SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — June 28, 2026

Gay Pride: From New York City 1969 to Watertown, WI, 2026

Story #1 — Stonewall Inn, New York City, June 28, 1969

- For most of United States history same-sex relationships have been illegal everywhere. In many big cities like New York, though, gay and lesbian individuals flocked to gay bars and clubs, as places of refuge. In New York, the State Liquor Authority penalized and shut down establishments that served alcohol to known or suspected gay patrons, arguing that their mere gathering was "disorderly."
- In 1966, an organization dedicated to gay rights, staged a "sip-in" where they openly declared their sexuality at New York City taverns. Their strategy worked. In 1967, a ruling from New York's highest court affirmed gay individuals had the right to be served in bars. Police raids were temporarily reduced, but engaging in gay behavior in public — such as holding hands, kissing or dancing — was still illegal, so police harassment of gay bars continued.
- The Stonewall Inn was registered as a type of private "bottle bar," which did not require a liquor license because patrons were supposed to bring their own liquor. When police raided Stonewall Inn on the morning of June 28, 1969, armed with a warrant, police officers entered the club, roughed up patrons and arrested 13 people after finding bootlegged alcohol.

- Fed up with constant police harassment and social discrimination, angry patrons and neighborhood residents gathered. The crowd became increasingly agitated as the events unfolded and people were aggressively manhandled. At one point, an officer hit a woman over the head as he forced her into the police van. She shouted to onlookers to act. For several days, protests, with some relatively minor violence, contintinued. When it was done, 13 people had been arrested; 4 police officers had been injured; there were no deaths. The protest didn't become significant due to its violence or lack of deadly violence. Stonewall Inn was an event that could be pointed to as the event that said, "Enough is enough!" It was a galvanizing force for modern LGBTQ+ political activism.

Story #2 — Immanuel Lutheran Church, Watertown, WI, May 20, 2026

- Stonewall Inn has inspired works of art. One such piece is a musical rendering of the event (no words, just music), a work for concert band by Omar Thomas, titled, "A Mother of a Revolution."
- In the Fall of 2025, Watertown (WI) High School Band Director Reid LaDew followed the school district's "controversial issues policy," sending a note home to parents, letting them know months in advance that the class would be preparing "A Mother of a Revolution!" for the Spring 2026 concert. He wrote to parents: "The purpose behind studying 'A Mother of a Revolution' is not to provoke controversy, but to deepen students' understanding of how music reflects the diverse experiences of humanity. Engaging with this piece helps foster empathy, cultural awareness, and respect for the stories and struggles that shape our shared history." He was giving parents the opportunity to opt their child out of the concert. Three families did so. At the time, the school board didn't object.
- As the Spring Concert approached in May 2026, the School Board voted 7-1 to not allow the Omar Thomas piece to be performed. Another piece was substituted for the Spring Concert.
- But the story doesn't end there. Immanuel Lutheran Church Pastor Carina Schiltz told "Wisconsin Today" the congregation is openly welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ+ people, and they would fill its sanctuary with sound, celebration, and optimism the following Wednesday night, May 20, 2026, hosting current and former Watertown band students and community members playing "A Mother of A Revolution!"

- Composer Omar Thomas traveled to Wisconsin to be part of the event. Before conducting the piece, he addressed the audience: "It's in the common story-telling that we fill in the gaps of humanity. We start to learn about one another, we start to see all the ways in which we intersect. And then all of our differences become places of fascination, rather than points of fear. . . . Empathy is not a given. It's a 'muscle' that we all have, but like any other muscle people have to choose to use it."
- Concert video: https://www.watertownimmanuel.org/concert