

Genesis 1:26-27  
John 3:16-17  
Romans 12:9-16b

## **You Won't Break My Soul**

This past week, Beyonce, known to her fans (point to self) as Queen Bey, released the first single from her upcoming new album "Renaissance" with a song called "Break My Soul." It's the first song she's released since June of last year and the moment I heard it, I loved it. Even my two kids, who are obsessed with Cocomelon and Halloween songs on repeat, couldn't help themselves from dancing to this song when I played it for them. I read a commentary describing the song saying, "Beyonce saw that it was the summer of late-millennial burnout, the labor movement, the 90s revival and queer pride and was like, 'Yeah, I can make a song about that.'"

With the hook, "You won't break my soul," and talking about what it is we need to release, it was what I needed to hear this week as a personal anthem as I was recovering from COVID, taking care of my kids at home while trying to do some work, and hearing the news of the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe vs. Wade. It was a rough week, you all. And although I did not hold it together well at all times, at the end of each day, I was still singing and will continue to sing, "You won't break my soul." And so I'm really glad to be here with you this morning so that together we can begin a new week declaring that we will not be broken.

We declare this especially on this day that we are celebrating Pride in worship and many of us have been celebrating Pride all month long. Although it's been a public and interwoven part of our identity at Stone Church for a very long time, we do still live in a world that necessitates a public, worshipful act in affirming and declaring that we believe that all people are created in God's image, particularly those who identify as part of the LGBTQI community-and not only that, but that God can call anyone into ministry leadership and that it is not restricted by who we love or how we identify. It is so important to acknowledge this in the life of a church community because it is often "the church" that has been the symbol and place of rejection.

And so I want to begin by saying that I stand here as a minister at the pulpit, someone who loves Jesus, loves scripture, loves God and the ways in which the Spirit works, and if you are part of the LGBTQ community and you've never heard someone like me say this before to you, hear it right now. You are welcome here. And who we are as a people of faith at Stone Church believes that you are whole, you are loved, and you are created in the image of God. There are no caveats to this declaration. You and your gifts and all of who you are, you are welcome here. In fact, we believe this so much that in 1998 Stone Church wrote a covenant of dissent

against our own denomination, promising to remain connected while disagreeing with the then stance that persons called into ministry of Word and Sacrament, elder or deacon could not be ordained into those roles if they were “out” as part of the LGBTQ community. Stone continued to ordain and call all those who were called into ministry. All the way until, what was it, 2012 I think, when the PCUSA finally changed its language to allow for the ordination of all those who are called, regardless of who they love or how they identify.

I needed to begin with that declaration today because as I was preparing the message for this morning, I was doing some research and my search brought me to a headline that said, “How do I talk with love to my LGBTQ neighbor?” I was like, “Ooo, let me click on that! That sounds inviting and nice and speaking with love... letting love lead the conversation, it’s gotta be a good thing and maybe I will learn something new.” And so I clicked on it and it took me to a video of a friendly nice looking young woman, probably in her late 20s, who started out the video with a smile on her face and a very approachable manner.

As I listened to her, one of the things she said in how to have these conversations was to be honest, know your audience and who you are talking to, to not dismiss the person or how they identify-and I was like, “Okay, cool. Check.” And then she went on to say, “Claim honestly that you are a Christian...identify yourself in that way...” and then it took a twist that I should have expected but fell into-a message of exclusion and hate and how anyone who identifies outside of male and female and straight were sinful and it just kept getting worse and worse so I clicked it off. You all, I was so mad. And then I was sad.

I was sad because what she is saying is *still* the louder voice in the Christian narrative of who God is. And although living in the Bay Area, LGBTQ rights seem like a given in every area of our lives here, it’s still not a given in the life of the church. She claimed over and over that we need to put the gospel first as a justification for her hurtful claims, but friends, I am not up here as one of your pastors declaring belovedness for all of God’s children because it’s the popular thing to say or to do, but because I really do believe this is the gospel. I really do believe this theology of welcome is the gospel message.

In fact, I wish I could meet her and talk to her and tell her that there was space in scripture if she could see it. I want to talk to her about God’s expansive love, a love that’s meant for her, but also for all people, including the LGBTQ community. That tricky title of “talking” with love is not love if you are belittling who they are as people and not actually letting love lead you. I wanted to tell her that in the same scriptures we read, there’s space for tax collectors and prostitutes, for the poor and the sick, for women and all those who are outcast in any way. Jesus didn’t ask them

to change, he said things like “follow me” “go and share the good thing that’s happened to you”, “rise up, you are made well” and he loved them. I wanted her to know that there is so much joy and love in the world that she’s missing out on because she insists on this stance.

But can I tell you all the truth of what my gut verbal response to her was before I clicked her off the screen?

True confessions of your pastor? I mumbled it, but I did say it out loud. I said, “Forget you. We don’t need you here.”

Do you all hear how that sounds?

The same type of exclusionary message she was spouting off came out of my own mouth to her. To a complete stranger, mind you. I know nothing about her as an actual person. I don’t know her story, I don’t know her life. And I did the same thing to her that I wish and pray that she would not to do to our queer siblings.

The same exclusionary language that pushes people out for who they are was coming out of my own mouth and thoughts. And even though I can get on a really high horse about how I’m right, I do not want to be saying things like that to any other person who is created in the image of God. For if I proclaim and believe that we are all created in the image of God, that also means her. And the truth is we DO need each other.

Let love be genuine, scripture tells us. Hate what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. It seems straightforward, but friends, there is a fine line these days of hating what is evil and hating people. And no matter how passionately I feel about justice issues, and I will unapologetically continue to stand and declare and work for equal rights for all persons no matter their gender identity, sexual orientation, race, age or class, I do not want a language of hate or exclusion to come out of my heart and mouth, even to those for whom I strongly disagree.

As we think about who we are as a people of faith living in these days, people who also claim the Christian identity, I keep thinking of the kind of world I want to live in, and more than anything, I want love to lead me in all of it. Adding my own hatred into that world should not be part of the equation. And Church, I hope it’s not what you want either. We can be angry, we can be sad, we can fight like tooth and nail for those we love to never doubt the full humanity of who God has created them to be ... do it with your protest, with your vote, with your resources and however you are feeling called to do it. We can and should hate what is evil, but let’s not do the same thing we despise and start hating people. We have to try and practice walking in a different in this world.

And so today and in the days ahead, because I am guessing I'm not the only one struggling with this right now, let's work on that together. I know so many of you are probably going to be mad at me for making this our challenge this week. I'm kind of mad at myself about it too. But this is how we are different. This is how we must be different. That same Romans passage tells us that we are to bless those who persecute us, bless and do not curse them. How can love lead us with justice to do just that?

A pastor friend of mine wrote this week, "Jesus often said throughout his own ministry-a ministry that also grappled with a legal system that was death-dealing and a religious system held captive by self-preservation that the kin-dom of God is here. Wherever people gather to create community, to sacrifice for one another, to hold each other tenderly and stand for one another's liberation, the kin-dom of God is near."

Friends, don't let hatred and injustice break our souls.

On this Pride Sunday, as San Francisco celebrates Pride with a big old gay parade today, "may our Queer family remind us how to pursue self-determination and dignity for ourselves and each other; by living courageously, by turning our protest into a party and by showing the world what it looks like to be free, nevertheless."  
(Rev. Emily McGinley)

For God so loved the world, loves us all, loves you, yes you, and me, yes me, SO much that God gave God's only Child that whoever believes in that Child should not perish but have life. For God sent that Child into the world, not to condemn the world, but that through that Child the world might be saved.

May you believe that deep down in your own soul this day, and may love take the lead.

Amen.