operandi of this mixed economy, before Conference, proposes two understandings or theologies of marriage, both at the same time:

- one, is 'that marriage can only be between a man and a woman',
- the other, is 'that marriage can be between any two people.'
- Church Councils and ministers will need to 'opt in' to offering marriage between any two people.<sup>8</sup>

It's a compromise; it's pragmatic; it's politics; it doesn't deliver equality – to which you might say, it isn't justice – don't deal with it. But *Dignity and Worth* hope that in being pragmatic, 'it allows the Church to live with itself, whilst getting on with the business of spreading Scriptural Holiness.'<sup>9</sup>

What I find particularly Christlike and appealing about this compromise, is this. *Dignity and Worth*, 'We commit to uphold the dignity and worth of every person, including those who hold different theological views'.<sup>10</sup>

... *Including* those who hold different theological views. Their stance is to make friends with, and listen to, those who oppose them. Radical Christian love.

Friends, that is the tough call for Methodist Conference this week, which just might keep my two friends and me in the same church.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Pride – a celebration of LGBT+ people; of human diversity; a recognition and lament of the pain many experience. All in the context of a vote this week in Methodist Conference on same sex marriage.

Martin Luther King in his search for a world where bigotry and hate cease said:

"The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends."<sup>11</sup>

A 'beloved' community, where we recognise and accept one another for who God made us to be – 'fearfully and wonderfully made'; 'beloved'; with who, 'God is well pleased'.

### **Rev. Peter Cornick**

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<sup>7</sup> [Getting-to-the-Mixed-Economy-Final.pdf \(dignityandworth.org.uk\)](#) p6

<sup>8</sup> TMCP, *God in Love Unites Us*, 2019 [www.methodist.or.uk/MandR19](http://www.methodist.or.uk/MandR19)

<sup>9</sup> [Getting to the Mixed Economy.v2 \(dignityandworth.org.uk\)](#) p8

<sup>10</sup> [About Us | Dignity & Worth \(dignityandworth.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> King, Martin Luther [The Beloved Community: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Prescription for a Healthy Society | HuffPost](#) 2017