

## Reflection for Rainbow Fellowship Sunday

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church

June 11, 2017

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This will be brief. First, a quick look at the Bible. Second, a little history.

The Bible. Over the years in Adult Faith Formation classes and other sermons we have spent a fair amount of time on this, so we will just look at this briefly.

How many of you have or have had a teenage son? Was he ever rebellious? Did he ever talk back to you? Show of hands. Did you then do what the Bible says to do? And I'm not talking about "spare the rod, spoil the child." Oh no. Did you take that rebellious son to the village elders for them to stone him to death?

What? No??? Don't you take the Bible seriously? Because that's what the Bible says to do, in Deuteronomy 21:18-21.

It's passages like that, located right near some of the "anti-gay" passages, that cause many people just to throw out those notorious "seven passages" of scripture condemning homosexual behaviors. That's maybe a reasonable conclusion. It's a different day today; a very different culture from two or three thousand years ago. Today we do a lot of things forbidden in biblical times. Most of us eat pork and shellfish. We wear clothes made out of two different fabrics. We don't keep slaves. We allow women to speak in church, etc.

But I don't throw those notorious seven passages out. Because if you look at them individually and understand precisely what behaviors they are condemning, you see that these passages make perfect sense and the behaviors cited *should* be condemned. Those seven passages are talking about cultic prostitution; they are talking about pederasty—grown men with young boys; and they are talking about rape. I think we would all agree that those particular behaviors are reprehensible and should be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

Here's what's NOT found in the Bible, anywhere: the case of two people of same-sex orientation choosing to be in a monogamous, loving, life-long relationship. The Bible doesn't say that's okay. It doesn't say it's not okay. That scenario is simply not found in the scriptures. Like air travel. The Bible doesn't say if flying on an airplane is okay or not.

The only scripture that applies to this situation of an equal, committed relationship between two same-sex equal partners is this: Jesus said, "Love one another."

Now, a little history.

The Presbyterian Church started studying the issue of ordination of "self-affirming homosexual persons" in 1976. In 1978 it came to a vote at our national decision-making meeting, the General Assembly. The move for inclusion failed by a vote of about 10-1. Virtually each year the issue again came to a vote, and each year the vote grew a tad closer. But the tiny conservative presbyteries in the South kept the overtures from passing.

But those of us in favor of inclusion did NOT leave the denomination.

In 2001, Oak Grove ordained an openly gay deacon and the roof did not fall in. In 2010, Oak Grove became an official More Light congregation.

Finally, in 2011, after a struggle of 35 years, the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted to allow LGBTQ people to use their God-given gifts as deacons, elders, and pastors. It was such a thrill for those of us in the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area to cast the vote that put us over the top!

Over the next two years a number of us Oak Grovers worked hard for the passage of marriage equality in Minnesota and we celebrated when that became a reality in 2013. (I think it was the first time I've been on the winning side of a social justice issue. I was totally discombobulated.)

A lot of good stuff happened in a hurry.

But we are not all the way there, obviously. In recent months our society has taken steps backwards. And people are scared. And they have reason to be scared.

In this new climate, where will the Church be?

The Church always needs to stand with those on the outside, as Jesus did. Particularly on this issue. The Church for hundreds of years was in the forefront of persecution of LGBTQ folks. In repentance, let us now be in the forefront of protection and comfort and solidarity.

Jesus said, “Love one another. Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one’s life for another....”

Let us be faithful, whatever that takes. Amen? Amen!