Today in a sacred covenant Frank and Todd will bind themselves to each other, and together as one flesh, they will bind themselves to God. Twice in Matthew's Gospel Jesus talks about the idea of binding.

In Matthew 16 Jesus says to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven." ¹

We hear Jesus saying those same word again in the context of holding one another accountable for our actions in Matthew 18. ² "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." There, Jesus couches his words between the story of God's joy at finding a lost one out-sizing the joy God feels over 99 others who never went astray, and Jesus telling Peter that forgiveness is only true if it's unlimited, illustrated by a story about a man who received grace but would not show it, thus ending up losing it.

While Jesus was on the earth binding and loosing were his responsibility. After his ascension decisions about who's in/who's out, what's permitted and what's not, even decisions about what's sin and what's righteousness were left, first, in the hands of Peter (Mat 16), and then, more broadly, in the hands of the whole community of God's people, the Church (Mat 18).

Jesus knew moments would come in the life of God's people, because of the way God created the world - to evolve - and the way God structured culture - to progress, when God's people would need to draw new boundaries or expand old ones, to welcome new people to the circle of discipleship, to reinterpret what had been written in Scripture through the lens of what Jesus' said was his purpose on the earth:

¹⁸“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” ³

¹²“I still have many things to say to you, ”said Jesus, ”but you cannot hear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he bears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

Jeremiah saw those moments coming too. Even with the Law written in stone, there were new things to be written, written on our hearts. New things about Jesus being the Promised One. New things about church. Even new things about weddings and marriage.

While in each moment, God has everything figured out, we don't. We grow into things. It takes time and study, consideration and prayer. By the time we've figured it out, Jesus says we can trust that God is already there.

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² Ibid., Mt 18:18.
³ Ibid., Lk 4:18–19.
⁴ Ibid., Jn 16:12–13.
Jesus didn't seem to be worried that Peter or the Church would make too many mistakes. Jesus' words in today's Gospel reading say to us that we shouldn't be worried about getting it wrong either. For whatever the community of God's people binds on earth (restricts, rules out, or requires) "shall have been bound"5 in heaven. Whatever God's people discern as permissible, acceptable, a matter of freedom, or using Jesus' words "loose on earth," God has already given the divine blessing or as I like to think, said, "Go for it!"

Maybe the hardest thing about our gay friends getting married is that all of God's people haven't yet caught up to God. And so we are left wondering which side is right. When the question we ought to be asking ourselves needs to be, "Given Jesus teaching me that we only have to worry about two things: loving God with our whole heart soul mind and strength and loving our neighbors as ourselves, what is the most faithful thing I can do in loving my friends?"

We, as God's people living in moment of cultural change, need not worry about getting it wrong. We are always playing catch-up to God. In those moments when the church is called upon to exercise the responsibility of binding and loosing - deciding who's in/who's out, what goes and what doesn't - God has already moved the boundary. We're only discerning the mind of God about those things that were previously too much for us to bear, but for which God has decided now we're ready.

That process of new binding and new loosing started within just a few years of Jesus ascension. At first the church said that only Jews can join us. They had it wrong. Peter said, "Gentiles can be followers of Jesus too." The community of God's people confirmed that decision. The Church has been playing catch-up to the ever-expanding Good News of Jesus, the widening proclamation of release to those restrained, the opening of the eyes of those who could not previously see, the freeing of those who before were oppressed, ever since.

In 2005 The United Church of Christ, after years of prayerful discernment, loosed the covenant of marriage, formerly restricted to heterosexual couples, so as to include couples regardless of gender, and challenged every member congregation to consider taking that same step. In 2007 after a year of prayerful study this congregation followed suit. And so we find ourselves here today celebrating this wedding in a United Church of Christ congregation's building. Simply by being here today you are a part of the extravagant welcome of Jesus.

I can safely say that all of us are present because we know and love Todd and Frank. We want for them both what makes them happy and fulfills their lives. And still we may have some discomfort or awkwardness on Monday answering our coworkers' question, 'So what did you do this weekend?' by telling them we went to a wedding and whose wedding it was. We might still be growing into our comfort with the issue of gay marriage even while we promised Frank and Todd our love, support and care few moments ago. And maybe, just maybe, we are here because what God has written on our hearts tells us that because of the friendship, love and commitment we witness between Todd and Frank, this wedding must be ok. And so we struggle to be part of or maybe have stopped participating in a faith or in churches that don't say it's ok too.

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5 The Greek New Testament uses the perfect passive participles in both Matthew 16 and Matthew 18 for the words to bind and to loose. The sense of the perfect passive tense is that action began previously and continues now and into the future.
If you've known Frank and Todd since the beginning of their more-than-ten-years-long relationship, you may be thinking today, "It's about time." I hear God inviting us to that same thought about ourselves. It's about time! It's about time the Church gets her act together about how she treats her lgbt neighbors and couples. It's about time the Church proclaim with conviction that, when it comes to weddings like this one, we are playing catch-up to God. It's about time to listen to your heart and go with over-the-top love and extravagant welcome when it comes to the issue of gay marriage, not just the gay weddings of our friends. It's about time to find a faith community where God is still speaking and people are still listening to the new things that God is writing on our hearts. It's about time ---- for me to stop talking about Todd and Frank getting married and do this. Amen.