

Sermon

June 26, 2016 | The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Text: Luke 9:51-62 | Preacher: Dan Puchalla

For in the midst of all the news the past couple of days about the UK's historic divorce from the European Union, it would have been easy to miss this piece of slightly less historic but certainly more uplifting news: This past Friday, President Obama designated a new national monument to encompass the Stonewall Inn in New York City, the site of the Stonewall Uprising on the early morning of June 28, 1969, and the birthplace of the LGBTQ-rights movement.

The Stonewall Inn itself was no paradise. It was owned and managed by the mafia, the staff were abusive to the patrons, the drinks were watered down, the glasses were filthy, the building was dangerous, the toilets were always backing up, and police raids were very common. But despite all that, the Stonewall Inn was a sanctuary for those most most vulnerable and most ostracized by society and even by other members of the queer community: drag queens, transgender people, sissies and butch lesbians, male prostitutes, homeless youth, and queers of color. Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the patrons of the Stonewall Inn had nowhere else to lay their heads – that is, nowhere else to rest from the abuses of others, nowhere else to be at home in the world.

I keep calling it the Stonewall Inn, even though most people just call it Stonewall. I like calling it by its full name because I think the idea of an inn reveals something about the importance of gay bars generally and Stonewall in particular. In the days before Motel 6 and Waffle House, before the speed of cars and the protection of highway patrols, stretching far back probably to the first Roman highways if not earlier, inns were sanctuaries for travelers. The warm light streaming from the windows of inns, taverns, and public houses along a dark road meant food, drink, a bed, a roof, and safety.

Inns were a home for those who had left home far behind.

Such is the condition in which we find Jesus in today's gospel story. He's leaving home far behind and traveling to Jerusalem. But in today's story, leaving home far behind is about much more than geography.

There are three people Jesus encounters as he sets out on his trip.

The first person wants to follow him. To this one Jesus says, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

The second person, when invited to follow Jesus, says he has to bury his father. To this one Jesus says, "Let the dead bury their own dead."

The third person, too, wants to follow Jesus, but only after saying goodbye to everyone at home. To this one Jesus says, "No one who starts to plow and looks back belongs in the Kingdom of God."

These are harsh words, harsh invitations into a harsh way of life. To follow him, Jesus says one must leave home behind, just as he has. Leave behind your bed. Leave behind your father and your mother. Leave behind everyone who will be missing you. Leave behind the security, the comfort, the relationships, the obligations, the affections, the traditions of your home. Leave home far behind, and only then can you follow me, says Jesus.

So much for biblical family values.

I wonder, though, if what is going on in this story is something that is not quite as harsh but which is even more challenging. I wonder if Jesus means for us not necessarily to just leave behind our own, literal homes, but more so to leave behind the very idea of home.

The curious thing about that June night in 1969 is that no one is entirely sure how and why it happened. The Stonewall Uprising was not an organized protest. There were no activist groups behind it, no committees steering it, no planning meetings that set it in motion. But for some reason that night, the patrons didn't run away when the police raided. For some reason, a crowd gathered around the Stonewall to witness what was happening. For some reason, a mysterious lesbian put up a hell of a fight as the police dragged her into the van, and for some reason she yelled at the crowd to do something to help her, and for some reason, they responded. After being pushed downward their whole lives, the sexual and gender misfits of the Stonewall Inn pushed back. As President Obama put it this past week, riots became protests, protests became a movement,

and that movement ultimately became an integral part of this country.

I wonder if what happened that night is that the people of Stonewall finally realized that that place was, after all, an inn. Like all inns, it had indeed been a home for those who had left their homes far behind, by choice or not. Stonewall had provided comfort and relative safety and relationships. But like all inns, it was a waypoint on their journey, not their destination. I wonder if they realized that they were called to something better. I wonder if in those predawn hours on June 28, it was Jesus himself calling out over the tumult of that night, saying,

Come follow me already.

For God's sake, it's time to get moving.

It's time to leave behind the mafia managers and overpriced drinks and stinking toilets.

It's time to leave behind the routine raids and the routine abuse.

It's time to stop dancing in the secret back room – go dance in the streets.

It's time for every person like you in the world to see you and stand up against those who push them down.

It's time to set your face toward Jerusalem, and don't you dare look back.

It's time to follow me to the destiny for which I created you.

And here we are today, the first anniversary of same-sex marriage being declared a constitutional right by the Supreme Court. Who could have imagined it? The journey from Stonewall to *Obergefell* has been nothing short of miraculous.

And yet, even now, Jesus calls us to be on our way. From the Latinx in Orlando to the transgender persons in North Carolina to the homeless youths of color in our own Boystown, we have a lot more waypoints ahead of us.

And this is what Jesus expects of us. He expects this of us in the LGBTQ liberation movement and for all liberation movements. He expects this of us in this mission we call the church, which is nothing less than the liberation of all people from that which corrupts and destroys human life. And Jesus expects this of us especially for our own individual journeys of liberation and empowerment for the work God has given us to do. Leaving home behind means leaving the safe-and-soundness of the status quo, it means being dissatisfied with leaving well enough alone.

So do we live in Jesus and he lives in us. Let the dead be satisfied with being safe at home. But let the God of the living lead us all forward toward the fullness of life.

Amen.