

Sermon Discussion Information

Sermon Series: "Caring for Others Through Social Transformation"

Sermon Title: "LGBTQ"

Sermon Text: Luke 11:37-53

Listener's Journey: I want my listener to honor LGBTQ designations alongside all human identity realities and to see LGBTQ equality and inclusion as the work of living the gospel.

Unique Quotes from Sermon:

Those two meals did not go well, but the worst of the three recorded by Luke was by far our text for today from chapter 11. We are not told if Jesus raised his voice, but as you heard read, Jesus used the "Woe" word several times in direct confrontation some of the leaders and theologians of his religion of origin with his two key points being:

- First, generosity and forbearance, justice and love, are more important than policing religious and cultural rules and traditions that will likely change over time.
- Second, we are to prefer others and be ever aware of that which needlessly weighs people down, and be compassionate sojourners with those carrying special burdens.

In the closing verses of today's text we also learn a difficult lesson that is repeated over and over again in the gospel biographies, and echoed in the voices of others as well: Those who live Jesus' generous way of doing things will be persecuted.

At this point you may be asking, "what does heliocentrism and disastrous dinners of Jesus have to do with a sermon focused on human sexuality?" *Everything, if we believe that the Christian theological notion of the sacredness of difference applies to those who are lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, or questioning. I say "if" because recent studies are showing that facts and reality rarely change the minds of humans once impressions are made in one direction or another.*¹ And, sadly, like Christianity and Galileo and other religions and "take your pick" person, our religion plays a huge role in first impressions, and for good reason! But, also for poor outcome if it gets something wrong.

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The current social context in the United States is that of public institutions and religious institutions continuing to wrestle with what is "real" in regards to disability, race, gender, and human sexuality. Strangely, it is the "immortal declaration" embedded in the second paragraph of the United States 1776 Declaration of Independence that continues to frame the ever expanding conversation about what is real and right, and therefore true. The declaration being, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The basis sentiment at the moment of its' declaration was largely communicating that what was "real" was that human beings should have the right to choose *who* governs them and have a say in *how* those chosen govern them as well.

In 1776 that basis was a shocking change of mind in a time where monarchy rule was the brutal norm. It needs to also be said, though, that it would be shallow thinking to assume that the founders of our nation were only thinking about governmental structure when they signed the declaration. If for no other reason because quickly and over time the immortal declaration spread to mean more than equal rights for white European men. It has come to reference real identities of many kinds of people. But, not quickly nor easily.

¹ <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/why-facts-dont-change-our-minds> (accessed 3-4-17)

- It took 92 years before enslaved Africans were given the legal rights to *begin* the journey of being considered equal that continues even today.
- It took 144 years since the immortal declaration for women to have the right to vote as citizens of equal standing to men in the United States.
- It took 188 years before laws were passed to prohibit discrimination *of all kinds* based upon race, color, religion, or national origin.
- It took 191 years for elder citizens and people of different racial backgrounds who want to be married to be considered equal. That was 1967, one year before I was born.
- It took 214 years before people with disabilities were considered equal in the workforce (1990) and 239 years before people of the same sex were granted the legal right to be married. (2015)²

Christians and Christian institutions have fallen on all sides of these equal rights identity conversations with contentious battles constantly raging between institutions, their interpretations of Scripture, and their traditional views on reality. In every case the key questions are: “What is real and the way the human experience is designed to work by the Creator of all things?” and “What is a fiction and a distortion of the way the Creator of all things has designed the human experience to work?”

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For Christians who consider the Bible inspired and their basis for truth and life this presents some challenges because, like the heliocentric view of the universe, there is no example of a transgender person in the Bible. The only example of specific people who might or might not have been any category of LGBTQ in the Bible were the gang rapists of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis chapter 19, and that passage doesn't tell us anything about gender identity or sexual orientation, only about gang rapists.³

This is a significant challenge and part of the reason why this conversation is so difficult. Modern studies tell us that 3.4 to 5% of all people everywhere are LGBTQ.⁴ And, just as there are no mentions of Mayan and Chinese ancient cultures and any number of different human identities in the bible, doesn't mean they don't exist and aren't in the purview of the Creator of all things. We can link such silences to the limitations of specific historic narratives or the development rate of human and religious consciousness, but Scripture is silent to the biographies of those who are LGBTQ in favor of 95% of the population who are heterosexual.

The biblical matter of gentile inclusion and gentile versus Jewish identity in the First Century Church is the example we need today. Jewish identity mandated males having their penises circumcised, abstinence of certain foods, and conversion to specific Jewish cultural practices. Some first century Jewish Christians called “The Judaizers” demanded that these things be done in order to be fully Christian.⁵ The Apostle Paul was the strongest and most vocal advocate for gentile inclusion and the exhortation that our identity in Christ was on the basis of Christ and faith alone.

Paul's advocacy created a vortex of theological and cultural conflict that ripped through the Early Church in ways not dissimilar to race and gender in the recent past, and now the current debate around human sexuality. Ultimately, it cost Paul his life. And, yet he and the Apostle Peter, and others, clung to the experience of the New Testament book of Acts Chapter 10, where God instructed Peter to change his mind. And, further God instructed Peter to not call anything unclean that God has created.⁶

² <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/civilrightstimeline1.html> (accessed 2-28-17)

<http://www.civilrights.org/resources/civilrights101/chronology.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/> (accessed 2-28-17)

³ Genesis 19.

⁴ Several recent studies for the U.S. suggest a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender population ranging from 3.4 to 5 percent. Gushee, David P.. *Changing Our Mind: A call from America's leading evangelical ethics scholar for full acceptance of LGBT Christians in the Church* (Kindle Location 541). David Crumm Media, LLC. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Read the book of Galatians.

⁶ <http://gaychristianyes.org/blog/who-are-we-to-hinder-god>

If LGBTQ are who they are as created by God in a similar yet distinctly mysterious way than heterosexuals, there is a “Jesus reckoning” to be had in our time. Just like the dinner conversation where Jesus told the religious leaders: “...And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.” Luke 11:46. NIV

There may be no more true passage of Scripture related to LGBTQ in our time, than this.

Three Discussion Questions:

1. What has been your experience and understanding of human sexuality? (Personal sharing)
2. How does today’s text speak to the way you understand Christian religion and how we include or exclude any number people based upon differences. (Exploring the text)
3. What are some ways that you can grow in your understanding of the LGBTQ conversation? (Direct application)