

The Patron Saint of LGBTQ People

On Sunday, we continued our study of the lives of great saints from church history by focusing on someone God used, more than anyone else in history, to open churches to LGBTQ people.

1. Warm-up Question: Halloween is upon us. Due to COVID, most of us won't be going to any costume parties. But if you were, what would your costume be this year?
2. The election is next week! On Sunday, Jeff invited us, as a church family, to participate in a week of fasting and prayer for our nation and the elections. Jesus said, "People ought always to pray and not to faint." Luke 18:1. Jesus also said that difficult situations require both prayer and fasting to overcome. Mark 9:29.
 - a. What national issue is of gravest concern to you?
 - b. If you feel led to participate in this week of fasting and prayer, what form is your fast taking? In other words, what are you "doing without" to create more room for focused prayer?
 - c. Fasting is an ancient spiritual practice. What purposes does it serve?
3. On Sunday, we discussed a living saint, Rev. Troy Perry, the founder of the Metropolitan Community Churches. Rev. Perry's ministry helped break open the church universal to LGBTQ people. To provide biblical context for Troy's ministry, we read an ancient prophecy of Isaiah predicting that "eunuchs" eventually would feel welcome in the house of God. In Isaiah's time, eunuchs were banned from the temple. In ancient literature, eunuchs had the reputation for being disinterested in women and interested in men. With that as background, let's re-read Isaiah 56:1-8.
 - a. Look again at verse 5. What specifically is the nature of God's promised to eunuchs?
 - b. In verse 7, God says, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people." What does that mean? What kind of spiritual communities was Isaiah envisioning eventually coming into being?
 - c. When ancient eunuchs heard Isaiah's prophecy, how do you think they felt?
 - d. If God wanted Isaiah's prophecy to happen, why did it take so long for it to be fulfilled?
4. Troy Perry began the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Troy was born in rural Florida in 1940. At age 15, he dropped out of school to preach full time. Later he got some formal education at Moody Bible Institute and Midwest Bible College, then pastored a Church of God Prophecy in southern California. But he had a secret. He was wrestling with being gay. When his wife found out, she divorced him and he lost his

- church. After a wilderness experience of several years, Troy got the crazy idea to start a church for LGBTQ people. In 1968, that was unthinkable. But it soon became a church of 1,000. Word spread through LGBTQ communities and soon other similar churches arose in other cities and aligned themselves as a denomination called the Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC). During MCC's heyday in the 80s and 90s, it had hundreds of churches providing sanctuary for LGBTQ people and spark affirming movements within other denominations. Rev. Perry led MCC for 35 years.
- a. Was there ever a time in your life when you thought LGBTQ people were an abomination who should be excluded from church? What awakened you to a different truth?
 - b. Given the prophecy of Isaiah 56, how do you think God felt on October 6, 1968, when Troy Perry held that first LGBTQ worship service in his home?
5. When Pastor Chris suggested that Troy Perry should be one of the saints we talk about in the current sermon series, Jeff was surprised. Because Jeff knows Troy and has worked closely with him, his first thought was, "Troy can't be a saint! He's got too many human flaws." Actually, though, all saints do, including all the great Bible heroes. Even the saints we've already studied – St. Joan of Arc and St. Francis – had significant flaws. All of which leads us to a key lesson: **Saints are ordinary people that God uses to do extraordinary things, despite their flaws.** Who is one of the most saintly people you've ever known? What were some of their flaws? Does this give you hope? If so, why?
6. Jeff shared three stories illustrating how Troy's incredible ministry wouldn't have been possible without other less-well-known saints who impacted him, like his snake-handling Aunt Lizzy, the nurse who encouraged Troy after his suicide attempt, and a bereft mother who prayed for a church for her son after he took his life. This led to our second key lesson: **We all need special people who inspire us, and God wants each of us to do the same for others.**
- a. Tell us about a saint who directly influenced your life.
 - b. Tell us about someone God has used you to inspire and encourage.
7. The first church building owned by MCC Los Angeles was burned to the ground under suspicious circumstances in 1973. Later that year, an arsonist fire also destroyed the building where MCC New Orleans had met, killing 50 people. Fifteen other MCC sites were burned in those early years. In spite of it all, Troy and the early leaders refused to yield. Their example reminds us: **Great progress almost always requires great perseverance.**
- a. Read II Corinthians 4:8-10. What do you think this verse means?
 - b. Where in your life right now is God calling you to the same kind of unflinching perseverance?