

**Being An Active Ally**  
Micia Mosely Ph.D.  
Congregation Rodeph Shalom  
June 3, 2011

When we think of significant dates in LGBT History, we think of June 28, 1969. The Stonewall Riots. When LGBT folks stood up to police harassment and a revolution was born. Soon after Stonewall people think of April 21, 1991 - the day that I came out and a new Micia Mosely was born. For those who aren't familiar with the latter story let me catch you up.

I had just returned from the State finals for my forensics (speech and debate) team. During the competition I realized that I had developed feelings for a girl on our rival team. This was a problem on a couple of levels 1) I was the team captain and I needed to focus on winning 2) I had a boyfriend at the time who I really cared about. So I did what any 18 year old would do. I called my best friend. Pat and I met in kindergarten and by this point she had skipped two whole grades which made her one of the smartest people I knew. Pat was almost done with her freshman year at Brown and when I told her about my feelings she listened, like any good friend would. She said that it sounded like something she heard about during her new student orientation. She said, if I liked a girl and I liked my boyfriend, I was probably bisexual. She assured me that according to everything she was told in her workshop I would be o.k. From that moment on Pat became my ally.

Over the last 20 years some things have changed: I decided that I didn't want to date guys and my high school boyfriend decided that he did. Don't ask don't tell has come and gone, Melissa Etheridge has come out, married a woman and gotten divorced. And Queen Latifah finally admitted that she likes to wear make up. But what stayed the same is the truth of what Pat said...everything was and is o.k. In my personal life I have been blessed to have many allies and to know that I am o.k. In fact I'm more than o.k. Like every human being, I am a unique expression of God. Genesis 1:27 reminds us that we are all created in God's image. All of us. Take a moment and look at the people in this room. Go ahead. It's o.k. if there is an awkward stare, sometimes God is awkward. How do we know? Because each face you are looking at is the face of God. We all come from one source. My godfather taught me that at a young age. He told me that our physical differences are just that, physical. But inside we are all human beings born from the same source.

When I think about what Pat did for me 20 years ago the word compassion comes to mind. Compassion can be defined as feeling sorrow due to someone else's misfortune and wanting to relieve their suffering. To be clear the misfortune that I was dealing with was not my sexuality itself, but coming out in a homophobic and heterosexist society. Pat showed me compassion because I was suffering and struggling with who I was in this culture at that time. She showed me love and empathy when I needed it most. She was and is a true ally. When I think of a true ally I think of manifesting compassion across

difference. I think of someone expressing love & oneness, recognizing the Divinity in people.

When I told people that I was speaking at a synagogue the response was consistent: why? are you Jewish? I replied no, but I attended NYC public schools in the 1980's and I went to Brandeis University for my undergraduate work so it's likely that something rubbed off. I reminded people that there are many Black people who are Jewish. More importantly, Blacks & Jews have a long and important history of love, compassion and alliance. We are two groups that have served as solid pillars for progressive politics in America. I kept thinking of the countless Jewish people who risked their lives during the Civil Rights era to stand up for what they believed in. They made sure that their actions matched their values. They worked on an interpersonal and institutional level to enact change. Their work allowed me to stand before you this evening.

At Brandeis I found that some people were willing to accept my sexuality because it was already housed in the body of difference. I listen to the same people who told me that they were "cool with gay stuff" condemn my Jewish friends who were gay. Somehow they could tolerate all of my difference, but not a little from their own community.

Pat helped me come out and be free. When I got to Brandeis and I wanted everyone to be free. It was the gay 90's after all. When I got to campus I was faced with people who were trapped in the closet.

Folks who told me they couldn't come to the LGBT dance because people might think they are gay. All I thought was um... you are gay and really it's just a dance. To be clear, our dances were the best on campus and everyone knew it. Soon I realized it wasn't just a dance for them. It was a proclamation that they were not ready to make.

You see everyone at Brandeis went to the same summer camp so people would not come out for fear that it would get back to their families through camp channels. I found myself being an ally to Jewish folks who were struggling with coming out. Listening to them describe a culture and community that was different than mine. Sure I knew about all of the holidays in the fall, Hanukkah and Passover. But the interconnected relationships and rules of engagement were new to me. I found myself giving voice to issues that I knew my classmates were too afraid to speak about. I had to be that bridge builder between folks in the Jewish community. Sometimes that looked like getting into arguments with more conservative folks and sometimes it looked like creating space for more open-minded folks to share their views so that people in the closet knew that they weren't alone. I'd like to say I was super conscious about what I was doing the whole time I was doing it. That's simply not true. Now I take deliberate steps. I choose to be an aware and active ally. Some see being an ally as sharing opinions and views. I've heard many people say they think LGBT folks deserve rights. "Live and Let Live". "Do You". I thank God that Jewish people in the 1950's & 60's did more than just let people live. I thank God that they took action. We are so inundated with information that sometimes we confuse

thinking with acting. It's great to be clear about your values, but if you don't act you miss the full potential of possibility. Take our experience earlier, I may see God in you, but if we don't ever treat people like they are a reflection of God we limit the magnificence we all can experience.

I recognize that some people are limited by the political ties or a secular understanding of who we are. Some imagine LGBT folks to be so far from themselves that it is difficult to connect and feel like allies, but when we recognize that we all are God then we see that this person is just another manifestation of God and a reflection of one another. Scholar and Theorist Michael Lerner reminds us that the spirit of God is a transformative energy in the world.

So what does this mean for us today? How can we manifest that God-Spirit to transform the lives of LGBT people? Some would say on an institutional level the political struggles in the LGBT community are not as resonant as the struggles for racial equality in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Homophobia doesn't affect people the way racism did. And even if folks wanted to get involved there is no Dr. King to follow or Freedom Rides to work on. I've heard these reasons and more for why people don't get involved.

But let's go back to compassion for a moment. Each one of us wants to be as free as possible. That's part of why we choose to live in the United States. We want to be treated as fully human, as full citizens. Not as 3/5 of a human or as having practically the same rights as

everyone else. I am not going to say Black Micia is happy that she has all of these rights...yippie, but Lesbian Micia should be content with civil unions, and she should ust avoid the states where her very existence is illegal. Black Power! LGBT ?!?! Yeah see it doesn't quite work that way. Just as I am whole as a human being we are also whole as all of humanity. We really are one, whole, perfect and complete. So if one part of us is experiencing inequality we all are. We can choose to ignore it or we can recognize it and act on it. We can choose compassion. We can choose to recognize struggle and work to end it. As Cornel West said, Justice is what love looks like in public.

Professor Ruth Wilson Gilmore reminds us that we are building a movement, but we are not starting from scratch. We have the shoulders and structures of those who came before us to stand on. Movements are made through organizing and collaboration. You are already organized here in this beautiful space. You are already working in community. But how many of you are active in LGBT issues? Who of you helps this congregation make change around these issues? There is work to be done and this is a great place to do it.

But let's take it away from the institution for a moment. Let's look at the interpersonal level. How can each of us be active allies in those ways. Again, it's great to be an ally in word, but what about action? As a 30 something I have many friends who are working hard in their careers and have young children. I know they share my values around these issues. But they are not the only ones raising their

children. They have nannies and teachers who are influencing their children's lives. I told one friend a way that you can be an ally is to make sure that your nanny knows your values around LGBT issues and is giving Asher (his son) the same messages you are.

When we help people recognize and live in alignment with their wholeness, they are closer to God. When we see and accept people in their wholeness and fullness then we are looking through our divine eyes. As you move through the rest of today, see people through your Divine eyes. Set an intention to see God in everyone. When we accept people for who they are we remember each one of us is a blessing. God Bless each and every one of you. Thank You.