

Pride in the Pulpit address, April 28, 2009 in Albany, NY

(These remarks were made in front of the Capital in Albany where about 2000 people gathered on April 28, 2009 for LGBT Equality and Justice Day)

Good afternoon saints! My name is Prince Singh, and I am the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester, NY. Some folks refer to me as “the Bishop formerly known as Prince!” I am honored to be here with you today and I thank the organizers for inviting me to your pulpit in the public square. I am humbled to stand in a continuum of Lay and Clergy leaders including bishops—like Bob Spears, Bill Burrell, and Jack McKelvey—in the Diocese of Rochester all of whom have helped uphold the human dignity and full inclusion of LGBT saints for the past three decades.

I am here to remind you of a creation narrative in the Hebrew scripture where we are told that everything God makes, all of creation—including human beings—is GOOD! Later, in a Gospel narrative we are reminded that we are God’s Beloved. Not only are we inherently good, we are also God’s beloved! Yes, we mess up by our selfishness, anger, greed, etc., but that’s not our essential identity! We are essentially good and deeply loved. Therefore, no matter what your family or religious leaders tell you, no matter what you tell yourself, YOU ARE GOD’S BELOVED child. No self loathing please!

I am also here to remind you that sacramental rites such as marriage are rites and rights! Sacraments are visible signs of invisible grace, but it is important that we administer these sacramental rites with fairness. In other words, when we “bless” some unions and “marry” some others we end up creating an unfair gradation, a new kind of caste system of sorts where some people are more equal than others. In my circles there is debate about whether it should be blessing or marriage and I say, “We bless battleships, and we marry people.” Marriage is a sacramental rite between two people who love each other deeply enough to want to spend the rest of their lives together. That is enough of a reason to ensure that marriage is made available as a rite and as a right to gay and straight couples. Let us bear in mind that not everyone is called to marry. The divorce rate in this country, which is close to fifty percent, is enough evidence for this. Marriage is not for everyone, but needs to be available to all—whether they are gay or straight. I hope and pray that this sacred conversation will further strengthen one of the most beautiful gifts available to humankind: the gift of love.

Finally, one of the reasons I am here is because I am not gay! I have been married to my beloved Roja for seventeen years and we have two children. I would like my Gay and Lesbian, Transgender and Bisexual friends to have the same privileges, and encouragement Roja and I continue to receive as a couple! When my gay brother, lesbian sister, transgender or bisexual neighbor is treated as less than anyone else, it becomes my problem, my spiritual problem. I thank all the straight people who are here to stand in solidarity with our LGBT saints. Together, I hope we can create a new future of equality, justice, harmony, and a more humane New York State. Remember, God loves you and the Episcopal Church welcomes you!