

Come out; Come out, where ever you are. *Rev. Paul D. Daniel, Minister*

Today, on National coming out day and I want to speak from my heart; to share a little of the experiences of the closet.

Most gay people, certainly those of my age, are quite familiar with the experience of living a hidden, divided life; but others with different secrets suffer too— from physical as well as emotional trauma. Frankly the psychic pain of that experience is constant, unrelenting.

The closet is dark and dreary, created by the majority culture to contain that which is alien and against biblical teachings for fundamentalists of all faiths.

It can only be maintained with the active collusion of the oppressed... we are bombarded with the broad message that we are pariahs, deviant in some way, shameful in our sex and love expressions.

These experiences are far broader than my own personal story.

So my sermon is a jumping off point for a wider discussion on oppression, exclusion, inclusion and judgment.

Any of you who have led a secret life know full well the negative effect it has on relationships within families and beyond. It destroyed my marriage

Let me start with a parental warning.

I am going to speak frankly about human sexuality, which is central to our lives and survival as a species.

Whether you are currently in an intimate relationship or your sex lives resemble the dance of the seven virgins... all done from memory...

we think about sex more often than we are comfortable admitting; especially we men, gay or straight. Oh come on, men think of sex several times a minute. Don't know about women.

I am not going to titillate with xxx tales or even x but I am going to treat this subject as if we were all adults.

For too long, anything which sets someone apart, especially the L/G/B/T/? Community our sexual and love expression; society has forced into the closet out of sight and mind.

It would seem, denial is easier for the majority rather than having to confronting one's own fears, judgment and prejudice, or desire or yes, perhaps curiosity.

Nice people don't talk about sex ...

it belongs in the closet...not in our faces. I have heard that one too often.

We all struggle with what a full range of human sexual relationships call us to.

We question what is good, healthy and normal, as if anyone can truly define that.

An unfortunate focus on the act of sex, "doing it" over the experience of love has done humankind a vast disservice. It has forced this topic and people like me and other deep in the closet so that people do not have to come to terms with their own bigotry.

Shame, judgment, fear of exposure, loss of love and job are constant companions for gay and others hiding in fear, such as immigrants in Al and Az.

Whether you are gay or someone dealing with mental illness, an eating disorder, a drug or other addiction problem

there is a stigma attached that make one feel less worthy, different, isolated, outside looking in, not seated at the table of life... .

There are times that the judgment of others is palpable and barely hidden. I have had bear cans thrown at me from passing cars, as the occupant's screamed faggot and worse and that was in the Gay Castro of San Francisco. Or this weeks, Republicans values summit where we were along with Islam blamed for the corruption of the First Amendment and American families. Wow, that power just goes to my head...perhaps not...lol.

Denial, is not helpful in combating hate, nor is it a river in Egypt.

I knew at 14 that my interest and desire was not for girls. Our culture told me that I was bad and sinful; so I hid my sexual identity for more than 33 years.

As an adult I hid in plain sight in a heterosexual marriage, every day a bit at self loathing for keeping such a secret;

Every day, knowing that people did not know the real me; My family, never having the benefit of a fully present husband and father.

Regardless of the reason for secrecy, how many of you know what that experience is like, whichever end of the lie you are on?

The closet is not uniquely my own story. My first partner knew at age 4 that he liked men. As a Latino he knew to keep quiet.

My friend Walter came out at the age of 65 after divorcing. My friend Don had to give up his ministry.

For my friend Mary her secret was one of sexual abuse. She and all eight brothers and sisters were violated by their father in collusion with the family priest.

My cousin's mental illness was hidden until she killed herself.

There are people in our congregation right now who struggle. Are you one of them?

My hope for those of you in hiding is to take courage, and come out, come out wherever you are... but only when you are ready.

It is your process. I was outed by a member of my church with the potential of hurting my children who did not yet know.

Pain and the circle of rejection and abuse are broad based and wide, touching us all, and yet many, too many people live a life of quiet desperation until they crack under the strain, or commit suicide to finally escape the pain. Remember the recent spate of teenage suicides?

A society that put people in that place to feel inferior, deviant, a drain on society, perpetrate a great injustice.

Somehow those of us who are different get the message early on that there is something wrong with us. Our love and relationships not valued, our rights denied.

We often find our past history erased and our current events denied or ignored.

The closet whether populated by people of color, gays, the differently abled, large people, mentally or physically challenged, political conservative, becomes a safe, if dismal and demeaning haven.

Coming out is life threatening and life transforming experience. It was the worst of times, the best of times.

We lose much and gain more, especially our freedom and self respect.

This discussion comes around to addressing issues of inclusion and exclusion that we have been thinking about at UUMAN.

One of my colleagues wrote, "Each of us makes choices about who will and who will not be included in our lives... [in our church]. Our culture excludes many people. If you are in a wheelchair, for example, you are excluded because there are places you can't go. If you are very young, if you are very old, you are excluded... Inclusion, hospitality doesn't mean anything as long as some people continue to be tossed aside..."

The good news is that L/G/BT/? people have been coming out for decades and we've gone from a place of fear and unknowing to a celebration of humanity and a quest for justice and equality.

The hopeful news is that the same is true for other communities different from the majority. All of these journeys are worth celebrating.

For the Queer community (most of whom were Latino and people of color) the journey to come out began in 1969 by refusing to go quietly when the police of New York City raided the Stonewall Bar. I use the word Queer partly because I know it makes some people uncomfortable. If gay people reclaim such language we can no longer be hurt when it is us to denigrate us.

UU churches have been a place where the Queer community could meet socially, spiritually, and politically when no other place besides bars would open their doors.

It was true for me when I came out in 1991 even after being known as a straight married person in my home church.

I celebrated my commitment service thirty years after my marriage in the same church and many of the same guests...

Is that not something worth celebrating?

In 1970, Unitarian Universalism became the first religious faith to speak out against discrimination against the queer community.

We provided inclusive sexuality education for our children, welcomed people of all sexual orientations into our ministry, worked to end our own homophobia, and spoke against injustice in the wider world.

Our churches have become places where same-sex couples can hold ceremonies of union, now marriage in certain states.

Our churches are places where our youth can come out as one of our own did in our recent history.

Here we can all be whole. Are these not things to celebrate?

Our first Welcoming Congregation was certified in 1991. Today over half of all Unitarian Universalist congregations are recognized as Welcoming including UUMAN.

At one time, even we, as Unitarian Universalists who knew the right thing, were afraid to express our support.

But, today, our congregations fly rainbow flags, march in pride parades speak out, locally and nationally for full equality for the queer community and other oppressed minorities.

This is progress that we UUs have witnessed and helped create over the years. There is much good in our heart, although we are not fully free yet.

There is work to do, love to share, people to save, and communities to build.

Dorothy, we have come out.

We have clicked our Ruby Red heels together and are continuing to make our congregations a welcoming home for people regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, race or ability.

We in this denomination continue to broaden our circle of inclusion to bring in and welcome all who have been made to feel different, excluded, unwelcome, less than, unloved.

Now is the season to celebrate, although the struggle goes on...

And Dorothy said it best: "There's no place like home." There's no place like UUMAN!