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PRIDE Sermon
Hope United Church of Christ
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Luke 7:24-8:3

I love doing puzzles. All kinds of puzzles. Jigsaw puzzles, word games; sudoku, and of course candy crush. Doing puzzles keeps me calm. Doing puzzles helps me feel right again when something has gone wrong. When my grandfather died last year I did a jigsaw puzzle that was a huge artistic map of DC. Doing them gives me comfort because everything just fits. Looking at a finished puzzle makes me feel like everything will be ok. It's the only way I've found to ease my pain about the brokenness of the world.

All of us share that pain about the brokenness of the world and we struggle with what to do about it. People aren't also aware that they are struggling and feeling out of control and this is always a dangerous thing. When people aren't aware, they do all kinds of hurtful things to try to make the world seems simpler and more concrete.

When we aren't aware we draw lines. We say “this is good” or “that is bad.” We start make labels, oh do we make labels. We love to categorize. The worst is when we label and categorize people. It’s one thing to get a sense of order from doing a puzzle or alphabetizing your comic book collection. It’s a totally different thing to draw lines around people. Sometimes we go further than a label and we call people names, we slander them, we exclude them.

The members of the GLBTQ community know this tendency all too well. They have often felt discrimination, exclusion and hatred. The have felt the inner sense of shame that comes when you are labeled by someone else. And this weekend, they felt the fear of knowing that their bodies are not valued or safe. In a place that was supposed to be fun, they were attacked. All because someone
else decided to label them.

This labeling is as old as humanity, one of our most common sins that we commit all the time. We sort people, judge them. And today’s Bible story shows that Jesus’ peers did this as well.

In the story today, Jesus was invited to the house of a Pharisee, and you never know what those Pharisees are up to, could be good, could be questionable. But Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus for dinner. And when Jesus comes in a woman came to see him. She went to him and for awhile just stood close to him, just kind of behind him, shamefully wanting to blend into the curtains, but also determined to be near Jesus. And then she moved closer and ended up being overcome. She knelt down and wept before him, washing his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair. I’m sure it was kind of a spectacle drawing some whispers and stares from the host and the other guests. But then, Simon the Pharisee, saw this, the Bible says, “he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.”

If he were really a prophet, he would know that she is a sinner. Boy what an easy label that is. With one label, he was able to dismiss the woman and Jesus both. She was a sinner and Jesus was not a prophet. Easy. I bet he thought he would sleep so well that night.

“Sinner.” He called her a sinner. Outside of biblical stories, I have only really heard this term used in one other context. That is to refer to members of the GLBTQ community. For some reason, church folk especially thought it was ok to pick out one group of people and label them “siners.” And that is wrong. Those who would call my friend a “sinner” are acting like Simon the Pharisee. They are taking a simple, hurtful path, drawing lines, excluding and causing pain.
And Jesus had something to say about that. He had something to say about Simon and about this “sinner” woman. He was going to make this right. He turned to Simon and said

“Do you see this woman? (Do you see this woman!!) I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” 48 Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” 49 But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” 50 And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

So what happened in this amazing moment between all of these people? There was a problem between Simon and the woman. Simon didn’t understand her and labeled her “a sinner.” She came up to Jesus and worshiped him. And then Jesus brought about an understanding between them. He entered the space between them and he took all the labels away and replaced them with grace. He filled the gaping hole in the room with love. Because when one person labels another a sinner, they both need God. The one who has misused power needs to understand the wrongdoing, needs repentance and reconnection. And the one who absorbed the label, needs to be freed from shame, needs to be told, no my child, you are not what he said. Be at peace. And with one interaction, bam, Jesus gave them both what they needed.

This PRIDE weekend, we recognize that there are many who have born the pain of being labeled a sinner and so we stand in solidarity with them. Those of us who are allies must be vigilant to make sure we also don’t misuse power and marginalize or exclude. We need to seek the presence of God to help us. And to those in the GLBTQ community, we need PRIDE to remember to live free of
shame. To shed someone else’s labels. To seek God’s peace.

I want to conclude with one point—what really sparked the drama of this story was one act of worship, one act of love. Whether we have taken the easy road and labeled someone else or whether we bear the wound of someone else’s sin, it only takes one thing to turn it around. One act of worship, one act of love.

In the end it's about love, loving God, loving neighbor, loving self. This interaction ends up being an issue because of its huge deficit of love. The hosts did not welcome or love Jesus the way they could have. Nobody loved the woman the way they should have. And we don't know, but I'm guessing nobody was loving themselves enough either. But the woman makes one act of love, she steps out to show her love of Jesus, her love of God. And that that changes everything. This PRIdE and our baby blessing for Micah today are about love and promises to love. We celebrate both pride and babies to remind ourselves how much God loves each one of us and how we are called to love each other. It's important to participate in PRIDE, that we might never forget that love, that we might never retreat in shame, that we might never callously label another as sinner, and that we might be strengthened to live in all the uncertainties and ambiguities of this life. May we look for small acts of love that can change everything. May we rest in the extravagant love of God, today on PRIDE Sunday and every day, Amen.