



Who knows the story of Spider-Man here? Really? Oh, okay. Higher, please. Oh, phew. Okay. All right, let's do this one last time. A hapless but brilliant high school student is bitten by a radioactive spider, then takes on the responsibility for protecting New York City, but he still has to commute all the way from Queens. Speaking of Queens, once more, happy Pride. Yeah.

Our movie this week is a newish installment in the Spider-Man lore. It takes these elements that we heard and it jumbles them up and re-imagines them in a different dimension along a different strand and the tangled web of time and space in the multiverse also known as Brooklyn. Yeah. I mean, going from Queens to Brooklyn might be a different universe, but that's all right. The hero we meet in this movie is named Miles Morales, not Peter Parker. He lives in a universe where Spider-Man, that Peter Parker, had just died. And then he steps into the role, the new hero.

Until Spider-Man was created in 1962, teenagers were just relegated to sidekick status. They were the yes man, the Robins of the world. Spider-Man was an innovation in the early '60s that married the young age of Peter Parker with the tremendous undertaking a superhero endures. Spider-Man was always, always really a spider kid who had become an adult because of the weight. Because of the weight of what he was dealing with, he had to grow up faster than all his friends. In our movie, Miles Wakes up after being bitten by his radioactive interdimensional spider. Those of you who didn't watch the movie, you really missed out. And overnight, overnight, he's actually bigger and taller and stronger. He even has a hard time getting on the same clothes, the same pants he wore just yesterday. And he says a little louder than he meant to, "I must have hit puberty." It's a great line. You had to be there.

But along with the puberty comes powers. The powers are how he helps people, yes. And that's the what, he helps people. But why? The why, the origin story of all heroes, what they needed to be superheroes. It's different for Spider-Man. Superman, he was already powerful. Then he decided to protect others because he was powerful and because his dad told him to. Batman witnessed the death of his parents so he became powerful. Wonder Woman was perfect. That's all. This is the only... There's no... It's just the facts, just telling you how it is. Spider-Man's why, his origin, arose after he came into his powers, not because of them, and this is important. When his uncle is killed, killed in a robbery as a result of a robbery that Spider-Man could have prevented, he was there but he didn't do it or couldn't do it. This loss galvanizes him to protect and defend others who need help.

Virtue that's born of pain, hard-won virtue, is different. It's different than virtue born of benevolence and a little different than Wonder Woman's Amazonian sapphic perfection. But I digress. That one's for Cameron. Anyway, his heroism born out of the tremendous weight, the tremendous weight of guilt and duty, makes Spider-Man a special hero even among heroes. But why are we talking about this, TJ? Why are we talking about this on Pride Sunday? If you're asking that, thank you for being a straight ally. Thank you. Because every queer kid knows superheroes are very, very queer. Right? Okay.

You don't have to out yourself. Again, thank you, Cameron. At least someone's paying attention. And the guilt, sorry to say, but the guilt so many superheroes carry, the weight of the duty they feel that they have in this world is one of the queerest things about them.

This movie introduces us to a half dozen heroes from different universes that converge on Brooklyn through the actions of one of the villains. Our heroes, all from different dimensions, were each impacted by the guilt of not being able to be the savior to their friends and family that they then became to the entire city, to the entire universe that they're in. It wasn't only the tights, it wasn't only the witty quips when fighting monsters, but the way they feel they are responsible for all the things going on in the world at once, or that the whole world might just be against them. Those ring true for queer kids too. Just ask that handful of trans athletes in states where entire legislatures drafted, debated, and passed bills just to single a handful of kids out. Just ask them what it feels like to feel like the weight of the world is against them. It's real. It ain't fiction.

We are talking about superheroes on Pride Sunday because superheroes are super queer. But what does every superhero need to be a hero? An adversary to overcome. In our reading by James Baldwin that Cameron read, Baldwin talks about a time when Europeans had not yet arrived in these lands and where these lands were labeled literally on world maps, "Here be dragons." Ignorance is a monster; they knew that even then. And I don't know if there's anything more ignorant or monstrous being said right now in the world than what is being said about our trans, intersex, third gender, and non-binary beloveds. Right? Right. Baldwin was writing about this in the '80s. He was a man ahead of his time. Even then he notes our insight into human biology is growing and expanding before our scientific eyes. It was never settled that there were two sexes. And one rock concert in the '80s would show you

that gender has never been binary. Thank God. Gender is far from binary, and that binary is utterly false.

Baldwin suggests that the villain, the monster, the adversary, the dragon we fear is inside of us, not inside of the other. We are sensory beings. And this is the truth the queer community has known for years; the people we fear the most for our own safety are those who sense in us something they fear in themselves, their own dragons. And it's the freedom. Guys, they fear and loathe our freedom that comes from making peace with something we feared ourselves growing up with our own dragons that they desire to possess and control. Right? It's the freedom. It's a freedom hard won by resistance and in riots, by throwing bricks through windows and more, as well as simply opening a closet door just a little to let out our light. It is a freedom hard won, not, not simple virtue, that comes too often with great cost and sacrifice that the critic, the hater, the lawmaker, and the religious bigot, the chief moron among oxymorons, a religious bigot, I can't even, wants to stop by any means necessary, including by violence and lethal force.

Pride isn't about who we have become, what we wear, whom we kiss, or how we dress. We know we dress better than you. That is not what the parades are about. The pride I'm talking about is in surviving. Surviving. Amen. Surviving the shame and the guilt that our culture tells us is supposed to come with the love we give, with the love we want, and the ways we choose to live our lives in our own bodies in accordance with how we love. Can I get an amen?

The pride is in our survival that we lived to tell the tale. When you walk out of here and someone ever tells you, "Oh, what's with all the pride? Yeah, we get it. You get what you want." No, no. The pride is in our survival. We were never meant to survive.

Audre Lorde, the queer poet and icon, doesn't mince words. "The fleeting love that passes in doorways under the dark of night, the hiding from others and from discovery for fear of death and being found out, living against the wishes of power structures, surviving to tell the tales of that living." She says this, "When we are loved, we are afraid love will vanish. When we are alone, we are afraid love will never return. And when we speak, we are afraid our words will not be heard nor welcome. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So, so it's better to speak remembering we were never meant to survive."

That, that's real hero stuff, friends. For what is heroism except being afraid to do what must be done and doing it anyway, come what may? Lorde's words speak to the universal experience so many have of the minuscule amount of love they feel from this world and learn over years of longing and bargaining to accept as all they can have. And so they hide away the rest. They hide it away, that love that they have to give. And it's in the hiding, friends, hiding that love, that affection that we crave or that we want to have or even to give. That is a hallmark of queer love. That's the origin story only though it's where the heroism, the heroism starts.

Miles' dad tells him he hates, he hates Spider-Man. Miles hears that just as he's awakening to the idea that he might be Spider-Man. In the night in his own room of comfort and care, being embraced by his

parents after a night of scary changes going on in his body and around his world being held and comforted, in the same instance as hearing the casual hate spilling from the lips of someone who just kissed him with them. Is it any wonder the superpower he developed right then and there was disappearing, turning invisible when threatened? Disappearing, being unseeable, being unknowable, improvising? The way our music is today is a power many kids have to learn early because of thoughtless comments like Miles' dad that he hates the very thing or disapproves the very thing that Miles knows he's becoming.

In a time of dismantling of rights, criminalizing who we are and how we present ourselves to be loved, which is only another word for being seen as our whole selves, this contradiction is a way to force people to accept less and less love, and to hide or flee or run from people who claim, who claim to be people of God or to be followers of the teachings of Jesus. These people could not find a civic virtue if it punched them in the nose, let alone a shred of Christian kindness if it was handed them loaves of bread and fresh fishes from the sea. I'm on one today.

Jesus to many was one of the first superheroes, and certainly a hero to many who claim him. He always, always looked at his community, at his surroundings from the perspective of how society treats the least among them, those whom society has given the least and from whom society has taken the most.

A quarter, a quarter of all total hate crimes in the state of Texas are committed because of sexual orientation or gender identity. Those numbers have not yet been scrubbed from the Department of Justice website. They're still there. Maybe not after this sermon. And more than half of all hate crimes are based on race and ethnicity in Texas, 55%. So if you are wondering, if you are wondering who Jesus would be inviting to his table, and now I am not talking to our members I don't think, but those of you watching this and those of you sending it to the relatives that you want to piss off, there's a lot of them out there, if you're wondering whom, yes, we know when to use who or whom. It's a queer power also. If you're wondering whom society has given the least and from whom society has taken the most, look for queer people of color, friends.

As the people today Jesus would go and seek out to break bread with who he would trust to carry his message that love must overcome hate on through centuries to come, so that it might not rest alone in his people, but in the people that need the message of love, who cannot forgive like he taught, who can't and won't stop seeking power over others like he warned them not to do, who will render unto Caesar until they can't render no more. Would he see powerful politicians ridiculing the people they were elected to serve as his people, this superhero people claim as their own? Would he even recognize altars of gold and robes of silk in church? No.

Now, I realize we just replaced this beautiful carpet. It's very nice. We spend some money. It's a very nice Steinway piano we have here. But it's a little different than what I'm talking about. We recognize this where I am standing when I'm calling out what Jesus would recognize as church or not. But the religion of Jesus always centered those whom society has cast out and put under pressure, and certainly centered on those whom society would lock up, against whom crimes are not investigated or

solved, and those who cannot get essential medical care solely because they are too poor to afford it. I'm not saying centering these people is the only way to be Christian. I'm just saying it's the way Jesus was. Right? Like any life-saving hero worth the love of their community.

Now, saving lives. It doesn't actually take a heroic act like we see in the movies, only a small gesture. And I say this not for self-pity, but because those in power, and some of us need to hear it, for some who have known so much little love in their life, the smallest act of care is an ocean, is a multiverse. So in those elected to be public servants try to make queer people invisible again, robbing queer kids and those who support them from life-saving community and care, I start to wonder, I can't help but wonder whether the fear those public officials have isn't about saving everyone, isn't even about saving anyone, but is about how many more people they can harm just to stay in power.

So this is a message for them at the end of this legislative term. Do what you must. Do what you're paid to do. Take your 50 pieces of silver and go. But don't dare for an instant invoke the name of a person who defends the meek, who defended the poor, who fed the hungry, who healed the sick for free, and never had a cross word to say about any gay, trans, bi, lesbian, or queer people in his entire ministry. Don't wrap his name up in your hateful schemes. Do not pretend he is your hero. Yeah. Don't do it.

I hesitate to say this, but if that's what you believe, someone's taken your faith from you too. I hope you're still listening because I want you to hear this loud and clear. I don't hate you. I forgive your disordered worship of love and power and money. And I pray for your warped minds that they may be won by love at last, that your heart may be overcome in the beloved community before it's too late.

David Bowie and Freddie Mercury got together in 1981 in a recording session that no one is entirely sure what happened during, but one of the things that came out of it was this, love dares us to care for the people on the edge of the night. And love dares you to change your way of living, of caring about ourselves. This is our last dance. This is ourselves under pressure. Pressure is what molds every hero worth your time. Miles' uncle's dying words, words spoken to every hero across the multiverse in one way or another were these. "You are the best of all of us. Just keep going. Keep going."

To every queer kid of every age who faces the loss of community, the security of your life, I hope you will come here or to a Unitarian Universalist community near you. I hope we may show you another way, where not only the ministers, but even the freaking donuts are gay. Sorry, I just crack myself up sometimes. Because love wins, yes, but queer love wins too.

One of the innovations of this film is that the spider sense that they have is used not just to detect danger anymore, like in the other Spider-Man movies. No, this spider sense is also used to recognize other spider people and pig people, but that's, you got to watch the movie, even when they are in disguise. Peter Parker realizes this right away and says to Miles just before he dies, "I thought I was the only one. You are like me." And Miles says, "I don't want to be." And Peter gently says, "I don't think you have a choice, kid." Three lines of dialogue don't get much queerer than that, friends.

Queer love is love in a multiverse. In new ways and new directions, queer love is an outpouring of love from people who made so much from so little, who survived and thrived when it was inconvenient, when it was threatening to power. Queer love is a radical love without requirement or judgment, and it wins too. It is the faith of a future in humankind that can imagine and live out the beloved community in its true beauty and fullness, and it wins too. It is what we can do to make heroes of all of us. It wins too. Queer love wins. May it ever be so. Happy Pride and blessed be.