

April 30, 2000

## Remarks at the Millennium March for Equality

Troy Perry

This is the text of the address made to those attending the Millennium March on Washington by Reverend Troy Perry, founder and moderator of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, on the Mall in Washington, DC, on April 30, 2000.

We've gathered today on the National Mall with incredible diversity!

We've gathered here today:

Those ready to fight for justice,  
And those who are weary from the battle.  
I come here today as a person of faith.  
Many of us gathered here today are people of faith.

Let me also quickly acknowledge that too many of us in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered communities have been hurt by organized religion.

In spite of that:

*Many of us have found strength and hope in our spiritual faith.*

So we gather here today:

Jew and Christian, Islamic and Hindu, Pagan and Wiccan, as well as those who have rejected any faith system.

And today I proclaim this message that I have preached during my 30 years of activism:

*Believe that God—the God of the Universe—loves you just the way you are!*

There are some things I believe with all my heart. These are the things I believe with unshakeable faith:

I believe that we don't owe an apology to anyone for who we are!  
I believe that God loves me, And if God loves me, I KNOW that God loves YOU!  
I believe every one of us can come to terms with our own spirituality without the control of any other person, church, temple, group or organization.

Let me make it clear:

In Metropolitan Community Churches we believe in *freedom of religion* for all people. And we believe just as passionately in *freedom from religion* for those who choose another path.

But this is my witness: In my own life, my faith has kept me going.  
What a battle this struggle for justice has been!

For many of us in these diverse communities, our spiritual faith has kept our hope alive in the midst of the struggle.

This is my witness: in the ongoing battle for social justice: *We've come this far by faith!*

But I tell you the truth: Some days its been hard to keep the faith.

When our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered communities continue to suffer the oppression of hate crimes; it's hard to keep the faith.

In my own church—the Metropolitan Community Churches: more than 21 of our congregations have been firebombed or arsoned. In New Orleans, 12 of our members died in a terrible fire. In California, Rev. Virgil Scott was murdered solely because he was gay. And just six moths ago, our associate pastor in Sacramento, Rev. Ed Sheriff, died after being stabbed 24 times. The police say it was “just” a robbery, but I'm not so sure.

I am so conscious that as we gather here today, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses:

*We are surrounded by our own gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered martyrs: Those who have paid for this struggle with their own lives and who inspire us to keep on keeping on.*

So some days it's hard to keep the faith, when our people are still oppressed and harassed and murdered. Some nights I awake up in the middle of the night, and I can see them—I can see them just as clearly as if they were standing in front of me. I see the people I have met during 30 years of activism for our community:

Too many high school students taunted and branded as “faggots” and “dykes.”

Too many people who’ve attempted to end their lives too soon because society heaped shame and humiliation upon them.

I think of the man who walked away from his spirituality because his faith community rejected him.

I see the mother in tears because the court took her baby.

I think of the partner of 35 years denied access to his lover’s hospital room because no laws protected their relationship.

*Listen, America:*

It’s time to end the division!

It’s time to end the oppression!

And it’s time to stop the hate crimes against our people!

*Listen, America:*

Holy Scripture tells us it is a sin to murder!

It is a sin to oppress!

It is a sin to deny or destroy God’s creation!

God didn’t create us so God could sit around and have someone to hate!

*Listen, America:*

It’s time for this nation to repent of her sins against gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered persons.

*Listen, America:*

It’s time to welcome all of the human family to our rightful place at the table of understanding.

Listen to me:

Until those who seek to oppress us have ceased from their ways:

WE MUST NOT REST!

Until the government leaves our families alone and protects our children:

WE MUST NOT REST!

Until we can marry those we love:

WE MUST NOT REST!

Until hatred and prejudice are banished from our vocabularies:

WE MUST NOT REST!

Until the doors of all churches and temples and houses of faith open wide in welcome to all people:

WE MUST NOT REST!

Until the Matt Shepards and the James Byrds and the Billy Jack Gaithers  
are no longer taken from us:

**WE MUST NOT REST!**

Oh yes, there are days it's hard to keep the faith. But just when I think I can  
no longer go on, faith stirs inside me. Hope is reborn. And new strength  
arises.

*Today, each of us must renew our commitment to "fight the good fight."*

*Until all our people are free from oppression;*

*Until this nation grants equality to all our people;*

*Until all our people experience the promise of our nation's ancient  
creeds;*

*Until that day, I'll continue to cling to the words of the old hymn, words  
we all know;*

"Through many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come."

"Tis grace that brought me safe this far,  
And grace will lead me home."

Until that day for which we work and strive:

Keep the faith!

Keep the faith!

Keep the faith!