

Psalm 138

I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;

I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.

On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.

All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth.

They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.

For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.

The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Grateful! - August 23, 2020
Psalm 138

Today I'd like to share a personal message about how my family came to call Collingswood Presbyterian Church our place of worship. As in Psalm 138 I would like to express how Grateful we are as a family for god's steadfast love and this community of faith. If we haven't met, my name is Tara Klemash, my wife is Ananda and we have a 7 month old son is Grayson.

You see my journey in faith began in the Catholic Church, my wife Amanda began her path in a strict evangelical church and well, baby Grayson he is a blank canvas who is the light of our world in these challenging times. We look to raise our son with faith and we will encourage him to love, accept and to be kind to all people.

Back in 2001, I spent most of my free time as an active LGBT and civil rights activist. I poured myself into activism for years and still speak on diversity and inclusion initiatives today. In that time period I was healing from the incredible loss of losing my mother in my early twenties to cancer. I met Amanda at my day job, and we had an immediate connection becoming good friends. If you know Amanda she has a great sense of humor and is still till this day the funniest person I have ever met.

We became an official couple in 2002. I was your typical Catholic Chreaster. You know the person who only goes to church on Christmas and Easter. I also learned quickly how unaccepting her evangelical church was to LGBT people. So as a former catholic, there we both found ourselves with 2 communities of faith that did not accept us as a couple or even really accept us as LGBT individuals.

During our first few years together we experienced homophobia camouflaged in the typical bigoted talk track "we love the sinner not the sin". We hit a critical point in 2008 after I refused to attend any more services or events for her family and friends in churches known to be homophobic and we came to a joint agreement. I committed to being more engaged with a community of faith (meaning giving up my old relaxed chreaster ways). Amanda committed to looking for a new church family. Our goal was simple - find a church that would accept us fully as individuals and as a committed LGBT couple.

I quickly realized how spiritual and dedicated Amanda was in her faith as a Christian. The path to finding that type of church was long and hard. Also this single decision erupted a firestorm, we experienced too many homophobic attacks to mention. It was an incredibly sorrowful time, and forced us to lean on our faith and each other even more.

The words in Psalm 138 teach us about God's steadfast love. Amanda was resolute in her faith and belief in God's steadfast love and acceptance – she would not waiver because of someone else's opinion or ignorance. The stronger she became in her decision, the more aggressive the wrath of homophobic attacks became.

After a friend's referral we visited CPC and met the Pastor Kate Killbrew and several members and allies in the church. We started to attend on occasion, and Kate would visit us at our home. That's when Kate began to learn about our story. Kate asked the author and Pastor Jack Rogers to come to CPC on our behalf to do a symposium on his work on LGBT acceptance. Jack's work and his famous book "Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality" has been a major influence on us as a couple. It taught us about the full acceptance of LGBT people in the Presbyterian church and the wider Christian community as a whole. It also addresses why homophobia and bigotry can no longer be tolerated in our church communities.

In 2009, we became official members of Collingswood Presbyterian church. We are extremely grateful for the steadfast love of this church and community have shown us. We have met so many allies and friends through this congregation.

As the years moved on so did our society of faith and the rest of the world and eventually the ability for LGBT people to marry became law. Make no mistake about it - I was in love with Amanda and knew that married or not we would always be a solid couple. I also knew that proposing to her would mean she would loose her evangelical family.

My family was 100% supportive of our relationship so it would have been easy for me to just push forward. However, I loved her unconditionally and we talked about my decision. Eventually in 2014, Amanda mustered the courage to propose to me in a surprise proposal she organized with my family. It took so much courage in the face of

adversity for her to make that decision. We were finally married in 2017 in our church sanctuary by Pastor Marianne Robbins. The ceremony was absolutely gorgeous, the images and videos of that day highlight so many beautiful features of our church and its beauty.

So in closing I'd like to express how truly grateful we are for this community of faith. We look forward to many more years in this congregation with our son Grayson and with our many church members who have shown such love and acceptance to us. May God keep each of you in his grace and protect you all for your many days ahead.

Amen.