



Still Here Still Queer
Episode 103: When God Speaks

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Ziru Zhang

Producers
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Emma Davis Williams

Runtime: 23 minutes, 31 seconds

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Series Logline

Gay men who lived through the AIDS crisis are part of a generation that's smaller than it should be. *Still Here Still Queer* explores how the lives they live now are shaped by the love, hustle, and faith that helped them survive the closet and a plague.

Episode Logline

As a gay pastor, Keith Mozingo lives what so many queer folks had stripped away from them: practicing faith without hiding their sexuality.

Brief Summary

“Gay” and “Christian” coexist seamlessly in the world of Keith Mozingo, but it wasn't always that way. This episode tells Keith's journey from a closeted church pianist to a sex-positive pastor who leads Founders Metropolitan Community Church - the world's first Queer Christian denomination. Pastor Keith reveals stories he rarely shares around struggling with his sexuality, faith, and suicidal ideation. As a pastor, Keith now actively celebrates queer relationships within his congregation - an unwavering representation of hope for gay couples who also want to hold onto a belief in God. The audience follows Keith's story in dreamy visuals that range from the joy of connection within his church to repping a rainbow stole as a proud out pastor during a political demonstration, and concludes with pensive hope for the future.



Extended Summary

"How we change the world starts with us individually and starts with that one word: Love."

- Keith Mozingo

Keith Mozingo is a charismatic, quick-witted pastor, who opens this episode of *Still Here Still Queer* by debunking popular "clobber passages" that have long been used to persecute queer people. Donning a blonde beehive wig and a pink dress to embody his Southern church lady drag persona, Penny Costal, it's hard to imagine a time when Keith wasn't fully confident in who he is.

Keith pastors Founders Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), the first congregation of the world's original queer Christian denomination. It was the pioneer of that denomination, Troy Perry, whose book, *The Lord Is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay*, first showed Keith in college that it was possible to be both gay and Christian. In an intimate scene, Keith shares the personal story of his suicide attempt, something he rarely speaks about publicly. Sitting on a park bench at sunset overlooking the ocean, Keith discloses how, after years of struggling with suicidal ideation born from the tension between his sexuality and his faith, he found the courage to come out to his father, reaching a point of acceptance he never got to experience with his late mother.

Alongside discovering Perry's book in his university library, Keith describes a vision in which God spoke to him audibly, telling him he was loved "just as he is," the words of a cherished hymn, and affirming that his faith and his sexuality were not in conflict. He plays Just As I Am in dreamy golden-hour light, and he reveals how that moment set him on a path of ministry and advocacy that has defined his life ever since.

Now approaching 67, Keith has lived proudly as a gay Christian and serves as a role model to new generations of queer people, much as Troy once was for him. Keith and Troy meet for lunch regularly, and during a lively lunch conversation, Troy describes through teary eyes what it was like to be a gay man in the 1980s and how he advocated for men who were hospitalized and discriminated against because of an AIDS diagnosis.



Extended Summary

That history cast a long shadow over Keith's newfound self-acceptance. It was the community of MCC, however, that gave him hope, and continues to do so: a community that accepts him fully. He credits the church with his continued vitality into his later years.

"Being the pastor of Founders, it just makes you feel alive. There's some days, you would think I was 25 again." - Keith Mozingo

Every year at Founders MCC, the congregation holds a radical Valentine's Day tradition: a blessing ceremony in which queer couples come to the altar to have their relationships honored before God. The service opens with a moment of silence for those lost to the AIDS epidemic, a grief that lives in the memory of nearly every person in the room. Reverend Keith then speaks about love, for one another and from God, before the couples are called forward.

Standing beneath the crucifix, Keith prays over them and invites them to whisper something to their partners. In that moment, husbands kiss their husbands, and non-binary folks hold the hands of their wives. The service embodies something present at MCC every day: safety and celebration for queer lives.

The film culminates in a montage of poetic visuals and moments of joy between Keith, church members, and his dog Fairfax, as Keith reflects on how far he has come in his outlook on life.

"Back in the day, I wanted to make something left after. But, now that I'm older, I feel like where we leave our glory is every day. It's every time I touch someone's life, or someone touches my life." - Keith Mozingo



Showrunner's Statement

When I started looking for men who had experienced the reversal of fortune that hit gay men in the early 1980's, I assumed that I was going to make a doc series about ageism and loneliness. Perhaps I was projecting my own internalized hopelessness onto a group of men who had been stolen from me. When I was growing up, I knew two things would happen to me if I came out. First, I would get AIDS and then I would go to Hell. After I had my first gay kiss, I spent a year wondering if it would be the death of me. I called an HIV hotline and a nurse explained the difference between blood and saliva. I spent a lot of time imagining what Hell would be like. Perhaps if I had had access to a few gay men who were older and wiser, they could have held my hand and tried to convince me what in the world might be possible: love, fun, and even faith in a God who had made me just as I am.

Now I do have access to older and wiser gay men, and the ones I asked to participate in this doc series are ambitious, hungry to live, eager to do something with the years that had been denied to many of their contemporaries. In them, I see what straight people see when they look at their parents and grandparents: a future for myself. I also see the past more clearly. Queer existence before my time was varied, interesting, and more complicated than the media typically suggests. Film and television tend to pop out just a few varieties of gay men, and even fewer over forty. I needed more options. I developed *Still Here Still Queer* so that I could find them.

-Duncan Teater



Director's Statement

The truth is that Keith's story, and the extraordinary story of Founders Metropolitan Community Church fell into my lap by chance. When Duncan approached me to join *Still Here Still Queer*, I panicked. As a 24 year-old, somewhat straight girl, who grew up halfway across the world in Singapore, with a strictly secular upbringing, how is this my story to tell? Yet at the same time, the very premise of Keith's story and its inherent conflict between faith and queerness captivated me with an intensity that I couldn't quite explain.

I scoured my past in search of a common ground, an opening through which the truth that Keith lives could resonate universally, even with someone drastically different like myself. And at some point in the iterative process of editing, it dawned on me that, beneath Keith's radical reclamation of faith as a gay man lies a more simple, universal story: the journey of finding your way back home – and back to yourself.

As a child of immigrant parents who grew up constantly moving around, code switching and learning new languages, I often wonder where home is, and who I am beneath the layers of camouflage I've worn to survive each new place. Keith's story showed me that home can be simultaneously a community that I choose for myself wherever I am in the world but also an inner sanctuary where I finally learn to accept myself, just as I am.

As a director, I believe that the personal is the most universal. Keith's story isn't one that's only for queer people. This is a story for anyone who has needed the courage to be themselves and for anyone who has wondered if they can find home in a hostile world. It's an incredible privilege to bear witness to this story and I hope it travels to the people who need to hear it the most.

-Ziru Zhang



Producer's Statement

As two women who both hail from the Bible Belt South, we are no strangers to the homophobia embedded in many Christian communities. We were both raised in environments that taught that homosexuality was sinful, something worthy of eternal condemnation.

Emma

For me, that messaging ran deep. I became a devout Christian and spent a year traveling on the mission field. I always had LGBTQ+ friends and loved them genuinely, but secretly hoped they might have a moment of spiritual transformation that would change their sexuality. As I got older, I began to reckon with the harm in that thinking. As I deconstructed my faith, my beliefs about sexuality shifted alongside everything else. I no longer believe being gay is a sin, but rather something to be celebrated. That outward acceptance has also opened space for me to explore my own attractions across the gender spectrum, and is a significant reason I felt so drawn to this story.

Auriyana

In the Black community, your village is everything. What often goes unsaid is what happens when your “village” turns its back on you upon the embrace of your queer identity. For me, growing up in the Baptist South meant having a front row seat to harmful rhetoric, cruel punishments, and ultimately complete abandonment by those I considered family due to their outward expression of sexuality. Forcibly, this led to an adolescence of silence and conformity until I found community during college at HBCUs of the Atlanta University Center. Feeling seen through the works of Audre Lorde eventually melded into exploring underground ballroom communities, facilitating both a safe space and resources for those who felt alone on their journey of becoming. Through this, I learned that being queer is not a mere “choice” to take on additional marginalization, but a reclamation of being rooted in love, and that’s what this film truly embodies.

Keith and the community of Founders MCC represent something powerful for both of us: a living example of faith and sexuality in full reconciliation. Spending months in that church, watching queer couples worship and love without fear of condemnation, has been a healing experience for us both. Our hope is that this episode of *Still Here Still Queer* resonates with others in the same way.

-Auriyana Armour + Emma Davis Williams



Key Participants

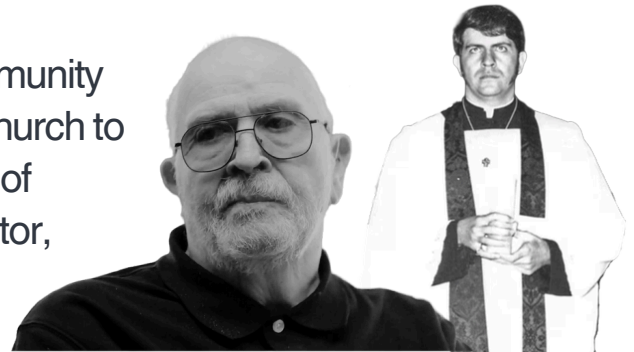


Rev. Keith Mozingo

Rev. Keith Mozingo is a former educator of 19 years and published author, and has been deeply involved in social justice causes across the South, from advocating for gay rights in North Carolina to fighting for same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ protections in Louisiana. He currently pastors the founding location of the Metropolitan Community Church denomination; the same denomination that let him know it was okay to be gay and Christian back when he was in college. When he isn't doing pastoral work, you can find him traveling, solving crossword puzzles, or spending time with his fur-baby, Fairfax.

Rev. Troy Perry

Rev. Troy Perry founded Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles in 1968 as the first church to recognize the need to minister to the needs of LGBTQ+ folks. He's Rev. Keith's hero, mentor, and dear friend.



The People of Founders MCC

Founders MCC (Metropolitan Community Church) Los Angeles is a prophetic, liberating and progressive Christian community of faith that honors, values and welcomes all people. They are rooted in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and Intersex communities and they activate their members politically and compassionately to aid the people of Los Angeles.



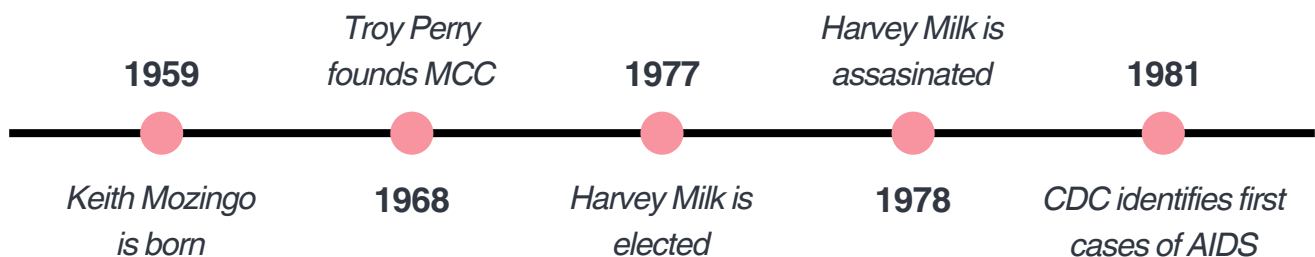
Additional Context

In 1977, Harvey Milk was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. In 1978, he was assassinated. In 1981, the CDC identified a cluster of five homosexual men in Los Angeles who were all infected with a rare kind of pneumonia. AIDS was the ultimate reversal of fortune for gay men. The modest freedoms and hints of acceptance that had emerged throughout the 20th century were overwhelmed by a merciless plague and a new tide of homophobia.

For men like Keith, the messaging was clear: choose eternal bliss with God or eternal torment in hell alongside other sinners. With pervasive and hateful rhetoric coming from the likes of religious figures like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, his only option seemed to be living a double life or stifling his identity entirely.

This series highlights men who had experienced the hope of Milk's election and the subsequent nightmare of the AIDS pandemic. The anti-queer movement seeks to send all but the most well-behaved members of the LGBTQ+ coalition back into the closet. Progress more generally seems to have stalled out, and all kinds of people feel like the world is stuck or going in reverse.

But the men in our series have seen much worse. In spite of AIDS and the power of the closet, they are still here, and they are still queer. Our series is powered by the laughter, love, grit, ambition, courage, and hope of their stories.



Key Team



Ziru Zhang *Director*

Ziru is a Singaporean writer-director and editor currently pursuing her MFA in Film & Television Production at USC. Growing up between Singapore and Shanghai, she has long grappled with the diasporic uncertainty of not quite knowing where home is - an emotional thread that runs through all of her work. Through her filmmaking, she seeks to illuminate immigrant and underrepresented narratives of those who live at the margins and are unafraid to boldly carve out space for themselves in a world not made for them.

Auriyana Chanelle Armour *Producer*

Auriyana is an award-winning filmmaker and producer working across narrative, documentary, and experimental film, with a focus on character-driven, socially engaged storytelling. She is an MFA candidate in Film & Television Production at USC's School of Cinematic Arts and holds a bachelor's in Documentary Filmmaking from Spelman College. Inspired by both the intersectionality of identity and the reclamation of marginalized communities, joining this project was a no-brainer.



Emma Davis Williams *Producer*

Emma is a producer, director, and editor currently pursuing an MFA in Film and Television Production at USC. Her work spans short film, podcast, and documentary series, and her projects have earned recognition from the USC Asian Pacific Film Festival, the Signal Awards, and the Berlin Women Cinema Festival. She is currently on staff at USC's Media Institute for Social Change, where she organized the institute's inaugural film festival.

Angie Hanqing Guo *Director of Photography*

Angie is a cinematographer originally from Shanghai, China. She is currently pursuing an MFA in Film & TV Production at USC. She is passionate about visual storytelling and crafting images that convey emotional depth and nuance. Her work often focuses on naturalistic lighting, intimate framing, and a strong sensitivity to performance.



Key Team

Christine Xi Gong *Editor*

Christine is a filmmaker and MFA candidate at USC School of Cinematic Arts. The films she writes, directs, and edits have been featured at nearly 20 international festivals. Her work is drawn to the quiet fractures inside intimate relationships, where love sits alongside fear, shame, and silence. She works at the edge of reality and fiction, using mixed media to bring memory, emotion, and dreams onto the screen.



Runhe Zhang *Editor*

Runhe is a filmmaker from China, currently pursuing an MFA at USC's School of Cinematic Arts. She focuses on editing, where she uncovers story and shapes emotional journeys. Trained in Thai during her undergraduate studies, she brings a cross-cultural sensitivity to her storytelling.



Val Cordecia *Sound*

Raised in Miami, Val is a filmmaker and MFA candidate at USC studying Film and Television Production. A writer at heart, their script *Revolve* was adapted into an award-winning short film, earning three honors at the Asian American International Film Festival. They are driven to tell stories that center voices often left out, bringing honesty and depth to underrepresented experiences.



Xiaoning Zhang *Sound*

Xiaoning is a student filmmaker currently based in Los Angeles. Before moving to the West Coast to pursue an MFA in Film & TV Production at USC, he studied at NYU, where he made multiple short films and worked in New York's independent theater production scene. Xiaoning focuses on directing, editing, and sound.



Duncan Teater *Creator + Showrunner*

Duncan is an award-winning filmmaker currently pursuing a Masters of Fine Arts at the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts. He is a recipient of both USC's Annenberg Fellowship and the School of Cinematic Arts Student Impact Award, recognizing his "body of work dedicated to social impact, building community, and



groundbreaking efforts to empower a wide range of voices and perspectives."



Behind the Production



This is not the film this team signed up to make. A week before production began, the original participant for this episode dropped from the project. They were out - no further contact, and no hope to move forward in any way. Duncan, Ziru, Auriyana, and Emma took a collective deep breath and worked hard to find an alternative participant, and Keith came into their lives as if sent by God themselves. After an approval

meeting with the MCC board and getting the rest of the team up to speed, they went full-steam ahead on building a relationship with Keith and documenting his life. Rather than ample time to get to know their participant, the team had to start filming with Keith almost immediately. Ziru had to work hard to make up for lost time with Keith, and it was during one of their many dinners together that Keith shared a story he rarely tells: the time he nearly took his own life. It was a moment of profound trust, and one that ultimately shaped the heart of the episode. Production took place over 13 days



and spanned from Keith's apartment in Hollywood to Founder's MCC in Los Feliz to Fred Hesse Community Park in Rancho Palos Verdes. Over the course of the production, the team consumed an entire bulk box of fruit snacks and soaked up endless doggie-cuddles with Keith's pup, Fairfax.

