“JUST A CLOSER WALK ... ... to see more, hear better, and do what we have yet to do”

An Application of the United Methodist Quadrilateral REST (Reason or revelation, Experience, Scripture, Tradition as Authority), and a Workbook in Support of Discipline Amendments to Bridge the Cultural, Heterosexual and Non-heterosexual Divide Among Us.

- An Invitation to 14 relevant personal encounters with Jesus from the Gospel of Mark.

- An Invitation to read Galatians the way that Paul the Lawyer wrote it, with Transformative Questions.

- A Letter to my Conservative and Liberal Brothers and Sister, with the “Here I Stand” test.

By Frederick Christian Roesti, attorney member of Hamilton United Methodist Church congregation, San Francisco, CA, and the Hamilton United Methodist Church congregation.*


**Distribution**

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Dedication

To my Family, my mother and father, and brother and family, my wife, my aunts and uncles, my nieces, my cousins, my second cousins, my grand nephews, grand nieces, my grandparents and great grandparents, my great aunts and uncles, without limitation, and

to my Friend, Chris, my Good Samaritan Incarnate, Michael, who although unaware opened my eyes to read scripture at a depth not previously experienced, and

to Jesus, born of Mary, from the Household of Joseph.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am grateful to many people who helped me put this together, especially my wife, Allison Jan Kolb-Roesti, who has always helped me keep my perspective and remain down to earth, and who in her volunteer work and many associations has made real what I write about the love of God to all.

I am grateful to my family, my grandparents, Christian Gottlieb Roesti and Helena Heydt Roesti and Frederick William Kirn and Edna Shelly Kirn; to my parents LeRoy Philip Roesti, Sr. and Margaret Florence Kirn Roesti, and to my brother, his family, to my nieces, grandnephews and grandnieces, and to all my aunts and uncles, cousins and second cousins, equally loved in a unique way.

I am grateful to my mother, who, when I shared this with her gave me a clear focus that if anything good comes it, it will not be because of me, and who also gave me permission to identify her in my text as my Cloud of Witnesses, who reminds me when people disagree on what the Bible says, the most important thing is to read together, share, pray together, and keep on reading together.

I am grateful to my father, who served as an Evangelical United Brethren and United Methodist pastor for 30 years, who in retirement became a certified mental health chaplain. When I shared these writings with him, he welcomed me into his trust and shared with me confidences always known within the clergy.
I am grateful to my brother, older and wiser than I am, who has never hesitated to speak his mind to me. He has helped me see what I might not otherwise have seen.

I am grateful to the many Sunday School teachers and pastors in my life, who have been faithful disciples of Jesus, and to a circle of people with whom I have shared drafts of individual chapters, and requested their prayer.

I am grateful to the many lay and clergy delegates to General Conference the past decades, though separated by “Aye” or “Nay” votes on specific items, about which I write, have remained united in Christ, faithful to God and to each other.

I am grateful to those who ask hard questions because when those questions are answered to their satisfaction to the Glory of God, history tells us something very good and lasting will happen. See Acts 11:02-18; 15:1-29.

Now, Dear Reader,

*Just a Closer Walk* has attempted to answer the hard questions that you may have, or that have been raised by the Heterosexual Party now as with the Circumcision Party of old in Acts 11:02-18 and 15:1-29. **Because your questions and commentaries are most important, speak you questions and comments freely and boldly to the United Methodist brother or sister who distributed *Just a Closer Walk* to you.** Read the scripture together. Ask questions. Share answers or non-answers. Share Commentaries. Then pray together. Read or sing the hymns together, and continue reading the Bible together. (See Part 1, *Acknowledgment*, page ii).

- *Just a Closer Walk*

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I am grateful to my pastor, Rev. Ana Tiutai, the first ordained woman Tongan clergyperson, who has passed away, but who gave me courage to declare publicly my private belief, that on the very narrow topics about which I write, I write with the Power and Authority of the Promised Advocate. I am grateful to all effective Advocates for Jesus Christ on these topics.

I am grateful to Norma Beth Morgan for typing and assisting me in the preparation of the manuscript; to Gregory Cucina, Frank Hale, Andrew French, Jeremy Williams, Fred C. Woolf, and all Proof Readers, and to Ben Schlessinger who assisted me in first posting the manuscript of Parts I and II on the web, then entitled, *JESUS SPEAKS* (*about heterosexuality and homosexuality*), *THE FAMILY KNOWS* (*that all children are loved equally*), *THE CHURCH CANNOT BUT HEAR*.

I am grateful for the integrity of scripture that documents events described in this manuscript, *Just a Closer Walk...* and for the dynamic interaction of the *Gospel of Mark* and other scriptures, that have come alive for me.

Finally, and foremost, I am grateful to Jesus, Son of Mary, from the Household of Joseph, who taught us how to love each other, then showed us how and challenges us to do even greater works than he did (John 14:12). Not the least, I am grateful to the Syrophoenician, Canaanite women, a Gentile from Tyre-Sidon,

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through whom God by her love for her daughter, revealed to Jesus a new depth and breadth of Faith and Love, that Jesus had not theretofore experienced (Mark 7:24-30); Matthew 15:21-28).

Forever, I remain grateful to the people within the United Methodist Church and throughout Christendom, who have continued to remain faithful disciples of Jesus in the midst of insult and oppression and persecution, who advocate by their lives that to which they know and I give witness herein: that GOD IS ONE.
PREFACE

This book is presently self-published in-house to all United Methodists and to all lay and clergy delegates to General Conference 2016.

In the 2012 Book of Discipline, there is found the following Preamble to the Social Principles not previously found in the 2008 Book of Discipline. The added provisions of the Preamble read in their entirety:

We acknowledge that, because it is a living body of believers, gathered together by God from many diverse segments of the human community, unanimity of belief, opinion, practice has never been characteristic of the Church from the beginning to this day. From its earliest time, as evidenced in the letters of Paul, the witness of the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and other New Testament texts, diversity of understanding and controversy with regard to to many matters has been the reality.

Therefore, whenever significant differences of opinions among faithful Christians occur, some of which may continue to divide the church deeply today, neither surprise nor dismay should be allowed to separate the members of the Body from one another; nor should those differences be covered over by false claims of consensus and unanimity.

To the contrary, such conflict must be embraced with courage and perseverance as all together continue to seek to discern God’s will. In that understanding and commitment, we pledge ourselves to acknowledge and to embrace with courage, trust, and hope those controversies that arise among us, accepting them as evidence that God is not yet finished in sculpting us to be God’s people.

We commit ourselves to stand united in declaring our faith that God’s grace is available to all, that nothing can separate us from the love of God. In that confidence, we pledge to continue to be in respectful dialogue with those with whom we disagree, to explore the sources of our
differences, to honor the sacred worth of all persons, and to tell the about our divisions as we continue to seek the mind of Christ and to do the will of God in all things.

(2012 Book of Discipline, Preamble to Social Principles, page 104-105, emphasis added.)

This book is entitled, "Just a Closer Walk . . . see, hear, do" because it seeks bridge present theological and cultural divides that exist among us by focusing on "Just a Closer Walk with Thee," that we might "see" together what we have yet to see together, "hear" together what we have yet to hear together, and "do," what we have yet to do together. It is based throughout on the United Methodist Quadrilateral: Reason (and revelation). Experience, Scripture, Tradition.

This book gives witness to the reading of scripture at a deeper level for all, so that where we have been corporately blind, we may see, and give witness together as the one great fellowship of Love.

This book encourages those with questions to speak them, and encourages those with witnesses to give them.

This book is addressed throughout to the following sentences of the 2012 Book of Discipline emphasized in bold-face and quoted in context that were not always in the Discipline:

From 2012 Discipline, Paragraph 161 (F), on Human Sexuality, page 111:
"All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital, status or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights"
ensured and to be protected against violence.”

... “We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with others, and with self. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality, and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teachings. We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.”

From 2012 Discipline, Paragraph 304.3, on Ordination, page 220: “While persons set apart by the church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teachings. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church.

Apparently, these bold-faced pronouncements were considered so self-evidence, when first added the Discipline, and since then, the majority who voted for them then and since have found no need to qualify or identify to what “homosexual practices” the majority referred. Even more important, no attempt was made by the majority then and there is no evidence since then of any attempt by the majority to identify a unified sexual ethic in the Book of Discipline that affirmed both homosexual and heterosexual practices that were compatible with
the teachings of Jesus as distinguished from those heterosexual and homosexual practices that are not compatible with the teachings of Jesus.

This book seeks to identify a unified sexual ethic on the basis of the teachings of Jesus applied to both heterosexual and non-heterosexual persons.

The writer prefers use of the nomenclature, LGBTF, which is the current inclusive description adopted by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer community, but for the purposes of this book, the writer uniformly uses the nomenclature, “heterosexual” and “non-heterosexual” because it theologically parallels the nomenclature of “circumcised” and “uncircumcised” that is also inclusive of all people for “there is no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male or female; for all of you [apparently including ‘heterosexual’ and ‘non-heterosexual’] are one in Christ Jesus.” (See Galatians 3:28, brackets added), and this is extended to include “everyone” who believes (see John 3:17).

Part One, See, focuses on the issue of ordination. It is written in the format of a legal Biblical Brief to describe (1) the issue of ordination, (2) identify and give witness to the Principle Teaching of Jesus on Love, illustrated by the Parable of the Good Samaritan, as applied to ordination in contrast to other teachings, which are identified as “dicta,” which may be helpful but are not essential to decide the
ordination question. Part One, See, identifies a unified sexual ethic that applies to all and reaffirms all existing ordination steps as applied to all.

Part One, See, includes a description of the author's own experience that opened the reading of scripture, where he had hitherto been blind.

Part Two, Hear, invites the reader to 14 personal encounters with Jesus from the Gospel of Mark, as supplemented by the other Gospels, where Jesus did or said something of relevance to the ordination question, to same sex marriage, and to the status of all people within the church. It seeks to bridge theological gaps by using parallel translations from the Authorized King James Version and New Revised Standard Version. Each chapter provides for an interactive commentary between the writer and reader. Each chapter closes with a witness from tradition found in our United Methodist Hymns.

Part Three, Do, contains a bible study of "Galatians, read and applied the way the Paul the lawyer wrote it." For some, this a fresh way of reading Galatians and Romans that cuts across liberal and conservative cultural and theological divides for Paul writes, there is no basis for the divisions among you "for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Part Three, Do, includes the witness of a local congregation of the Hamilton United Methodist Church, San Francisco, California, entitled "The Hamilton
Statement,” and includes “Four Proposed Amendments on Ordination” proposed by the Hamilton United Methodist Church congregation that were approved in 1995 by a 60% to 40% margin by the Northern California-Nevada Annual Conference for submission to General Conference 1996. This writer has not been able to trace any evidence that they were presented to a floor vote at General Conference 1996 or since, and this writer concludes they are still awaiting a General Conference floor vote.

Part Three, Do, concludes with a Letter to My Liberal and Conservative Brothers and Sisters and includes a: “Here I Stand” test that may be taken by all United Methodist Church members and Delegates to General Conference 2016.

This book seeks to serve the broad purpose that “whenever United Methodists have a clear sense of mission, God has used our church to save persons, heal relationships, transform social structures, and spread spiritual holiness, thereby changing the world. In order to be truly alive, we embrace Jesus’ mandate to love God and to love our neighbors making disciples of all people. (2012 Discipline Par 121)
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BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON THE STUDY OF HOMOSEXUALITY
OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

In the Matter of the Appropriate Language Concerning the Ordination of Nonheterosexual Clergy to the Specialized Ministry of the Word, Sacrament, and Order of the United Methodist Church

SEE
BIBLICAL BRIEF

This was first submitted on October 9, 1990 with requested permission to the Committee on the Study of Homosexuality the General Conference of the United Methodist Church as mandated by the 1988 General Conference on October 9, 1990. It has been revised for United Methodists and Delegates to the 2016 General Conference.
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON THE STUDY OF HOMOSEXUALITY
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BIBLICAL BRIEF

INTRODUCTION

In the First Century of the Christian Church as the Gospel spread, the theological-sexual issue of adult circumcision threatened to divide the unity we share in Christ. It also became the principle context in which the First Century Church defined salvation by grace through faith as Apostles of Jesus, identified as our Lord and Savior, as the Messiah, as a High Priest in the Order of Melchizedek, and mediator of a New Covenant. See Galatians in its entirety. See Acts 10: to 11:18. See Romans 2:25 to 3:30 and following. See Hebrews 6:1 to 9:15 and following.

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1This Biblical Brief was written in a legal brief format, identifying the (1) Issue, (2) The Holding, (3) The Applicable Rule, and (4) The Rationale. It was first submitted to the Committee in 1990, and is revised for United Methodist members and for delegates to the 2016 General Conference. The attached Appendix contain legal “dicta,” not essential to the Rule.
In many ways the issues surrounding salvation and ordination in the human spectrum of sexuality, and homosexuality, in particular, offer the same threat but opportunity today.

Since 1988, and before, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church has voted to retain the following sentence to its Discipline, without any further qualifications, “Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed, practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church,” (The Book of Discipline 1984, Par 402.2. page 189.

In 1988, the General Conference mandated that a Committee on Homosexuality study and report back its recommendations regarding the implications of its study for the language of both the Social Principals and Discipline.

**ISSUE**

The issue included in that mandate that I want to address is the following:

Is the language that prohibits all self-identified homosexuals from ordination consistent with the experience of Jesus as our personal, Lord and Savior, and as a High Priest in the Order of Melchizedek, and with the self understanding of Jesus that he came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law.

If this language is not consistent, what is the appropriate language for the
2016 General Conference to adopt.

BACKGROUND

This continues to be a difficult issue, where there appears little progress. The 2008 Book of Discipline allows for human frailties among heterosexual clergy, but not for anyone else. Paragraph 304.4 of the 2008 Book of Discipline puts it like this:

While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church. ²

The 2012 Book of Discipline, Par 304.30, page 220 adopts the same language as follows:

While persons set apart by the church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United

²At the same time, Judicial Council Decisions 702, 708, 722, 725, 764, 844, and 984 made no distinction between “a self-acknowledge practicing homosexual” from a “self-avowed practicing homosexual,” nor did any of the General Conferences from Decisions 702 to 984.” See 2008 Book of Discipline, page 206, fn 1
Methodist Church.

To this prohibition is added the weight of Judicial Council Decisions No. 985, 1020, 1027, 1028 (2012 Book of Discipline, page 220, fn 1 and 2).

Clearly, this issue must be resolved by the General Conference in the Book of Discipline, and not Judicial Council Decisions. Yet, nowhere is there any recognition in the 2012 Book of Discipline of homosexual sexual practices that are loving and caring and consistent with the teachings of Jesus.

If there is a sign of hope in the 2012 Book of Discipline, it is found in the Preamble to the Social Principles not previously found in the 2008 Book of Discipline. It is quoted in its entirety in the Preface above.

These provisions recognize the fact that whenever significant differences of opinion among faithful Christians that divide the church deeply occur, neither surprise nor dismay should be allowed to separate church members one from another, nor should those differences be covered over by false claims of consensus and unanimity.

Instead, the 2012 Discipline included a commitment to stand united in declaring our faith that God’s grace is available to all, that nothing can separate any of us from the love of God, and to continue to be in respectful dialogue with those with whom we disagree, to explore the sources of our differences, to honor
the sacred worth of all persons, and to be honest about our divisions as we continue to seek the mind of Christ and to do the will of God in all things.

Because this issue continues to be difficult at many levels of the United Methodist Church from the Judicial Council to the General Conferences, let me briefly introduce myself before proceeding. As a lawyer, I identify with Paul, but I also write as “born again, crucified, resurrected, Pentecostal, Evangelical United Brethren United Methodist.”

“Born again” because I can take you to the spot between where the church building used to be and the parsonage of the Immanuel Evangelical United Brethren Church four miles east of Blue Earth, Minnesota where I had my “born again” experience that “God is Love.”

“Crucified and resurrected” because I know a little about suffering and pain, including crucifixions of my dreams and the resurrections of God’s possibilities.

“Pentecostal” because I have waited patiently for this moment. For, we are all a “crucified, resurrected, and Pentecostal” people.

“Evangelical” because I experience “salvation by faith through grace,” not by sacraments or works alone, and because I was born into the Evangelical United Brethren Church. I was named after my grandfathers, who were ministers in the Evangelical Association, and the Evangelische Gemeinschaft
before both the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the United Methodist Church came to be. So, I am “evangelical” both in heritage and self understanding.

I also identify with the Apostle Paul for just as Paul had his thorn-flesh that would not leave him, so I have mind.

I read the Bible as dynamic Salvation History, and on this issue, I offer my thinking theologically as a lawyer, and confess only Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior. For where some have said, “Jesus was silent,” I see an abundance of precedence in what Jesus said and did regarding those called to ordination in the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order, whether heterosexual or non-heterosexual, and in all his ethical teachings, he taught a unified sexual ethic applicable to all.

Where some rest upon or tumble over frequently quoted texts, attributed to Paul, the lawyer that he was, I offer as best I can the same theological legal perspective that Paul as a lawyer, would bring to this issue today.

 SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

1. I find the present ordination language theologically unworthy of the teachings of Jesus and the First Century Church, and to our witness of salvation by grace through faith, so that it is an obstacle to dynamic revival and
witness at this time.

2. This is because Jesus is Lord, not Peter or Paul. Therefore, the first inquiry of any person for ordination, whether heterosexual or non-heterosexual, practicing or not, is to the vow to love the Lord thy God with Heart, Soul, and Mind above all else (Deuteronomy 6:5); to love their Neighbor as thy Neighbor as theyself (Leviticus 19:18); and to love and serve others the way that Jesus showed how to love and serve others (John 14:12; Matthew 20:28).

3. Since the social principles already state, “We seek for every individual opportunities and freedom to love and be loved, to seek and receive justice, and to practice ethical self-determination” (2012 Book of Discipline Par 161E, page 110), they already support a single standard applicable to all. Therefore, no one shall be denied ordination on the basis of their sexual self-identification and practice, so long as they seek to practice their own sexuality consistent with the teachings and guidance of Jesus regarding love, responsibility, faithfulness, commitment, willingness to sacrifice for others, with non-exploitation of themselves or others, and with a sense of levity and with forgiveness.

4. This single standard is firmly rooted in the theological understanding of salvation as a free gift of God.

5. This single standard is consistent with the provisions of our Social
Principles, to which there is broad consensus for we already say “We affirm that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons...” “We affirm that all persons are of sacred worth created in the image of God...” “We affirm that God’s grace is available to all...” ‘We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving and loving one another as Christ has loved us and accepted us.” (2012 Book of Discipline, Par 161F, pages 110-111)

6. This single standard is consistent with the traditional Wesleyan questions used to confirm the call to ordination by candidates as set forth in the Discipline Paragraph 310(1)(d) at 224:

   (1) Do they know God as a pardoning God? Have they the love of God abiding in them? Do they desire nothing by God? Are they holy in all manner of conversation?

   (2) Have they gifts, as well as grace, for the work? Have they a clear, sound understanding; a right judgment in the things of God; a Just conception of salvation by faith? Do they speak justly, readily, clearly?

   (3) Have they fruit? Have they been truly convicted of sin and converted to God, and are believers edified by their Preaching?

7. This single standard is already incorporated in the eight crucial steps for ordination, including the use of psychological and aptitude tests as appropriate. These eight crucial steps are: (1) self-examination; (2) recommendation of a local Pastor Parish Relations Committee; (3) Approval of
a local Charge Conference; (4) recommendation of the District Committee on Ordained Ministry; (5) recommendation of a Conference Board of Ordained Ministry; (6) approval by an Annual Conference of probationary status; (7) recommendation of the Board of Ordained Ministry; and (8) election by an Annual Conference to ordination as an elder.

8. This single standard is already embodied in the existing agreement ("covenant") of all ordained persons to make a complete dedication to the highest ideals of Christian life, to exercise responsible self-control by personal habits conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional stability, . . . and growth in the grace and knowledge and love of God." since 1984, and before then (See 1984 Book of Discipline, Par 404 fn 3, page 192)

9. This single standard is not a lesser standard. Rather, it is standard more worthy of discipleship of Jesus Christ. "For God so loved the world, that Jesus came not to condemn the World, but that the World through Him might be saved." John 3:17.

ARGUMENT

In approaching this particular ordination issue as an evangelical, the fundamentalist perspective is helpful in reading the Bible as dynamic Salvation History, and inspired scripture. But when fundamentalists seek to prove
themselves by quoting scripture, oftentimes, they are not fundamentalist enough.

For too often the Living Bible becomes a dead Monolith, as if God can be confined to this verse or that verse, to this scripture or that, or to this time, this religion, this planet, or even this universe. As if Jesus only said this or did that.

Likewise, in approaching this particular ordination issue as evangelical, the liberal perspective is helpful in reading the Bible as dynamic Salvation History, and inspired scripture. But when liberals “demythologize texts,” oftentimes, they are not liberal enough. For too often the Living Bible becomes a distant and equally dead Icon, as if God was not present in this verse or that verse, in this scripture or that scripture, in that time, in this religion, on this planet, in this universe. As if Jesus did not say this or do that.

Therefore, we begin from the common point, that the Bible is dynamic Salvation History and that for us, as Christians, Jesus is Lord, not Peter or Paul. For Peter said: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:16) and Paul forever considered himself no more than as “servant of Jesus” and “slave of God” (Romans 1:1 and Titus 1:1).

For in Jesus, as Christians, we see the culmination of the Messianic vision of the Old Covenant with Abraham through Moses (John 1:41) and as the mediator of a New Covenant through a personal sacrifice as a High Priest by
descent of Melchizedek and the power of indestructible Life (Hebrews 5:5-6; 6:20; 7:15-17). And we also begin on the common ground of authority under our United Methodist Heritage: Reason (or Revelation), Experience, Scripture, Tradition.

1. Jesus is Lord, not Peter or Paul: “The Good Samaritan Incarnate”

Speaking evangelically as a lawyer, the first inquiry regarding the ordination of non-heterosexual persons is the application of the Great Commandment so identified by Jesus: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these commandments depend all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40). All other teachings of Jesus are specific applications of these commandments.

We also begin with the New Commandment of Jesus as it regards his disciples, regardless of sexuality, as applied to ordination for both heterosexual or non-heterosexual persons alike: “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34-35) For this is the mark of all ordained persons, whether ordained in the general
ministry of the United Methodist Church or the specialized ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order.

Therefore, we may look to the parable that Jesus used to explain specific application of the First Two Commandments regarding this issue and ask: Do non-heterosexual persons (whether homosexual, bisexual, transgender, transexual or other) come within the Discipleship of the Good Samaritan with regards to the specialized ministry of Word, Sacrament and Order? Jesus’ teaching in response to a lawyer’s question is reported in Luke as follows:

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now, by chance a priest was going down the road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So, likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

“But a Samaritan, as he journeyed came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.

“Which of these three, do you think proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robber.” He said, “The one who showed mercy on him.” (Luke 10:25-37)

Why did Jesus use a Samaritan to be the Disciple of Love? Before the
question from the lawyer, Luke tells us, a village of Samaritans would not even receive Jesus. James and John ask Jesus if it should be burned down (Luke 9:51-56). Earlier, in Jesus self-understanding of ministry, according to Matthew 10:5-10, he charged his disciples to “go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but only go the lost sheep of Israel.” This was also Jesus’ Self-understanding when asked by a Syro-phoencian woman to heal her daughter. In reply, we are told Jesus refused, that he was sent only to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” So, he refused her plea for help, calling her a “Gentile dog” until she begged him further to heal his daughter, for even “dogs eat the crumbs from the master’s table (Matthew 15:21-29)

So, why did Jesus use a Samaritan to be the Disciple of Love in his teaching about the Great Commandment of Love toward God and toward others?

One answer is found in the witness of the Syro-phoenician Canaanite women to Jesus, through whom God revealed to Jesus a depth of Gentile faith and love Jesus had previously experienced, so Matthew tells us.

Another answer is found sometimes after the encounter with this Gentile women and before the Lawyer’s question. According to Gospel of Luke, Jesus and his disciples were going through Samaria. Jesus was thirsty. He asked a Samaritan woman to draw water for him from a well. She had five heterosexual
married relationships and was living in an unmarried relationship. Yet, to this women, it is written that Jesus identified herself as the Messiah, the Christ. Se became a Disciple “ordained” as it were by Jesus to the special ministry of the Word. We are told that Jesus stayed there two days, and any believed because of her special ministry of the word (John 4:7-42).

**Nowhere else in the biblical record**, but the syro-phoenician and the Samaritan woman do we find authority to understand wh Jesus used a Samaritan to illustrate the Two Great Commandments of Love and the New Commandment by Jesus to his disciples. What are the implications to the United Methodist Social Principles and *Discipline* for Ordination into the specialized ministry of the Word, Sacrament, and Order.

**IT IS THIS:** If there are non-heterosexual persons (whether Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or other LGBTQ) who hear and respond to the call of God as disciples of Jesus --as we know there are --to be ordained in the discipleship of Service and Love (like the Good Samaritan), who then is this General Conference to make dogmatic theological formulations to exclude them?

If there are non-heterosexual persons (whether Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or other LBBTQ) who hear and respond to the call of God as disciples of Jesus --and we know there are --to be ordained in the specialized
ministry of the Word (like the Samaritan woman ordained by Jesus), who then who is this General Conference to make dogmatic theological formulations to exclude them? There is no one.

If Jesus be alive as a personal savior, as we say he is, the answer will come: “Ask and it shall be revealed. . . Knock and the door will open.” (Matthew 7:7)

The answer may come from an expected source, like a Good Samaritan Unaware or even in a United States Supreme Court Decision.

This writer’s Good Samaritan unaware was young, gay, and flamboyant. In his writer’s opinion, there was no closet big enough to hide in. He was known to this writer only because he was within a large circle of my heterosexual friends.

This writer’s heterosexual friend was not one to judge others by their sexual orientation. He had a wonderful social conscience and sense of humor. His life was full, but he was like the man beset by robbers on the road to Jericho for in those pre-AIDS days he was attacked by a rare form of lymph node canc that eventually invaded his bone marrow. My friend did everything he could to treat the cancer. Eventually, the pain was excruciating.

My heterosexual friend and his family was unchurched. So, the “priest” did not see him and walked by.

My commitment was strong, and I was churched. However, I lived in San
Francisco and my heterosexual friend lived in Modesto, California, and I had other commitments of family and school. I was like the “levite.” Even when I visited, my visits were limited. Even when I told him, I wanted to walk this walk with him, it was a limited visit. I could witness to God’s by word and deed, but it was always limited. I was like the Levite.

So, it was the homosexual friend who proved to be the Good Samaritan, whose lifestyle, and lack of heterosexual family commitments enabled him to work as a volunteer, unpaid home care nurse from the time that Chris could no long live until the end day, which I received a telephone call from Michael, “Chris wants you to know you are here.”

Several hours later I received a second call from Michael. Chris reported that Michael had died, and Michael described in this way. He felt, he said, like he could thrust his fist through the wall.

Several months later, I realized that I had met my Good Samaritan Incarnate unaware in Michael, not some sermon illustration, but for real. If there was room at the Table for me, as I assumed there was, there must certainly was a seat for Michael. And my scales of blindness fell away. Then, scripture opened itself up for me so that where I had seen little, now I saw much. How then do I apply the Parable of the Good Samaritan in the context of homosexuality to
ordination of Word, Sacrament and Order in the United Methodist Church? It is to the one who administered the sacrament to my friend.

So not only the teaching of Jesus on love of God and love others, but the Holy Spirit itself bears witness to those called to ordination “by what is in the heart and mind” (Hebrews 10:15,16). For what is in the heart and mind is no respecter of sexual orientation or practice, for all stand equal before God, inheritors of” the “free gift of eternal life” given to all. (Romans 6:23).

However, as powerful as Experience can be in illuminating scripture, it, itself, as authority is like building a house on sand. As strong and compelling as experience may seem to be as a bulwark for authority, it may take only one or two opposite experiences to leave us without fetters. So, we look to the rock of our salvation. See, for example, Romans 6:23; John 3:16; John 3:17. How could we so blind not to have seen this?

Therefore, there is no authority for making false distinctions among us regarding arbitrary prohibitions against ordination, for all are loved, are one in flesh and spirit, and by this love are known, one to another, and without qualification, for whosoever believes is born to eternal life.

Therefore, the Great Commandment of Love of God, and the Second unto it tolove others as one self, and the New Commandment of Jesus as
regards ordination are controlling authority. There is no greater authority for
discipleship in ordination. There is no greater assurance for Jesus assures us.

Illumination also comes by way of reason from unexpected sources. In the
2012 Discipline and before, the United Methodist Church, through careful
discernment and testimony declared that “All persons regardless of age, gender,
marital status, or sexual orientation are entitled to have their human and civil
rights ensured” (Par 161(F)) and “equal protection before the law” (Par 162(J)), and
stated, “We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons” (Par
161(F)).

On June 26, 2015, after a dozen years of legislation, and scores and scores
of reasoned argument, the United States Supreme Court decided the case of
Obergefell, et. al. v. Hodges, Director, Ohio Department of Health, et. al.
affirming the right of marriage between two people of the same sex on equal
protection grounds.

In order to minister for and with these persons, we must free ourselves of all
shackles that presently bind us, that prohibit such ceremonies in the United
Methodist Church Buildings, and prohibit United Methodists ministers from
performing such services, and prohibit ordination of non-heterosexual persons in
such acknowledged marriages. Reason and Experience also guide our Traditions.
2. The First Century Ordination Instructions

There are specific instructions concerning ordination of Bishops, Deacons, elders and ministers for the First Century Church that are attributed to Paul and set forth in Timothy 3:1-7). There, it appears, that Paul personally preferred that women be silent, not teach, and have no authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12) and that Bishops be husbands, although Paul himself may have been a widower.

These instructions attributed to Paul may have had some personal practical historical administrative value for First Century Church, but they do not address the ordination instructions that apply to self-acknowledged homosexual (and other nonheterosexual) clergy in the 21st Century Church.

Obviously, Paul never met the great women Bishops, District Superintendents and Preachers of the United Methodist Church. Paul, in all fairness to Paul, may also have lacked intimate knowledge concerning Jesus’ contact with the Samaritan woman and the Canaanite woman. So, far better is it in looking for guidance from the First Century ordination instructions, that we look to John, the youngest and most intimate disciple of Jesus, who wrote: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1)
For John also wrote concerning the ordained without distinction [and without distinctions between heterosexual and non-heterosexual persons]:

"Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in (that one) and (that one) abides in God. So, we know and believe the love God has for us. God is Love, and (the one) that abides in love abides in God.' (1 John 4:15-16).

3. The Gift of the Ordained Nonheterosexual Clergy to Heterosexuals.

This is far beyond my narrow vision; but let me suggest some of the more apparent gifts of the self-acknowledged practicing homosexual (or nonheterosexual) clergy regarding the appropriate ordination language:

(1) A pastoral, nonthreatening presence to women and children of abusive husbands and parents;

(2) A pastoral, threatening presence to abusive parents and spouses who worship their own dominance above love of God, neighbor, and spouse;

(3) A compassionate, pastoral ministry to those living with AIDS and to all persons with life terminal illnesses, a net that is cast large enough for all for life itself is terminal; and

(4) The possibility of a radical witness far beyond Paul’s witness to the uncircumcised Gentiles, to where even Angels fear to tread, for there is no love greater than that of a person who identifies all people as sisters and brothers.

20 & 21
**DICTA:** All Authorities and teachings that follow in the Appendix, Postscript, and Note are “Dicta.” That is, unlike the Great Commandment, the Second like Unto It, and the New Command, they are not essential to decide the issue of ordination before us. However, they may or may not be of some present or future benefit.

**APPENDIX TO BIBLICAL BRIEF**

We here examine Jesus’ other teachings and other authorities regarding heterosexual and non-heterosexual persons’ s Call to Ordination of the Word, Sacrament, and Order of the United Methodist Church.

1. **Jesus’ Specific Teachings in the Heterosexual Context**

In the Sermon on the Mount, concerning heterosexuality, Jesus taught:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that you whole body go into hell.” (Matthew 5:27-29)\(^1\)

Heterosexually speaking, this is not a particularly pleasant teaching. For if this were the standard, all ordained heterosexual males would be condemned to

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\(^1\)All references, unless otherwise stated, are to the New Revised Standard Version.
blindness and none would be ordained. For what ordained heterosexual male in the special ministry of Word, Sacrament and Order, or called to ordination has not looked upon a woman lustfully with sexual desire, consciously when awake or unconsciously when asleep?

Now, the first point that must be made concerning this teaching is that it is not a commandment for ordained clergy to “pluck out” their eyes.

This is because in the same teaching, Jesus also says: (1) “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14); (2) “You have heard it said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strike you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matthew 5:38, 39); (3) You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,’ But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Matthew 5:43, 44)” (4) “Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 6:1); and (5) “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you” (Matthew 6:14).

Second, it serves to remind of the inherent danger of “proof-texting” regarding this issue of ordination or any other issue. For the tempter took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple of the holy city, and (quoting from Psalms 91:11, 12)
said: “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written: “He will give his angels charge of you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike you foot against a stone.”’ (Matthew 4:5-6)

If Jesus resisted this temptation to mis-apply the Old Law to confirm his “ordination” by proof-texting, so ought heterosexual persons resist the temptation to “proof-text” concerning the ordination of non-heterosexual persons called to ordination, lest we place a burden upon others, that we cannot bear regarding our own sexual desires, and condemn ourselves to blindness.

Third, to paraphrase Jesus, “Woe to us, when we place a heavy burden on others that we ourselves cannot bear.” (Matthew 23:1-15). For concerning this teaching, Jesus also said: “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give out will be the measure you get.” (Matthew 7:1-2).

So, when the pharisees, the most devout religious leaders zealous in all manner of religious piety, presented Jesus with a woman caught in the act of adultery, and asked if she should be stoned to death according to the Law of Moses as a test of his authority, Jesus replied to them, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.” And we are told, that one by one, they left because none was without sin. (John 8:3-11).
Finally, it is helpful to read this teaching about heterosexual lust if we look to the purpose for which it was given. It was used to explain Jesus' self-understanding in relation to the law and prophets. For immediately before this teaching, Jesus said: “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. . . For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven.” (Matthew 5:17, 20).

It is also placed in Matthew as part of the continuing teaching from the Beatitudes to the Lords Prayer to the Admonition that “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven,” and the Promise that “everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be a wise man who built his house upon the rock.” (Matthew 7:21, 24).

Therefore, by this teaching, it may be said Jesus has provided specific authority that anyone who inwardly and outwardly seeks to do the will of God and is called by God may be ordained to the specialized ministry of Word, Sacrament and Order, without regard to sexual orientation or practice.

No one is excluded, not even heterosexual men with lustful thoughts.

2. Jesus' Teaching in the Non-heterosexual Context
Jesus also spoke regarding the *special fitness* of certain non-heterosexual persons for ordination in service to God. That is by his specific teaching in reference to eunuchs. Eunuchs were those persons on the spectrum of human sexuality, regardless of their sexual orientation, who did not reproduce, most frequently as a result of a genetic condition or castration by others.

This teaching is reported in Matthew toward the end of Jesus ministry. It appears after a discussion of divorce and marriage as follows:

"And the Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"

He answered, 'Have you not read that he who made from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one? So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.'

They said to him, 'Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?"

He said to them, 'For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.'

The disciples said to him, 'If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is expedient not to marry.'

But he said to them, 'Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given. *For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs*
by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it

(Matthew 19: 1-12, emphasis added)

Now this teaching of Jesus is not easily understood. For Jesus tells his disciples that not only are some eunuchs born that way from birth, but there are those who make eunuchs for the sake of the sake of God. However this teaching is particularly relevant to us on the issue of sexuality and ordination when we “leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on the maturity” (Hebrews 6:1), not resting on our individual “born again” experiences of undeserved grace, but building firmly on our experience as a crucifixion and resurrection Pentecostal people, who see Jesus as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets.

For all whose who believe are a “new creation” in Christ. So Philip instructed and baptized the Ethiopian eunuch who was an officer of the court without question (Acts 8:27-38). For there is no distinction according to sexuality, heterosexuality, or non-heterosexuality). “Since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” (Romans 3:22-24).

For under the law of Moses it was written:“No one whose testes are crushed
crushed or whose member is cut off shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:3 from the Torah, as translated by the Jewish Publication Society of America).

But nevertheless, in Isaiah, the prophet writes: “And let not the eunuch say, “Behold I am a dry tree.” For thus says the Lord: “To the eunuchs who keep the sabbaths, who chose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off.” (Isaiah 56:3-5).

Who then are we to distinguish for purposes of ordination to the special ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order between eunuchs, heterosexuals, and non-heterosexuals who are called to ministry by God? For all children may be brought and blessed equally, whether their heterosexuality or non-heterosexuality is the manifestation of a genetic, biological, psychological, or sociological condition.

Indeed, what of those who make themselves (that is identify with) homosexuals, but do so as clergy for the sake of the Glory of God? What does Jesus’ teaching say about these?

If this teaching be too hard, Jesus immediately illustrated by saying:
"Let the children come to me." (Matthew 19:13) That is to say, no children are excluded, regardless of their sexual development, orientation, or practice, whether born that way or made that way. For to enter the kingdom of Heaven, we must all become as children again, regardless of our sexual identities and practices. (Matthew 19:14) That is also to say that the ethical teachings of Jesus are equally applicable to heterosexual or non-heterosexual people, clergy and non-clergy, regardless of our sexual identities and practices.

3 Jesus’ Interpretation and Application of Sodom and Gomorrah

Various interpretations and applications of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah have been made both by the heterosexual party and homosexual community. Jesus interpretation and application is recorded three times: (1) Matthew 10:15;

(2) Matthew 11:23; and (3) Luke 17:29. Here is what is written:

(1) In sending out the twelve, it is written that Jesus said:

“And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it, and stay with him until you depart. As you enter the house, salute it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if any one will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from you feet as you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.
(Matthew 10:5-15, emphasis added)

(2) In reference to the cities where Jesus did most of his mighty works, but the people had not repented, it is written that Jesus said:

"You shall be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."

(Matthew 11:20-24, emphasis added)

(3) In reference to the coming of the Kingdom of God, it is written that Jesus said:

"Just as it was the days of Noah, so too will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise just as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed all of them—it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, anyone on the housetop, who has belongings in the house must not come down to take them away; and likewise anyone in the field must not turn back. Remember Lot’s wife. Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it. I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding meal together; one will be taken and other left."

(Luke 17:20-37, emphasis added)

So, everyone can interpret these references to Sodom and Gomorrah for themselves, but no one can say Jesus interpreted or applied the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as authority for condemnation of people on the bases of their sexual...
orientation or practices.

Indeed, Jesus’ understanding of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is quite specific. The first interpretation and application was in reference to those who did not welcome his disciples. The second was in reference to those who personally witnessed his mighty deeds, but did not recognize them. The third was in reference to those who were so consumed in gaining life by eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building, they did not recognized the Son of Man and for them the Kingdom of God will be lost and taken away.

Even in the present time, we have witnessed the destruction of powerful and righteous preachers praising the Lord and proclaiming the Kingdom of God, who were not honest about their own sexual issues.

And one can only speculate how Jesus might have interpreted the San Francisco Earthquake of 1989 in which the Castro and Polk Districts stood firm, but the Marina District crumbled, if Jesus had not already taught that: (1) A house built on rock with stand, while a house built on sand will crumble; (2) the rain falls equally on the righteous and unrighteous; (3) the wind blows where it will; and (4) if Jesus had not already promised us that midst of destruction, we can still see the smiling face of God. For we are witness to these things “here and now.” Yet, how quickly we forget.
So we apply Jesus’ interpretation of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah to stand as equals before God with those disciples whom God has call to enter into ministry and to ordination of the Word, Sacrament, and Order for the Kingdom of God, without distinction between heterosexual and non-heterosexual persons.

4. Jesus’ Teaching on Sexuality and the New Covenant

The issue of sexuality and ordination brings us to a more fundamental and evangelical proclamation regarding the “human condition” rooted in the teaching of Jesus to free us from the “yoke of slavery” as Paul describes it in Galatians 5: 1. For in the Gospel of John, there is reported the following encounter between Jesus and a person blind from birth:

“As he walked along, he saw a man blind from his birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’

Jesus answered “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. (Then, he gave him sight)

(John 9:1-5, emphasis added)

The question was asked because the vision of the disciples under the Old Covenant was a limited vision. (This was not the Old Covenant, but it was the disciples’ understanding of the Old Covenant). For Jesus’ disciples believed that
the physical condition of a person was a manifestation of sin, evidencing a
broken spiritual relationship between the Creator and Created: either (1) from the
sins of the parents visited on their children to the third and fourth generation (See
Deuteronomy 5:9 from the Torah) or (2) as a result of the sins of people visited
upon themselves (See, for example, Deuteronomy 8:19 from the Torah. Even in
Job, the question was: Will the righteous worship God only so long as God
answers prayer (Job 1:8-11). So Job was put to the test.

Therefore, under the Old Covenant, to Job there came the understanding
that a person's condition was not to be held against him, even it was portrayed or
experienced as nothing less a test between God and Satan. Job suffered until the
Lord spoke to him. Then, he heard and saw God, was renewed to old age (Job
42:1-17). But Jesus, in whom we see the presence of God as Love Incarnate,
suffered unto death by crucifixion, that the works of God might be manifested in
him.

So therefore, from Job to Jesus, there is no condemnation by God of any
people because of the biological, physical, or psychological condition. For Jesus
teaches that the human condition from birth, including one's sexuality, is not the
sin of the parent or of the person but it is an opportunity for the works of God to
manifest themselves for all of us, whether heterosexual or non-heterosexual. And
blindness can be lifted from each of us, so that we might see.

Who then are we to put obstacles in the way of anyone called to do the works of God by ordination into the special ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order? God is God. We are not. God calls to ministry and to ordination whom God will that the works of God may be manifest among us.

5. Jesus Teaching on the “New Reproductive Covenant”

For some the Old Reproductive Covenant between God and Abraham and Sarah to be fruitful and multiply (See Genesis 21:1) has been a stumbling block regarding the ordination of self-acknowledged homosexuals because they fear that non-heterosexual ordained clergy will lead people not to reproduce and into immoral practices. But it is the New Reproductive Covenant through Jesus that brings all people into the family of God (Matthew 12:46-50), honoring both those who marry and reproduce, as well as those who do not marry and reproduce, whether from birth, or made that way, or whether they have made themselves that way for the Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:11-12).

Therefore while the First Covenant through Abraham and Sarah was to be fruitful and multiply and to become the ancestor of many nations, the New Covenant through Jesus is to sow the Word throughout the whole world that all might be saved for the Word is known by the fruit it bears. And this word is the
New Commandment: “that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that
you also love one another. By this men will know that you are my disciples, if you
have love one for another.” (John 13:34-35).²

6. Other Teachings of Jesus to Remove Blindness and Regain Sight

Other relevant teachings of Jesus regarding the ordination of all people
without distinction between heterosexual and homosexual persons, are identified
and discussed below in “Just a Closer Walk . . . hear.” This includes an invitation
to some fourteen personal encounters with what Jesus said and did that is of
relevance to these issues taken from the Gospel of Mark.

This is important because the phrase, “The practice of homosexuality is
incompatible with Christian teaching.” was inserted in the Discipline without any
distinction of “homosexual practices” to which it refers and any identification of
“which Christian teachings” it refers, when in fact loving, caring, responsible,
non-exploitative practices of non-heterosexual persons like the same practices of
heterosexual persons are consistent with the teachings of Jesus.

These additional Christian teachings from some fourteen personal
encounters with Jesus support amendment of the Discipline to remove the

²This Appendix to the Biblical Brief was submitted with the Committee of
Homosexuality on the General Conference of the United Methodist Church on October 9, 1990.
prohibition against non-heterosexual clergy and support the adoption of a unified ethic that applies the teachings of Jesus to all relationships, including the most intimate sexual relations of heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals, without distinction. See Hamilton Proposed Amendments in "Just a Closer Walk...do" below.
DICTA TO BIBLICAL BRIEF:

POSTSCRIPT: Reflection on the First Century Church Today

1. Paul as Church Lawyer: Galatians as a theological-sexual case study

The study of Galatians is the prime case study of precedential value regarding the thinking of Paul on the theological sexual issue before General Conference 2016, as it was before the Committee on the Study of Homosexuality (not individual references attributed to Paul in Romans 1:26 or 1 Corinthians 6:9). This is because in Galatians, Paul rendered an “actual legal opinion” in the form of a legal opinion with precedential value on the only theological-sexual issue that came before him and before the First Century Church, much as the issue of the ordination of homosexual clergy was now before the Committee on the Study of Homosexuality under the mandate of the 1988 General Conference, and every General Conference since then, and is again now before General Conference 2016.

Everyone can read Galatians from their own perspective and reach their own conclusions. Here is how a lawyer would brief (read, outline, understand, apply) Galatians to the issue before Paul, and before us.

Facts: Paul = Apostle through Jesus Christ and God the Father (1:1)
   Other people preaching different Gospel than Christ (1:6-9)
   Paul = Advanced in Judaism (1:13-14)
   Sent to Gentiles by revelation of Jesus (1:15-17)
After 3 years, visited Peter and James only (1:18-24)
After 14 years, went to Jerusalem with Titus (2:1-10)
Titus was not required to be circumcised (2:3)
The Circumcision Party was spying re circumcision (2:4)
James, Cephas (Peter) and John: Pillars or Church 2:9)
Paul had been commission to go to un-circumcised (2:9)
Peter, James and John went to circumcised (2:9)
Cephas (Peter) feared the Circumcision Party (2:11-13)
Cephas acted in insincerely apart from Gentiles (2:11-3)

**Issue:** Paul phrased the issue, not as one of circumcision, but as follows:
Did you receive the Spirit by work of the law, or by hearing with faith? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you, and works miracles among you do so by works of law or by hearing with faith? (3:2-16)

**Holding:** By hearing with faith.

**Rule**
Christ has set us free (5:1) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision or un-circumcision is of an avail, but faith working through love (5:6)

**Rationale:**
God justified Abraham by Grace and gospel first (3:6-9)
Christ redeemed us from the curse of law (3:10-14).
In Christ blessing of Abraham came to Gentiles (3:14)
Law came 430 years after Promise, did not void covenant (3:17)
Law confines, but Sons of God through Faith (3:23-26)

**In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, but all are as heirs according to Promise to Abraham (3:28-29)**
Through God we are adopted children, formerly slaves (4:4)
Call to Freedom: Fulfillment of Law in Love (5:13-15)

**Rule**
Restatement: For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor un-circumcision , but a new creation (6:25)

**Benediction:** Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule (6:11)
The precedential value of Galatians today: When Paul writes there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave not free, neither male nor female, but all are one as heirs according to the Promise, and that neither circumcision nor un-circumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is being a new creation, Paul is writing with a broad brush. Paul is stating that neither heterosexuality counts for anything, nor non-heterosexuality, but being a new creation, because the rule extends to all distinctions that otherwise divide people.

Furthermore, in arguing his case, Paul goes on to argue with only the perverse sense of humor of a grace-redeemed lawyer: “I wish whose who unsettle you would mutilate themselves.” (Galatians 5:11-12).

Then Paul regains his perspective and concludes his Letter to the First Century Galatians Church, as I submit he would address the Twenty-first Century United Methodist Church regarding its prohibition of non-heterosexual clergy:

“For you were called to freedom, brothers [and sisters]; only do not use your freedom as on opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You shall love your neighbors as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another (Galatians 5:13-15)

For this is what has happened with the United Methodist Church. Where
clergy and laity, heterosexual and non-heterosexual alike should through love be
servants one for another, heterosexual clergy and laity have used the Book of
Discipline to bite and devout one another, not only non-heterosexual clergy and
laity but also themselves, where we should be standing together as one in witness
to a world that is hungry for authentic love.

2. On Romans 1:16-27

As a lawyer, who identifies with Paul, I can get impatient with those who
read Romans and quote only Romans 1:26, translated in the new revised standard
version to read: “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passion. Their
women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up
natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another,
men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the
due penalty of their error,” as if this were the only verse in Romans or the Bible.

But what else did Paul write in Romans about people who sit in judgment of others
in this manner? For Paul wrote: “Therefore, you have no excuse, whoever you
are when you judge others; for in passing judgement on another, you condemn
yourself.” (Romans 2:1)

For Paul also wrote: (1) “to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory
and immortality, he will give eternal life.” (Romans 2:7); (2) “Both Jews and
Greeks [and by this we may include heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals alike] are under the power of sin. As it is written: None is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:9-10; (3) “the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” (Romans 3:21-22); (4) “For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ” Romans 3:23-24).

I could resort to Paul's perverse sense of humor toward those heterosexual clergy and laity, who have made false distinctions between themselves and non-heterosexual brothers and sisters, embedding them in the Book of Discipline to discriminate against, inhibit, and persecute non-heterosexual brothers and sisters from answering calls to ministry.

But my “Cloud of Witnesses” teaches me to continue to read the scripture together for God has not abandoned this church. Even in this, Paul writes:

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28)

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37)

“For neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus
our Lord.” (Romans 8:347-9:2)

So, General Conference 2016 presents another opportunity for the United Methodist Church to respect differences, discern the active presence of the Promised Advocate in its midst, and present a unified witness to the world that we are One in the Lord.

3. On 1 Corinthians 6:9

As an attorney, who identifies with Paul, I can also get impatient at those who quote 1 Corinthians 6:9 as if it were the only relevant verse in 1 Corinthians or the Bible, translated in the revised standard version as follows:

“Do you not know the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God? (1 Corinthians 6:9, revised standard version)

but translated in the new revise standard version as follows:

“Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9, new revised standard version)

This list, itself, is strange. Immediately after this list, Paul writes that this is what some of the Corinthians had been doing, but were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus. Immediately before 1 Corinthians 6:9, Paul
addressed the settling of grievance among the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:1-8), and immediately before that Paul wrote advising the Corinthians to not associate with anyone bearing the name of a brother or sister who was “sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard or robber (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

So, this appears directed to the ethical misconduct of heterosexual and non-heterosexual persons alike, not ethical conduct of heterosexual and non-heterosexual persons.

Translation by the revised standard version, which translated two Greek words into the English word, “homosexual,” added to the confusion, whereas the new revised standard version translation, “male prostitutes” and “sodomites” is closer to making the distinction of ethical versus unethical conduct.

Immediately thereafter, Paul proclaims that “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial.” and “All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything.” What follows are very specific instructions against fornication and heterosexual use of female prostitutes because the “body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you.” (1 Corinthians 6:12-20).

As a result, 1 Corinthians 6:9 provides support for a Sexual Ethic applicable to both heterosexual and non-heterosexual clergy; it does not support discrimination against ordination of non-heterosexual persons.
Paul’s writing in 1 Corinthians 6:9 must also be balanced the following advice, which he identified strictly as his personal opinion:

“I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind. (1 Corinthians 7:7)

“To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion (1 Corinthians 7:8)

“(L)et each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which the Lord has called you. This is my rule in all the churches.” (1 Corinthians 7:17)

We may assume that these opinions of Paul were delivered in a heterosexual context. We may also note they provide no support for, and contradict the present discipline discrimination against non-heterosexual persons called to ordination, and prohibit blessing of same sex wedding within the United Methodist Church.

4. “Inclusive” Reconciling and Transforming Congregations

Few personal journeys bear the significance to us as our spiritual and sexual journeys. For some of us, the spiritual journey precedes the sexual journey; for others the sexual journey precedes the spiritual. In very few do they proceed simultaneously together.

So, if the United Methodist Church is not a safe place for dealing with one’s
personal sexual issues, then it has nothing to offer to people who are a sexually-
spiritual and spiritually-sexual people to whom the Reproductive Covenant, old
and new, is given. We cannot be a church any other way.

The sexual development and journey of people is no less dynamic than the
spiritual development and journey. Some of us are heterosexual with homophobic
fears. Others are homosexual people, and with heterosexual guilt. And there are
some reaching beyond the boundaries of heterosexuality or homosexuality.

Some who have been subject to homosexual practices are moving toward
heterosexual practices. Some who have been enmeshed in heterosexual relations
are moving toward a new affirmation and fulfillment with a homosexual identity.
Yet others within the Body of Christ are called to ordination in the special ministry
of Word, Sacrament and Order and identify themselves as bisexual or transsexual.

All of us are moving toward ultimate convergence of sexual identity with
God in whose image each has been made. Think how diverse and wonderful this
God must be to unite us together as one family.

We are also animals of experimentation by nature. In one circumstance,
heterosexual. In another circumstance, non-heterosexual. For one purpose,
heterosexual. For another purpose, something other than heterosexual.

But if we be the personal representatives of Jesus called to special
ordination of Word, Sacrament, and Order, we have been crucified with Christ, yet entered in eternal life.

We may not always be able, but we are willing to live our life for each other.

5. On Oneness

Regardless of sexual orientation or identity or practice, at any given time, we are one in the Word. We, all of us, have proclaimed together, “In the Beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” (John 1:1). This is a proclamation of Oneness far greater than any boundaries that separate us on the sexual spectrum of human existence.

For if the Word was in the Beginning, it was, has been, and is being manifested in all places, all traditions, all religious experiences, all sexual expressions of life.

This requires language in the Discipline that does not discriminate but provides for all persons, called to ministry, under the ordination process. No one shall be denied ordination solely because of their sexual self-identification and practice. All clergy should be subject to One Ethic Standard consistent with the guidance and teachings of Jesus regarding love, responsibility, faithfulness, commitment, willingness to sacrifice for others, with non-exploitation of themselves and others, and with a sense of levity and forgiveness.
DICTA TO BIBLICAL BRIEF

NOTE ON THE HISTORY OF EVANGELICAL PROCLAMATION

In addressing the issue of ordination of non-heterosexual clergy, you may find it helpful to trace the Evangelical Proclamation by Faith through Grace. That is because it developed historically as the First Century Church dealt with the issue of circumcision.

This writersubmits it is the same issue, only in a different garb: Namely, salvation by Faith through Grace of heterosexual and non-heterosexual people alike, without distinction, and the adoption of appropriate language in the Social Principles and Discipline to reflect this reality and ordination, without distinction.

Paul and Barnabas were sent to minister among the gentiles and among the uncircumcised for fourteen years, while Peter and James ministered to the circumcised in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-30; Galatians 2:1-10). If there was an uncircumcised candidate for ordination in the First Century Church, and the evidence suggest there was, it was Titus, a companion of Paul (Galatians 2:3).

Paul’s understanding of Salvation by Faith through Grace was developed during his fourteen years of ministry among the Gentiles, on the basis of Revelation Reason, Experience, Scripture, Tradition articulated in Galatians. For
Paul, the issue was not a light issue. It went to the center of his understanding of “Freedom in Christ” (Galatians 3:2-5). The threat to Paul’s understanding of “Freedom in Christ,” “The Gospel of Christ,” and “Salvation by Faith through Grace” was from the Circumcision Party. They wanted to enforce male circumcision of Gentiles as a condition of entry into the Way of Jesus. This threat was real and is well documented (Titus 1:10-16).

Peter, unlike Paul, came to his understanding of Salvation by Faith through Grace, without distinction between the circumcised and uncircumcised by way of revelation in a dream followed by the experience of baptizing the uncircumcised Cornelius, confirmed by reason (Acts 10:1-45).

The circumcision party came to its understanding of Salvation by Faith through Grace, without distinction between the circumcised and uncircumcision, by reason through the testimony of Peter and Peter’s account of the baptism of Cornelius (Acts 11:18). First they were silenced. Then, they glorified God.

But others kept preaching circumcision. So, a General Council was called in Jerusalem. James presided. Peter, Paul, Barnabus and other Apostles and Elders attended (Act 15:1-6).

Peter addressed the Council (Act 15:6-2). So did Paul and Barnabus
(Acts 15:12). James proposed a solution that accommodated uncircumcised Gentiles so long as they contributed money to Jerusalem and did not eat food sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:13-21). The Apostles first, then the Elders, and finally the whole Church agreed (Acts 15:22). Then, elders and others were ordained, without regard to circumcision or uncircumcision.

But Paul, not satisfied by this administrative solution, and by Peter’s conduct relating one way to the circumcised and another way to the uncircumcised, wrote his Letter to Galatians to his beloved Galatians. It was his first major work. He actually took Peter to task, Then, he set forth the theological basis for “Salvation by Faith through Grace” and “Freedom in Christ” equally available without distinction between circumcised and uncircumcised, Greek and Jew, slave and free, male and female and all believers and to us. (Galatians 2:11-20).

We are now undergoing the same process in Christendom and in the United Methodist Church today with the same promise and danger as we enter the Twenty-First Century. United Methodist General Conferences have been held in 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, essentially stalemated. Some clergy have conducted same sex marriage. Some clergy have come out. There have been church trials. This has put an undue weight on the Church Judicial Process, and Judicial Council that should be resolved by delegates to General Conference.
The hope is that the 2016 General Conference will break this stalemate because testimony will be given so that “the Spirit” will be sufficiently tested to the satisfaction of the Heterosexual Party (Compare 1 John 4:1 and 15-16). For in the answering of their questions amidst the continued “testing” of the Spirits, lies the hope of a reawakened “evangelism: resting on the evangelical proclamation of Salvation by Faith through Grace, available to all, in which there is no distinction among us.

Am I overstating this case? I think not! For Paul returns to Salvation by Faith through Grace in Romans 2:1-24). There Paul acknowledges our common state of sin and the power of the gospel (Romans 1:14 to 2:12); honors law (Romans 2:13-25, 3:13) and circumcision (Romans 2:25-3:8), But then Paul goes on to a deeper discussion of the common state of the circumcised and uncircumcised (Romans 3:9-30); traces the primacy of Faith back to Abraham and Sarah (Romans 4:1-14: and concludes:

“That is why it depends on faith, in order the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all

(Romans 4:16)

In real terms, this means so the all the privileges and benefits of church membership, service opportunities, consecration of marriages, ordination into the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order are guaranteed to all, without
discrimination on the basis of heterosexuality or non-heterosexuality.

And as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:14-17

“For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; Therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live may no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and was raised up for them.

“From now, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view, even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new”

So, passage of the required supporting legislation on ordination before the 2016 General Conference is not a new vision. It is long overdue.

Date: October 9, 1990
Revised, June 15, 2015

Respectfully submitted,

Frederick C. Roesti
“JUST A CLOSER WALK ...

Part II: To hear more clearly

- An invitation to 14 relevant encounters with Jesus taken chronologically from the *Gospel of Mark*, and supplemented by other Gospels, on the subjects of this book.
## PART II: "HEAR"

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Postscript: The Witness of Paul and the social principles. . . . . . . . . . . . . 102
INTRODUCTION

This is an invitation to read, and perhaps read anew, and listen to what Jesus had to say and what he did that is relevant to the issues presented in this book, and it is an invitation to what the Living Jesus in our midst is saying and doing.

This is an in-house invitation to all United Methodists and delegates to General Conference of 2016 as we United Methodists continue to “test the spirits,” seek to embrace oneness where it is found, and respect differences that exist. For we are mindful that each person is precious in God’s sight, and not until Thomas was satisfied, and Paul converted, and Peter baptized Cornelius and gave witness to the satisfaction of the Circumcision Party did the First Century Church embrace Jew and Gentile as one.

Part II, Hear, follows the chronology in Mark because Mark is the first composite account of Jesus life, supplemented by the other gospels.

Part II, Hear, follows the United Methodist Quadrilateral: Reason (revelation), experience, scripture, tradition. In this way, it seeks to hear what Jesus, the Living Jesus, is saying to his church today because in speaking of his own death, he reassured his disciples and us, that in his absence, the Comforter, the Advocate, would come to us and upon us, so that Spirit of Truth would come
and guide us (John 16:7-14)

Therefore, each chapter title identifies the subject of the chapter. Each chapter contains four parts: (1) The scripture translated from both the Authorized King James Version and the New Revised Standard Version; (1) A commentary by the writer from his personal encounter with the text; (2) A space for a commentary by the reader and his or her personal encounter with the text; and (4) Each chapter closes with a witness from our tradition form the text of a United Methodist hymn from the United Methodist Hymnal.

SUGGESTED APPROACH

Look at the title of the chapter.

Take time with the scripture, both in the Authorized King Version and the New Revised Standard Version. Circle or underline key words that relate the title (the topic) of the chapter. This is where the account of Jesus’ words and actions is found. Ponder them.

Even though the writer’s commentary is listed first, do not hesitate write your commentary first. This is where you will find the most benefit. Reflect on your commentary and the writer’s commentary.

Then read or sing the closing hymn from out tradition.

This approach can be used individually or in groups.

This writer emphasizes this approach because there in thing of which
he is certain. It is this. He might stimulate interest with his commentary, but if this invitation to some fourteen encounters with Jesus is helpful to the bridging of the theological divide among us, it will not be due to any persuasiveness on the part of this writer. It will be due to the reader’s personal encounter with the Living Jesus, the Promised Advocate, and the Presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst as evident from the reader’s commentary, and from the significance of the hymns from our tradition to the reader.
Chapter 1. The One Great Fellowship Of Love

Read: Mark 7:24-30; Acts 10:1-34; Acts 15:1-20; Romans 10:12-14

I give thanks for the Christ for whom there is no East or West, no North or South, but one great Fellowship of Love. I write to a Church united but divided and squabbling over homosexual people called to ministry and homosexual members who ask for their pastor to celebrate Holy Unions and marriages centered on Christ, much like the squabbles among the beloved disciples of Jesus, for whom, Jesus laid down his life and gave himself up for arrest, trial and crucifixion.

Looking backwards, reading the Gospel accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus, it seems obvious that in Christ, there is “no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.” For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:12-14). But we know from scripture that was not self-evident to the disciples of Jesus and it was not self-evident to Jesus, until the Syro-Phoenician woman confronted him with her love for her daughter (Mark 7:24-30).

The scripture tells us that it was not self-evident to Peter—not even after the full experience of the life, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus —until the Holy Spirit came to Peter in a vision (Acts 10:1-34). Nor was it self-evident to Saul until he witnessed the martyrdom of Stephen and Jesus came to Saul on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19), and Saul became Paul and Paul met Titus, and the power of the promised Advocate spoke through Paul in the Letter to the Galatians and in his testimony to the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15:1-20; Romans 1:14 to 3:30).

This did not happen over night. Paul documents a period of seventeen years between his conversion and the beginning of his missionary work among the Gentiles and the Jerusalem Council in his letter to Galatians. Here is what the historical record of these events from the scripture accounts recorded in Acts 10:10-28; Acts 15:1-20; and Romans 10:12-14 reports:

King James Version

Acts, 10: 10: “And [Peter] became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.
11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four

New Revised Standard Version

Acts 10:10; “[Peter] became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by
corners, and let down to the earth:
12 Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild
beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of
the air.
13 And there came a voice to him,
Rise, Peter; kill and eat.
14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I
have never eaten any thing that is
common or unclean.
15 And the voice spake unto him again
the second time, What God hath
cleansed, that call not thou common.
16 This was done thrice: and the vessel
was received up again into heaven.
17 Now while Peter doubted in himself
what this vision which he had seen
should mean, behold, the men which
were sent from Cornelius had made
inquiry for Simon’s house and stood
before the gate,
18 And called, and asked whether
Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were
lodged there.
19 While Peter thought on the vision,
the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three
men seek thee.
20 Arise therefore, and get thee down,
and go with them, doubting nothing: for
I have sent them.
21 Then Peter went down to the men
which were sent unto him from
Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he
whom ye seek: what is the cause
wherefore ye are come?
22 And they said, Cornelius the
centurion, a just man, and one that
feareth God, and of good report among
all the nation of the Jews, was warned
from God by an holy angel to send for
thee into his house, and to hear words of
thee.
23 Then called he time in, and lodged
its four corners.
12 In it were all kinds of four-footed
creatures and reptiles and birds of the
air. 13 Then he heard a voice saying,
‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ 14 But
Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord; for I
have never eaten anything that is
profane or unclean.’ 15 The voice said
to him again, a second time, ‘What God
has made clean, you must not call
profane.’ 16 This happened three
times, and the thing was suddenly taken
up to heaven.
17 Now while Peter was greatly
puzzled about what to make of the
vision that he had seen, suddenly the
men sent by Cornelius appeared. They
were asking for Simon’s house and
were standing by the gate. 18 They
called out to ask whether Simon, who
was called Peter, was staying there. 19
While Peter was still thinking about the
vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Look,
three men are searching for you. 20
Now get up, go down, and go with them
without hesitation; for I have sent
them.’ 21 So Peter went down to the
men and said, ‘I am the one you are
looking for; what is the reason for your
coming?’
22 They answered, ‘Cornelius, a
centurion, an upright and God-fearing
man, who is well spoken of by the
whole Jewish nation, was directed by a
holy angel to send for you to come to
his house and to hear what you have to
say.’ 23 So Peter invited them in and
gave them lodging.

The next day he got up and went with
them, and some of the believers from
Joppa accompanied him. 24 The
following day they came to Caesarea.
Cornelius was expecting them and had
them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. 24 And the morrow after they entered into Caes-a-re’a. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. 25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshiped him. 26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. 27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. 28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Acts 15:1-20: “And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. 2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. 3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phé-ni’ce and Sa-ma’ri-a, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. 4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 On Peter’s arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. 26 But Peter made him get up, saying, ‘Stand up; I am only a mortal.’ 27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; 28 and he said to them, ‘You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.
done with them.
5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.
6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.
7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.
8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;
9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.
10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?
11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.
12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.
13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:
14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.
15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written.
16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build them. 5 But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.'

6 The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. 7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. 8 And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; 9 and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. 10 Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? 11 On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.'

12 The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 After they finished speaking, James replied, 'My brothers, listen to me. 14 Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. 15 This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written,
16 “After this I will return,
And I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from
again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:
17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.
18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.
19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:
20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollution of idols, and from fornication and from things strangled, and from blood.

Romans 10: 10: “For with the heart of man believeth unto righteousness: and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall be saved.
12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.
13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved..

its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, 17 so that all other peoples may seek the Lord--Even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things 18 known from long ago.”
19 Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, 20 but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled.

Romans 10: 10: “For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11 The scripture says, ‘No one who believes in him will be put to shame.’ 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek: the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved,”

Commentary by Writer

The genius of the United Methodist Church is that we, too, have a General Conference process that allows for witnessing and questioning and “testing of spirits” until all questions are answered regarding full inclusion of all people, heterosexual and nonheterosexual alike, in the United Methodist Church, so that together we may be One in the Fellowship of Love and give Witness to what we know is true in our own lives.

This commentary is designed to encourage a personal interaction with the Word, not unduly distracted by commentary, but I also write to bear witness to this Word, as I have received it and to speak in direct and plain and meaningful language that can unite us in a much deeper understanding of what it means to be New Creations in Christ so that
Jesus speaks to us, His Church, today, so that scales of blindness peel away, blind eyes see, deaf ears hear, and silent voices speak.

For "(T)he Bible carries its full message, not to those who regard it simply as a noble literary heritage of the past or who wish to use it to enhance political purposes and advance otherwise desirable goals, but to all persons and communities who read it so that they may discern and understand what God is saying to them. That message must not be disguised in phrases that are no longer clear, or hidden under words that have changed or lost their meaningfulness; it must be presented in language that is direct and plain and meaningful to people today, helping them to understand and believe and respond to its message." (From Bruce Metzer, Committee of Translators, Harper Collins Study Bible (New Revised Standard Version).

Where do we go to meet Jesus? Let me suggest that we begin with The Gospel of Mark. This is because it is the first full historical Gospel written that tells the Story of Jesus’ life, chronologically, without later embellishments. Then, we will go to the other Gospels that “flesh in” this account in Mark with other recollections and sources that provide a deeper understanding of what Mark tells us about Jesus and what Jesus has to say on the subject of homosexual and lesbian disciples and pastors and Holy Unions and Marriages between his committed disciples. This will also lay a firm foundation for the Fellowship of Love, one for another, without distinction.
Commentary by Reader
So together we sing with the Fellowship of Saint:

**Witness from Our Tradition**

"The Churches One Foundation"

The Church’s one foundation in Jesus Christ her Lord
She is his new creation. By water and the word.
From heaven he came and sought her. To be his holy bride.
With his own blood he bought her. And for her life he died.

Elect from every nation, yet one o’er all the earth.
Her charter of salvation, One Lord, one faith, one birth.
One holy name she blesses. Partakes one holy food.
And to One hope she presses, with every grace endued.
Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation of peace forever more,
Til with the vision glorious, His longing eyes are blest.
And the great Church victorious shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy! Lord give us grace that we,
Like them, the meek and lowly, On high may dwell with thee.

(Written by Samuel J. Stone, 1839-1900; Music: Samuel S. Wesley, 1810-1876, The Methodist Hymnal, Board of Publication of the Methodist Church, 1966, page 297)

"In Christ There Is No East or West"

In Christ there is no east or west, In him no south or north;
But one great fellowship of love Throughout the whole wide earth.

In him shall true hearts everywhere Their high communion find;
His service is the golden cord Close binding all man-kind.

Join hands, then, brothers of the faith, What e’er your race may be.
Who serves my Father as a son Is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both east and west, In him meet south and north;
All Christly souls are one in him Through-out the whole wide earth.

Chapter 2. The Good News Of Jesus: Then And Now

Read Mark 1: 1-45

King James Version

Mark 1: 1, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God:
2. As it is written in the prophets, Behold
I send my messenger before thy face,
which shall prepare the way before thee.
3. The voice of one crying in the
wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the
Lord, make his path straight.
4. John did baptize in the wilderness and
preach the baptism of repentance for the
remission of sins.
5. And there went out unto him all the
land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and
were all baptized of him in the river of
Jordan, confessing their sins.
6. And John was clothed with camel’s
hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his
loins; and he did eat locust and wild
honey;
7. And preached, saying, “There cometh
one mightier than I after me, the latchet
of whose shoes, I am not worthy to stoop
down and unloose.
8. I indeed have baptized you with water;
but he shall baptize you with the Holy
Ghost.

The Baptism of Jesus

9. And it came to pass in those days, that
Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee,
and was baptized of John in Jordan.
10. And straightway coming up out of
the water, he saw the heavens open, and the
Spirit like a dove descending upon him;
11. And there came a voice from heaven,
saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in

New Revised Standard Version

Mark 1: 1, “The beginning of the good
news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2
As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
‘See, I am sending my messenger
ahead of you.
Who will prepare your way;
3 the voice of one crying out in the
wilderness:
“Prepare the way of the Lord,
Make his paths straight”.
4 John the baptizer appeared in the
wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of
repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5
And people from the whole Judean
countryside and all the people of
Jerusalem were going out to him, and
were baptized by him in the river Jordan,
confessing their sins. 6 Now John was
clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather
belt around his waist, and he ate locusts
and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, ‘The
one who is more powerful than I is
coming after me; I am not worthy to
stoop down and untie the thong of his
sandals. 8 I have baptized you with
water; but he will baptize you with
water; but he will baptize you with the
Holy Spirit.

The Baptism of Jesus

9 In those days Jesus came from
Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by
John in the Jordan.
10 And just as he was coming up out of
the water, he saw the heavens torn apart
and the Spirit descending like a dove on
whom I am well pleased.

*The Temptation of Jesus*

12. And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness.
13. And he was there in the wilderness forty days tempted by Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.

*The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry*

14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,
15 And saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

*Jesus Calls the First Disciples*

16 Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers.
17 And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.
18 And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.
19 And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James, the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets.
20 And straightway he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servantss, and they went after him.

him. 13 And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved: with you I am well pleased’.

*The Temptation of Jesus*

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

*The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry*

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news’.

*Jesus Calls the First Disciples*

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake--for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you for people’. 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 29 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.
The Man with an Unclean Spirit

21 And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught, 22 And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. 23 And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out. 24 Saying, Let us alone: what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. 25 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. 26 And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. 27 And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? for with authority he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they obey him. 28 And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region around Galilee.

Jesus Heals Many at Simon’s House

29 And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 But Simon’s wife’s mother lay sick of a fever; and anon they tell him of her. 31 And he came and took her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them. 32 And at even, when the son did set, they brought unto him all that were sick of possessed

Jesus Heals Many at Simon’s House

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. 32 That evening at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick of possessed
diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. 33 And all the city was gathered together at the door. 34. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.

A Preaching Tour in Galilee

35. And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. 36 And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. 37 And when they found him, they said unto him, All men seek they. 38 And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth. 39 And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.

Jesus Cleanses a Leper

40 And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. 41 And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will, be thou clean. 42 And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed. 43 And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; 44 And saith unto him, See, thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy

with demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

A Preaching Tour in Galilee

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 38 And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37 When they found him, they said to him, ‘Everyone is searching for you.’ 38 He answered, Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.’ 39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Jesus Cleanses a Leper

40 A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, ‘If you choose you can make me clean.’ 41 Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I do choose. Be made clean!’ 42 Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. 43 After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, 44 saying to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them. 45 But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the
cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.
45 But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

Commentary by Writer

The Gospel according to Mark begins with Jesus’ experience and self-awareness of anointment by God when he answers the call and is baptized by John the Baptist (Mark 1:11). Immediately thereafter, he is driven into the wilderness, where he undergoes a period of temptation about what it means (Mark 1:13-14).

Later, when John the Baptist is arrested, when others are silenced, Jesus begins to publicly proclaim the Good News: “The Time is Fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at Hand. Repent. Believe the Good News.” (Mark 1:14). Jesus calls fishermen to become disciples (Mark 1:15). Jesus goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath and teaches as someone with authority (Mark 1:21). Jesus is empowered. He silences unclean spirits (Mark 1:23-26). People are amazed at his teaching and authority. They ask questions about his teaching and authority (Mark 1:27-28). He experiences the power of his message and of the power of his own person. His fame spreads (Mark 1:29-37). He continues to teach in the synagogues and to heal and proclaim the Good News that the kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:38-39).

Jesus is emboldened. Moved with compassion, he heals a person with leprosy. He tells the man to give witness to the religious leaders and to give an offering to God, but to not tell others (Mark 1:38-45). In this way, Jesus gives full witness to the religious community about his anointing and the Good News he proclaims but resists the temptation of self-aggrandizement.

But what is this Good News? What is this kingdom of God? How is this teaching relevant to the narrow topic of this Commentary? How does it apply to people who are not heterosexual? How does it apply to Holy Unions and Marriages between men who are homosexual and women who are lesbian?

There are some who say that what Jesus did and said has no relevance to these questions. As a result, they look to lesser authorities, Peter or Paul and ignore what Jesus said and taught and for whom Jesus died. In their search of scripture for guidance on these questions, they either quote or misquote selected references attributed to Paul in
1 Corinthians 6:9 or Romans 1:24-27, or the Old Testament Holiness Code at Leviticus 18:22, 29. But these verses most often misquoted or misinterpreted should not dissuade

King James Version:
1 Corinthians 6:9: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, or idolaters, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,
10. Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God.

Romans 1:21: "(W)hen they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.
22: Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.
23. And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image make to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things.
24. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts to dishonour their own bodies between themselves.
25. Who changed the truth of God into a lie and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.
26. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:
27 And likewise, also the men, leaving the nature of the women, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.

Leviticus 18:22: Thou shalt not lie down with mankind as with womenkind, it is an abomination"
24:29: "For whosoever shall commit any any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from your people."

New Revised Standard Version
1 Corinthians 6:9: "Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers, --none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.

Romans 1:21: "(T)hough they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools; 23 and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.
24. Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.
25. For this reason, God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their errors.

Leviticus 18:22: 'You shall not lie down with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.'
24:29 "For whoever commits any of these abominations shall be cut off from these peoples."
anyone from reading what Jesus said and did (Part 1, pages 6-37; Part 2, pages 21 - 102. Also replacing Leviticus 18:22 and 24:29, Jesus quoted Leviticus 19:18 ("You shall love your neighbor as yourself") as one of two great commandments.

The misquotation and misinterpretation of Corinthians 6:9 and Romans 1:24-27 should not dissuade anyone from reading Paul for Paul (Part 1, pages 47-51); Part 2, page 102-105; Part 3 page 1-21).

This is because Paul always pointed to Jesus, and Paul is ever adopting an inclusive Christian fellowship in which there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:28).

This means the Good News is Good News for All, not limited to heterosexual persons, or heterosexual marriages.

This is also because Jesus identified his mission as a person anointed to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who were oppressed (quoting Isaiah 61:01 in Luke 4:16-24).

This is also because scripture allows us to trace God’s broadening revelation to Jesus through Jesus encounter with a Syrophoenician woman in Tyre Sidon in Mark 7:24-30 and Matthew 15:24, (Part 2, page 52-56).

So, this Good News extends to all without a plea no matter where we are on the sexual spectrum as human being (John 3:16,17). No one is excluded.

**Commentary by Reader**

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18
Witness from Our Tradition

"Just as I Am, Without One Plea"

Just as I am, without one plea, But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidst me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!
Just as I am, and waiting not To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Just as I am, though tossed about With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!
Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind; Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need, in thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Just as I am, thou wilt receive, Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!
Just as I am, thy love unknown Hath broken every barrier down;
Now, to be thine, yea, thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

(Written by: Charlotte Elliott, 1789-1871; Music by: William B. Bradbury, 1816-1868, United Methodist Human, page 119)
Chapter 3. The Priorities Of Jesus Are Clear

Read Mark 2:13-18.

King James Version

Jesus Calls Levi

13. And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.
14. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphæus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.
15. And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples; for these were many, and they followed him.
16. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?
17. When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

Commentary by Writer

Jesus was clear about his priorities: He came for sinners and for those stigmatized as sinners, without condition. Among these, he called Levi and he associated with Levi and his friends, with no conditions attached.

In Mark 2:13-18, we read that when Jesus saw Levi the tax collector, Jesus said, "Follow Me," and Levi followed him. Jesus imposed no conditions on the discipleship of Levi except to follow him. Then, Jesus ate dinner and reclined among many tax collectors and sinners at Levi's house. This upset the righteous religious leaders, the Pharisees and scribes who promoted religious piety by keeping religious laws. They were upset to see Jesus eating and associating with tax collectors and sinners, and asked
his disciples why Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. When Jesus heard this, he replied, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners. (Mark 2: 18).

How does this apply to the narrow issue of the Commentary regarding heterosexual or homosexual sinners? First, Jesus made no distinctions between heterosexual and homosexual sinners. It may upset some righteous religious leaders that Jesus calls homosexuals to be disciples with no conditions except to follow him in the same way that he called Levi, even to the point that they adopt language in the Book of Discipline that prohibit homosexual disciples from positions of leadership in ministry or from ordination or prohibits pastors from performing marriages of homosexual, gays or lesbians, or other nonheterosexuals (as the General Conference of the United Methodist Church has done). But when religious leaders do this, they are acting out of their own humanness and not the authority of Jesus or as a disciple of Jesus.

This is because the Living Jesus calls tax collectors and sinners, homosexuals and heterosexuals, to follow, and all who follow are equal before God as members of His Church. All these people are included as beloved disciples for whom he laid down his life.

Jesus was very clear. He did not lay down his life for the righteous -- they do not need his message -- but for those stigmatized as sinners, and among these, Jesus made no distinctions. Nor does he make distinctions between us, heterosexual and homosexual alike.

All people who answer the call are entitled to the full privileges and duties, trusts and responsibilities, and participation in the ceremonies and rites of the Church, without distinction, to be leaders and pastors, and to be persons in committed relationships in Holy Union and Marriage centered on Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ priorities were clear. So are the priorities of the people that make up the Church. It involves the whole person in relationship to God that applies to the unique circumstances of that person’s life, every moment of every day, in hand and feet and voice, in gold and silver, in intellect, power, will, heart, and love. This priority will manifest itself in different ways. unique to each person, but it excludes no one!
Commentary by Reader
Witness from Our Tradition

“Take my Life, and Let It Be Consecrated”

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days; Let them flow with endless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing always only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from thee.
Take my silver and my gold; Not a mite would I withhold
Take my intellect, and use ever power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it thine; It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is thine own; It shall be thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

(Written by Frances R. Havergal, 1836-1879; Music by Louis J.F. Herod, 1791-1833; Arranged by George Kingsley, 1811-1884; United Methodist Hymnal, page 187)
Chapter 4. The Attitude Of Jesus Toward Religious Laws

Read Mark 2:23-3:8.

King James Version

Mark 2:23 And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn.
24 And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?
25 And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungered, he, and they that were with him?
26 How he went into the house of God in the days of A-bi’a-thar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?
27 And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:
28 Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

CHAPTER 3
And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand.
2 And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him.
3 And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth.
4 And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? To save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.
5 And when he had looked round about

Revised Standard Version

Mark 2:33: One sabbath he was going through the cornfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?’ 25 And he said to them, ‘Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food?
26 He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.’ 27 Then he said to them, ‘The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; 28 so the Son of Man is Lord even of the sabbath.’

The Man with a Withered Hand

Mark 3:1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2 They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man who had the withered hand, ‘Come forward.’ 4 Then he said to them, ‘Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?’ But they were silent. 5 He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.
6 The Pharisees went out and
on them with anger, being grieved for
the hardness of their ears, he saith unto
the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And
he stretched it out; and his hand was
restored whole as the other.
6 And the Pharisees went forth, and
straightway took counsel with the He-
ro’di-ans against him, how they might
destroy him.
7 But Jesus withdrew himself with his
disciples to the sea; and a great
multitude from Galilee followed him,
and from Juda,
8 And from Jerusalem, and from I-du-
ma’e’a, and from beyond Jordan; and
they about Tyre and Si’don, a great
multitude, when they had heard what
great things he did, came unto him.

immediately conspired with the
Herodians against him, how to destroy
him.

A Multitude at the Lakeside

7 Jesus departed with his disciples to
the lake, and a great multitude from
Galilee followed him;
8 hearing all that he was doing, they
came to him in great numbers from
Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the
Jordan, and the region around Tyre and
Sidon.

Commentary by Writer

Jesus was clear about the Good News He proclaimed: Religious laws were made
for the good of all mankind, to do good and not harm people, to give life and not
condemn.

In Mark 2:23 to 3:8, we read of two instances where Jesus violates the Sabbath
Laws that were based on the 4th Commandment to keep the Sabbath Holy (Exodus 20:8).
In one instance, it may have been inadvertent; in the second, it was intentional.

In the first instance, the religious law was very specific. It forbid harvesting and
reaping on the Sabbath (Exodus 34:21). In the second instance, the religious law was
less specific. It concerned honoring the sabbath and whether it was lawful to practice
medicine on the Sabbath to heal a chronic condition that was not life threatening.

In the first instance, when the Pharisees —religious leaders with whom he most
identified —asked Jesus why his disciples had plucked grain for eating on the Sabbath as
they were going through a grainfield, Jesus reminded them that David had entered the
House of God and taken Holy Bread to feed his companions when it was not lawful for
any one but priests to eat Holy Bread. Jesus then told them that the Sabbath was made
for mankind and not mankind for the Sabbath, and that the son of man was lord over the
Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28).
In the second incident, the Pharisees and righteous religious leaders watched Jesus when he encountered a man with a crippled hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath to see what he would do. Jesus was aware of their scrutiny, and Jesus asked them, "Is it lawful to do good or to harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" When they were silent, he looked at them with anger, and grieved at their hardness of heart. Then he healed the man's hand.

For this reason—disregard for the Sabbath law, --and from this point one, the Gospel of Mark reports that the Pharisees and righteous religious leaders began to conspire against Jesus even as his popularity grew among the people (Mark 3:10).

What does this have to do with the narrow topic of this Commentary, the language of the Book of Discipline regarding the teaching of Jesus. It is this:

When two members of the Church who are homosexual or nonheterosexual disciples of Jesus ask their pastor to bless their relationship in Marriage or Holy Union and to celebrate vows of commitment to each other in love that is centered on Jesus as Lord, - and the pastor discerns that the exchange of Marriage or Holy Union vows will bring a new depth of love and commitment and caring to their relationship, but that performing the Marriage or Holy Union will violate religious laws (like Social Principles enacted by the United Methodist Church 1996 and declared to be binding authority by it Judicial Council in 1998) --the Living Jesus ask his Church the same questions:

Is it lawful for Pastors to do good and affirm committed love relationships of all kinds? Are religious laws meant to do good, to serve people or to do harm and drive them away from his Church?"

And Jesus looks upon those in his Church with grief, even anger, at the hardness of heart who would persecute these members and the pastors that serve them and who would enact and enforce religious laws that do not serve people. Then, Jesus does the thing that he determines will heal and do good with love for the members of his Church and faces the consequence.
Witness from Our Tradition

"O Young and Fearless Prophet"

O young and fearless Prophet of ancient Galilee
Thy life is still a summons to serve humanity
To make our thought and actions less prone to please the crowd,
To stand with humble courage for truth with hearts uncowed.

We marvel at the purpose that held thee to thy course
While ever on the hilltop before thee loomed the cross;
Thy steadfast face set forward where love and duty shone
While we betray so quickly and leave thee there alone.

O help us walk unflinchingly in paths that lead to peace,
Where justice conquers violence and wars at last shall cease;
O grant that love of country may help us hear his call,
And would unite the nations in brotherhood for all.

Create in us the splendor that dawns when hearts are kind,
That knows not race nor station as boundaries of the mind;
That learns to value beauty, in heart or brain or soul,
‘And longs to bind God’s children into one perfect whole.

O young and fearless Prophet, we need thy presence here,
Amid our pride and glory to see thy face appear;
Once more to hear thy challenge above our noise day,
Again to lead us forward along God’s holy way.

(Written by S. Ralph Harlow, 1885-?; Music by John B. Dyke, 1825-1876,
United Methodist Hymnal, page 173)
Chapter 5. Jesus' Ethic Of Sexuality

Read Mark 3:13-30.

The Kings James Version

Mark 3:13: “And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him.
14 And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, can that he might send them forth to preach,
15 And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils:
16 And Simon he surnamed Peter;
17 And James the son of Zeb’ee-dee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Bo-a-ner’ges, which is, The sons of thunder:
18 And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Al-hae’us, and Thad-da’e’us, and Simon the Canaanite.
19 And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house.
20 And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.
21 And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.
22 And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Be-el’ze-bub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.
23 And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan?
24 And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot

The New Revised Standard Version

Mark 3:13: “And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, 15 and to have authority to cast out demons. 16 So he appointed the twelve. Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); 17 James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder), 18 and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Jesus and Beelzebul

Then he went home; 20 and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21 When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, ‘He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.’ 23 And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, ‘How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.
26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has dome.
27 But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without
stand.
25 And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.
26 And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.
27 No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.

28 Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme:
29 But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation:
30 Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.

Commentary by Writer

Here, we are told that Jesus had a strong ethic and a clear sense of the difference between sins that will be forgiven and the one, unforgivable sin that can never be forgiven, although, even here, let me suggest that when Jesus spoke about the sin that can “never be forgiven,” he used the word, “never” as a strong figure of speech for emphasis to identify that sin which is more serious than all others (as Jesus described his use of “figures of speech” (see John 16:25). For all sin, even this most serious of sin—to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit—can be forgiven because with God all things are possible else Jesus die in vain.

When we read Jesus’ ethical teachings on love, responsibility, joy, sacrifice, fulfillment, commitment, non-exploitation, and forgiveness and even with a sense of levity for after we are humans not god, I encourage you to do this, too—let me suggest we discover a Unified Ethic of Love that applies to all human relationships, including the most intimate sexual relation between people: One Sexual Ethic of Love applied to the unique circumstances of each person, to both heterosexual and nonheterosexual persons alike. See Chapter 14, Jesus Identifies a Unified Sexual Ethic, Mark 13:28-43.

But, here, in Mark 3:13-30, we are first told that Jesus chose 12 people from followers to be disciples, including Levi a Tax Collector (become Matthew), to
proclaim the Good News with power to cast out demons. As a result, there were Pharisees and righteous religious leaders who accused Jesus of casting out demons in the name of Beelzebub, the ruler of demons (Mark 3:13-22). Others accused Jesus of blasphemy because he declared the son of man was lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28) and others opposed him because he was identified “Son of God” by unclean spirits, an identity that he did not reject (Mark 3:11,12).

To the first group of his accuser, Jesus speaks in a parable, “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a House is divided against itself, it cannot stand. The same is true of the forces of evil. If Satan rises up and is divided, he cannot stand, his end will come (Mark 3:22-27).

To the second group, Jesus makes a clear distinction between the sins that can be forgiven from the one sin that is most serious of all: to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit. To these, Jesus replies, “people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of eternal sin.” (Mark 3:13).

It is of this latter sin, about which we (who readily identify sinful conduct in others) ought be most concerned because Jesus, the Living Jesus in our Midst, also speaks to us.

Now, there are many forms of sexual expression by and between homosexual people, just as there are many forms of sexual expression by and between heterosexual people. Some sexual expressions are sinful; they are subject to forgiveness. However, Jesus teaches that there is one sin that is far serious than any of these --to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit.

This is not a call, as some may suggest, for ethical laxity.

It is a call to live by the highest ethical standards, without the present hypocrisy embedded in the Book of Discipline because Jesus set the highest ethical standard for all human behavior without distinction between the righteous and sinners, between righteous heterosexuals and righteous homosexuals, or between those who have engaged in sinful heterosexual practices and those who have engaged in sinful homosexual practices. It is a ethical standard of sexuality measured by the depth of Jesus’ compassion, seen mostly clearly in even his love for Judas and the washing of Judas feet and by the ability to lay down his life for all his followers.

This ethical standard of Jesus is based on Love, Responsibility, Faithfulness, Sacrifice, Fulfillment, Commitment, Non-exploitation and Forgiveness, even with levity. It is evident both in his ethical teachings and in the way he lived and died. Restated over and over again, it is not a double standard applied to some but not to others. Instead, it

32
is applies to all human relationships, including the most intimate sexual relations between all people, in both heterosexual and homosexual relations alike.

About this sexual standard, Jesus specifically noted that heterosexual men and women had no ethical standing superiority over anyone, and that even religious leaders had no ethical superiority to judge others, not even a woman caught in adultery (Matthew 5:27, 28); John 8:2-11).

Therefore, whether it be taken figuratively or not, Jesus speaks about only one sin that cannot be forgiven—the sin that blasphemes against the Holy Spirit. What application does this have the narrow topic of this Commentary? It is this:

Everything we know as a worshiping community and from the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst as a worshiping community within specific churches and the Church universal tells us there are devoted, dedicated spirit-filled Christians who are homosexual and lesbian and with other sexual orientations who are faithfully doing the work of the church as obedient disciples of Jesus.

Now, if this be so—and none can deny it, for these saints are with us—some quiet, some outspoken, some in committed Christ-centered relationships with others, within and without the United Methodist Church—then it is time to stop the continued persecution of homosexual and lesbian Christians in the Church and rid the Book of Discipline of the apostasy that condemns all homosexual practices as incompatible with the teachings of Jesus, lest we dare blaspheme against the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst.
Then, let us sing with the fellowship of Saints and (and with these Saints in our midst):

**From our tradition**

"They will know we are Christian by our Love"

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,  
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,  
And we pray that some day all unity may be restored.  
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love;  
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will walk with each other; we will walk hand in hand,  
We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand.  
And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land,  
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love;  
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will work with each other, we will work side by side,  
We will work with each other, we will work side by side,  
And we'll guard human dignity and save human pride:  
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love;  
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

All praise to the Father, from whom all things come,  
And all praise to Christ Jesus, God's only Son,  
An all praise to the Spirit, who makes us one.  
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love  
Yes, they'll know we are Christian by our love.

(Written by Peter Scholtes; Music by Peter Scholtes; assigned 1991, to The Lorenz Corp.; found in Thy Faith We Sing, page 2223, used as a supplement to the United Methodist Hymnal)
Chapter 6. The Family Of Jesus

Read Mark 3:31-35 (as it continues from Mark 3:14-31, Chapter 5, above)

King James Version

Mark 3: 31: “There came then his brethren and his mother, and standing without, sent unto him, calling him.
32 And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee.
33 And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren?
34 And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!
35 For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.

New Revised Standard Version

Mark 3: 31: “Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, ‘Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside asking for you.’ 33 And he replied ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ 34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.’

Commentary by Writer

Jesus talked about family values, and when he did, Jesus made it clear that membership in the Family of Jesus was open to all without distinction. In Mark 3:14-35 (Chapter 5 above) we see Jesus from the perspective of his family. His mother and brothers have heard rumors that he has gone out of his mind --casting out demons in the name of Beelzebub --and go to restrain him. But when they find him, they find a crowd sitting around him. Someone is the crowd said to Jesus, “Your mother and brothers and sisters are outside asking for you.” But looking around at the crowd that sitting about him, Jesus replied, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the Will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:34b-35).

How refreshing! When people use “Family” and “Family Values” as code words to define family in a narrow way that excludes homosexuals, and homosexual couples with children, and other nontraditional families, Jesus speaks. Everyone in the crowd who is drawn to Jesus is a member of the family of Jesus without distinction between young and old, rich and poor, heterosexual and homosexual.

Everyone who does the Will of God is a brother and sister and mother of Jesus. What is this Will of God? It is to love God, to love oneself, and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:26-34). It is to love one another with the same love that we have experienced from Jesus, by washing one another’s feet in service and not in
judgment (John 13:1-35). It is to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to welcome the stranger, to clothe the naked, to take care of the sick, to visit the imprisoned, to treat the least of these with the same appreciation that we would give to Jesus for what he has done for us (Matthew 25:31-46).

What a wondrous thing this is to be able to stand together, as brothers and sisters, heterosexuals and homosexuals, as equals in this family, to overcome alienation one from the other. How wonderful it is for those who have been cast out and vilified and rejected by their natural family to find this true family, the family that gathers around Jesus.

But it is even more wonderful when members of the natural family, parents and children, children and parents, brothers and sisters, who in the past were torn apart by sexual identification as heterosexual versus nonheterosexual can be reconciled with each other because of the Love taught and demonstrated by Jesus, and experienced in their own friendship with Jesus as part of One Family of Humanity.

Commentary by Reader
Witness from Our Tradition

“I’ve Found a Friend”

I’ve found a Friend, O such a Friend! He loved me ere I knew him;
He drew me with the cords of love, And thus he bound me to him.
And round my heart still closely twine Those ties which naught can sever,
I am his, and he is mine, Forever and forever.

I’ve found a Friend, O such a Friend! He bled, he died to save me;
And not alone the gift of life, But his own self he gave me.
Naught that I have my own I call, I hold it for the giver;
My heart, my strength, my life, my all Are his, and his forever.

I’ve found a Friend, O such a Friend! So kind and true and tender,
So wise a counselor and guide, So mighty a defender!
From him who loves me now so well, What power my soul can sever?
Shall life or death, or earth or hell? No! I am his forever.

(Written by James G. Small, 1817-1888; Music by George C. Stebbins,
1846-1945, United Methodist Hymnal, page 163)

“Who is My Mother, Who is My Brother”

Who is my mother, who is my brother?All those gathered round Jesus Christ:
Spirit-blown people, born from the Gospel sit at the table round Jesus Christ.

Differently abled, differently labeled widen the circle round Jesus Christ
Crutches and stigmas, cultures enigmas all come together round Jesus Christ.

Love will relate us -color or status can’t segregate us, round Jesus Christ.
Family failings, human derailings all are accepted, round Jesus Christ.

Bound by one vision, met for one mission, we claim each other, round Jesus Christ
Here is my mother, here is my brother, kindred in Spirit through Jesus Christ

(Written by Shirley Arena Murray; Music by Jack Schraeder, copyright 1992,
from The Faith We Sing, page 2225; Used as a denominational supplement
to the United Methodist Hymnal)
Chapter 7. Jesus Speaks To All Who Will Hear

Read Mark 4:1-20.

King James Version

Mark 4: 1: “And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.

2 And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine,

3 Hearken; Behold, there went our a sower to sow;

4 And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

4 And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

5 And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:

6 But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

8 And grew fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.

9 And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

10 And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of

The New Revised Standard Version

Mark 4: 1: “Again he began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land. 2 He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 ‘Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold. 9 And he said, ‘Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’

The Purpose of the Parables

10 When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. 11 And he said to them, ‘To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; 12 in order that “They may indeed look, but not perceive,”
him the parable.
11 And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables:
12 That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.
13 And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? And how then wilt ye know all parables?
14 The sower soweth the word.
15 And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.
16 And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground, who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;
17 And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended.

18 And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,
19 And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.
20 And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

And may indeed listen, but not understand;
So that they may not turn again and be forgiven”.
13 And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 These are the ones on the path where the word is sown; when they hear; Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. 16 And others are those sown among the thorns; these are the ones who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing,. 20 And these are the ones sown on the good soil; they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.’
Commentary by writer

Jesus gives this teaching to everyone. Some will hear it and not retain it. But to all who hear and retain it, it will bring forth much fruit.

In Mark 4:1-20, Jesus talks about the way the people will respond to this proclamation of Good News and to these teachings with a parable. He describes four different ways that people will respond. In the context of this Commentary, these may be described as follows:

(1) Some heterosexual, homosexual, and nonheterosexual people have been so hardened and under-trodden by life experiences, that they will hear and read the words and teachings of Jesus, but Satan will immediately come and take away the Word, like seed that falls on a hardened path and is quickly eaten by birds.

(2) Some heterosexual homosexual and nonheterosexual people will receive the words and teachings of Jesus with joy, but the Word will not take root; the joy will last only a little while, but will not survive the travails of life like seed that lands on stony grounds, grows quickly in rain, and withers in the sun because it has no roots.

(3) Some heterosexual and some homosexual and nonheterosexual people will hear the words and teachings with gladness, but the cares of the world, the lure of wealth and desire for things will choke the Word so it amounts to nothing and does not bear fruit, like seed that grows in the midst of thistles and is crowded out by the thistles.

(4) But to all heterosexual and homosexual and nonheterosexual people who hear, read, and ponder the words and teachings of Jesus, as they apply to their experiences and the questions in their mind, these people will be strengthened, and grow, and they will give witness to the Word, and bear fruit, thirty, and sixty, and hundredfold, like seed that lands on good soil.

It is to this last group of people, that Jesus gives an additional mandate, “Let your Light Shine!” For a light is no good if it is hidden under a bushel where it illuminates nothing. To these people, and to the Church itself, Jesus provides this assurance, “Do not fear secrets hidden in darkness, but come to the light. What you give of yourself, you will get back and much more. For those who have, more will be given, and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.”

What is this Light that the Good News is about? It is a deep awareness of an intimate relationship with God, with reality, that the divine is no respecter of persons. It is the experience of being beloved by God, for God is no respecter of persons, be they heterosexual or homosexual or any other nonheterosexual identity.
It is the experience of the Love of God as a Good Father, who greets a lost child that returns with open arms, not rebuke, and also gives a full measure of inheritance to the child who was never lost, who was blind and now sees (Luke 15:11-32).

It is the promise of Jesus to all followers, heterosexual and non-heterosexual, that they can and will do even greater things than the works he did because he was faithful to his experience of God's Creative Love, even to death on the cross, and he was faithful to the Father in heaven, (John 14:12-16:33). In this manner, Jesus uses words and images that describe his sense of an intimate relation with the creative forces of the Universe that can never be diminished, only expanded.

Jesus witnesses to his experience of Light, when he proclaims, "I am the Light of the World," with reference to himself (John 8:12), and with equal authority, without reference to himself, when he proclaims to all of the heterosexual and homosexual and nonheterosexual persons who hear, read, and ponder the words and teachings of Jesus: "You are the Light of the World. . .Let your light shine before others so that they see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven," (referring to Jesus’ description of the intimate relation an awakened person has with the creative forces of the Universe) (Matthew 5:14-16.)

Then Jesus gives a special word of consolation and caution to heterosexual and homosexual and nonheterosexual followers who let their Light shine in response to his word. It comes from his own experience of praise and persecution.

Jesus was fully aware of the praise and persecution that can be experienced both from within and without religious circles: (1) Jesus endured false rumors; rumors that he was demon possessed; rumors, that his family believed; rumors, that he was out of his mind (Mark 3:21-28); and (2) Jesus endured rejection. People who had known Jesus for his entire life in his home town rejected him (Mark 6:1-5). They became so enraged that they drove him out of the synagogue, out of town, with the intent of killing him (Luke 4:16-30); (3) Jesus experienced persecution: persecution from fellow rabbis and ministers, pastors and religious leaders, some from jealousy, others who sought to discredit and destroy him.

The process of rumors, rejection, and persecution has been and is true for heterosexual ministers and members who mingle freely with homosexual ministers and members. It is also true for homosexual ministers and members who associate freely with heterosexual ministers and members. Each may be subject to false rumors from their own kind. Ultimately and tragically, it was the religious leaders --who should have enjoyed Jesus as one of their own learned in scripture, desirous of serving God, able to cut through to the core of the law and the prophets --who spread false rumors, who conspired to destroy Jesus, who accused him of blasphemy, and delivered him to Pilate, under whom Jesus was crucified (Mark 2:15-17; Mark 3:1-6; Mark 3:20-22).
In this religious and political climate, Jesus experienced persecution and betrayal, even from those who followed him, and foresaw that it could and would lead to his death (Mark 3:1-6; Mark 3:20-22; Mark 8:27-33; Mark 9:30-32; Mark 10:32-24). But Jesus also understood that the forces of jealousy and persecution could not prevail against the Truth and the Light that had opened his eyes to the intimate understanding of the relationship of people to God, and the revelation of God he experienced.

Therefore, Jesus taught his followers about rejection and suffering and betrayal and death, eternal life, and the eternal Light that cannot be snuffed out, and that anyone who wanted to be a follower of the Way of Jesus would have to take up his or her own cross and that it may include the same rejection and suffering and betrayal that Jesus experienced (Mark 9:30-36).

So, to his homosexual and nonheterosexual followers (and especially to those who have endured persecution from religious leaders), let me suggest that Jesus, the Living Jesus among us, speaks the following words of strength and encouragement:

**“Be aware.** There are those who will bring charges against you. There are those in the Church and outside the Church who will not accept you as one of my followers. You may be subjected to physical mistreatment. You may be brought before religious and civil authorities who will use your homosexuality or nonheterosexuality against you. They may be inflamed because of your audacity to be nonheterosexual and still call yourself a follower of mine (Mark 13:1-13).

**“Do not fear.** Do not let those who oppose you or persecute you diminish the Light in you. If you are required to answer to them, do not fear. The Holy Spirit will find words for you to speak. Your witness to Good News will be heard.

**“Endure.** Your witness will bear fruit, 30-fold, 60-fold, and 100-fold. (Mark 13:1-13; Mark 4:13-25).
"I Love to Tell the Story"

I love to tell the story Of unseen things above, Of Jesus and his glory,
Of Jesus and his love, I love to tell the story, Because I know 'tis true;
It satisfies my longings As nothing else can do.

I love to tell the story; more wonderful it seems Than all the golden fancies
Of all out golden dreams, I love to tell the story, It did so much for me;
And that is just the reason I tell it now to thee.

I love to tell the story; 'Tis pleasant to repeat What seems, each time I tell it,
More wonderfully sweet, I love to tell the story, For some have never
heard The message of salvation From God's own holy Word.

I love to tell the story, For those who know it best Seem hungering and thirsting
To hear it like the rest. And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new
song, 'Twill be the old, old story That I have loved so long.

I love to tell the story, 'Twill be my theme in glory,
To tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

(Written by: Katherine Hankey, 1834-1913; Music by: Katherine Hankey,
1834-1913 and William G. Fischer, 1835-1912, United Methodist Hymnal,
page 149)
Chapter 8. **Jesus Speaks About Defilement And True Defilement**

Read Mark 7:1-23.

**King James Version**

Mark 7:1: “Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem.
2 And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault.
3 For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands off, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.
4 And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.
5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?
6 He answered and said unto them, Well hath E-sai’as prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written. This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.
7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.
8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.
9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.
10 For Moses said, Honour thy father

**The New Revised Standard Version**

Mark 7:1: “Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, 2 they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them.
3 (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; 4 and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) 5 So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, ‘Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?’ 6 He said to them, ‘Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

“This people honours me with their lips,
But their hearts are far from me;
7 In vain do they worship me,
Teaching human precepts as doctrines.”

8 You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.’
9 Then he said to them, ‘You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition!
10 For Moses said, “Honour your father and your mother”; and, “Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.” 11 But you say that if anyone tells father or mother,

“Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban” (that is, and
and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:
11 But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free.
12 And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother:
13 Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.
14 And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand:
15 There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.
16 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.
17 And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him, concerning the parable.
18 And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him:
19 Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?
20 And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.
21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders.
22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:
23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

offering to God) -- 12 then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, 13 thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this.

14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand: 15 there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.'

17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 He said to them, 'Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, 19 since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?' (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, 'It is what comes out of a person that defiles. 21 For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, 22 adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'
Commentary by Writer

In Mark 7:1-23, a group of religious leaders—Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem—traveled North from Jerusalem to the region surrounding the Lake of Galilee, to Capernaum and Bethsaida and Gennesaret. They were devoted people and pious in every sense of the word with strong reverence for life. They observed strict health habits about cleanliness concerning food to avoid defilement from unclean food in worship of God. The stewardship of their bodies as creations in the likeness of God had evolved over time. It included many rituals passed down from the Elders. These rituals included the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles, the washing of food purchased from the market, and the thorough washing of hands before eating (Mark 7:2-4) —all good practices that everyone ought to follow.

The purpose of their visit or how they happened to have traveled from Jerusalem to the region of Galilee, a distance of some eighty miles—a journey of four to eight days by foot—is not reported in Mark. Perhaps they were attracted to Jesus. Perhaps they were in the region on other business. Perhaps they were curious. Perhaps they had heard rumors about Jesus that had been circulated in the religious community, both good and bad, and wanted to investigate for themselves.

Whatever their purpose, there is no indication that they were part of the group of Pharisees and Herodians who conspired to destroy Jesus as earlier reported in Mark (Mark 3:6). They appear to be sincere seekers. They notice that some of Jesus’ disciples were eating with defiled hands, without the thorough washing required by their traditions. So they ask Jesus why he allowed his disciples to eat with defiled hands, without following the traditions of the Elders.

Whatever their intent, the question was taken as a criticism, an inquisition of Jesus about the habits of his disciples, not directed toward genuine concern for health or religious practices, but as a critical judgment of Jesus and his disciples, that placed undue overemphasis on things that were of less importance in disregard of what truly mattered.

Jesus used their question to teach about religious traditions and personal habits. The teaching may be summarized as follows:

First, in striving for perfection, many rules and rituals had evolved over time. At the time of their question, there were over six hundred religious rules to be followed as identified by the Pharisees and religious leaders. So, the first thing Jesus said was that people had become so preoccupied with lesser traditions that they had lose sight of the weightier commandments.
Second, Jesus illustrated how preoccupation with less important matters had resulted in disregard of Greater Commandments, the Ten. He noted how the making of donations and contributions for religious purposes had become a substitute for caring for and providing for one’s parents in total disregard of the Commandment to Honor Father and Mother.

Third, Jesus used the confrontation over eating habits to draw attention to these greater truths. He answered not just the Pharisees and scribes and religious leaders, who were present, but called out to all who could hear, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand. There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile” (Mark 7:14-15).

Finally, Jesus clarified this teaching to his disciples when they were alone, “Whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters not the heart but the stomach and goes out in the sewer...it is what comes out of a person that defiles for it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and they defile a person.” (Mark 7:20-23)

Clearly, Jesus was talking about much more than cleaning rituals.

What he said extends to everything that is seen, read, heard, and it extends to all sexual practices of heterosexuals and homosexuals and other nonheterosexuals alike, and to the habits and rituals that serve these practices. In this matter of defilement from within, Jesus makes no distinction between heterosexual and nonheterosexual people, or between heterosexual practices and nonheterosexual practices.

Now, there are many ways to examine and analyze the examples of defilement from within that Jesus gave, but four things may be noted: (1) They are not equal in weight; (2) The conduct they describe does not provide any basis to distinguish oneself from other people—all fit in somewhere; (3) The purpose of the description was not to set up 600 new rules, but to re-focus on what does matter: the examination of the heart; and (4) Too much attention to personal habits in oneself and in others may become a way of avoiding attention to the greater Commandments.

What are the greater Commandments? To love God with all one’s soul, heart, and strength; to love others the way one loves oneself; to love others in the manner that one has been loved by Jesus; to bring good news to the poor, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim release of the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to do justice and walk humbly with the Lord. These are the greater things, not whether one is heterosexual or nonheterosexual in any of its forms, especially when the focus on sexuality distracts us from love of God, love of Self as created in God’s image, love of others extended to love of enemy (from within and without) and focusing on being Christian in one’s heart.
Witness from Our Tradition

"Lord, I Want to Be a Christian"

Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart, in my heart;
Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart, in my heart.
In my heart, in my heart, Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart.

Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart, in my heart;
Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart, in my heart.
In my heart, in my heart, Lord I want to be more loving in my heart.

Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart, in my heart;
Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart, in my heart.
In my heart, in my heart, Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart.

Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart, in my heart;
In my heart, in my heart, Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart.

(American Folk Hymn, United Methodist Hymnal, page 286)
Chapter 9. Jesus [And Disciples] Are Open To New Revelations!

Immediately after Jesus responded to the religious leaders who confronted him with his teaching on the Greater Commandments, the gospel of Mark reports an account in which Jesus was himself humbled in his own heart, and experienced a new revelation about God’s love that affected his own sense of Calling from an unexpected source......

Reads Mark 7:24-30

King James Version
Mark 7:24: “And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid.
25 For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet:
26 The woman was a Greek, a Syrophoenician: by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.
27 But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.
28 And she answered and said unto him, Yea, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs.
29 And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.
30 And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed.

New Revised Standard Version
Mark 7:24: “From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. 2 He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, 25 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.
27 He said to her, “Let, the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” 28 But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” 29 Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Commentary by Writer

This encounter occurs in an important historical context according to the Gospel of Mark. After Jesus began his public ministry in Galilee, according to the Gospel of Mark, the first time he traveled outside his home base in Capernaum was to the region of
Tyre and Sidon, a seaport on the Mediterranean to the North and West of Capernaum.

Prior to this trip, Mark tells us that the public ministry of Jesus after the death of John the Baptist was centered within a geographical triangle that consisted of Capernaum where he made his home (Mark 2:1), the Sea of Galilee (Mark 2:13, 2:23, 3:1) and Nazareth (Mark 6.1), where he grew up and where his family lived.

Mark reports that Jesus selected the twelve disciples from followers in this geographical triangle (Mark 1:16-20, 2:13-14, 3:13-19), that people from Judea, Jerusalem, Iduman and other places beyond the river Jordan, and from the region of Tyre and Sidon came to see and hear him there (Mark 3:8), and that the activities of Jesus and his teachings in the synagogues in this geographical area had come to the attention of the religious and political leaders in Israel, including the scribes (Mark 1:22, 3:22), priests (Mark 1:44), Pharisees (Mark 2:16, 2:24, 3:16) and the court of King Herod Antipas, the Tetrach of Galilee, who was answerable to Rome (Mark 6:14).

In Mark, there is no record that Jesus ever preached or taught outside the geographical triangle marked by Nazareth, Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee in his public ministry until after he traveled to the region and Tyre and Sidon.

What made this trip important? What was its purpose? We are not certain. Tyre and Sidon were some 40 miles north of Capernaum, - a distance of two to four days by foot.

Mark reports that from time to time, Jesus withdrew from the demands and pressures that surrounded him to seek rest and spiritual renewal. He went to deserted places to pray (Mark 1:35), to his home in Capernaum (Mark 2:1), across the sea of Galilee (Mark 3:7, 4:35), upon mountains (Mark 3:13, 6:46), and spent time at home with his mother, brothers, and sisters in Nazareth (Mark 6:1, 3). So, the purpose of the trip to Tyre and Sidon may have been for rest and relaxation.

Or the purpose of the trip to Tyre and Sidon may have been to retreat from the immediate threats of political persecution from King Herod who had beheaded John the Baptist and wondered aloud if Jesus was John the Baptist come back to life and who feared that Jesus possessed the same threat to Herod that led to the arrest and death of John the Baptist (Mark 1:14, 6:14-29).

Or perhaps it was to obtain respite from false rumors about Jesus that were spread by righteous religious leaders (the Pharisees) and political authorities (the Herodians) who were conspiring to destroy Jesus and his credibility among the people (Mark 3:6, 3:22).

Or perhaps it was from despair at the experience of rejection when he proclaimed
the Good News in the synagogue at Nazareth to people who had known him as a youth, to adults he had admired as a youth, and for whom he had worked (Mark 6:1-6). Certainly, if anyone would understand the sincerity and integrity of Jesus’ call and ministry, it would have been these people, but they almost stoned him to death.

Or perhaps it was in response to an invitation from people who traveled from Tyre and Sidon to hear and see Jesus (Mark 3:8).

Mark does not tell us why Jesus traveled to Tyre and Sidon. It may have been for these or other reasons.

But Mark is clear about one thing. Jesus wanted to remain anonymous and unknown in Tyre and Sidon. Tyre was a foreign place in which most of the people were Gentiles, not Jews. Jesus did not go to Tyre and Sidon to preach or teach or heal or proclaim the Good News of God’s Kingdom or to call people to repent or believe the Good News. Jesus did not want anyone to know he was there (Mark 7:24).

Nevertheless, Mark reports, a Gentile woman of Syro-Phoenician origin, recognized Jesus. She knew he was a healer. She asked him to heal her daughter, to cast out a demon that tormented her daughter (Mark 7:26). Jesus’s immediate response was to refuse the woman and dismiss her, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs” (Mark 7:27).

The use of the word, “dog” by Jesus, --by any objective observation was the use of a crude word, rooted in Israel’s historical conflicts with Gentile nations and Gentile people as reflected by the use of the word “dog” in reference to Gentiles in I Samuel 17:43, 24:14, and Proverbs 26:11.

And the use of the word “dog” may have reflected lingering hostility toward Gentiles traced to the Maccabean rebellion 150 years earlier, to a Gentile invasion of Israel, when Gentiles violated the temple, destroyed and burned religious books, persecuted the people, and turned Jerusalem into an armed citadel occupied by foreign troops. Those hostilities ended when the Maccabees liberated Jerusalem and entered into a treaty with Rome to safeguard Israel and Jerusalem from its immediate neighbors (I Maccabees 1:20, violation of temple; I Maccabees 1:41-61, book burnings and persecutions; I Maccabees 4:36-5:23, liberation of Jerusalem and Galilee, I Maccabees 8:17-32, Jewish alliance and treaty with Rome). This is a history that Jesus of Nazareth from Galilee would probably have studied and known well.

Whatever its roots, the use of the word, “dog,” was an epithet used by Jesus with the intent to dismiss the woman. But, Mark reports, the woman persisted. She replied, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” (Mark 7:28). Jesus relented. He healed her daughter.
So great was her love for her daughter that she was not diverted from her purpose by the insult. She took the insult, a verbal blow on the cheek, and turned it into a request that could not be refused.

In this manner, in this way, Mark records that God through this Syro-Phoenician, Gentile woman revealed to Jesus a depth and breadth of Love that Jesus had not experienced from any Gentile person before. It was a quality of Love that continued to grow as Jesus sought to do God’s Will and continued to find itself expressed in Jesus and his teachings. In its fullest expression, it was expressed in the manner in which Jesus loved his disciples who would have resisted his arrest when he stepped forward and gave up his life in love for them, not as the political Messiah for Israel, but as the Son of Man whose vision was not limited to Israel, so his disciples might live (Mark 8:27-31, 8:34-35, 9:30-35, Mark 9:34-49).

Matthew is more direct about the significance of this encounter in Tyre and Sidon than Mark. Matthew reports that at the time of the encounter, Jesus has a limited self-understanding that he was called only to minister to the “Lost Sheep of Israel”, not Gentiles residing in Tyre (Matthew 15:24). But Jesus was impressed by the Great Faith of this Gentile woman and by her love for her daughter and her persistence in the face of the insult. And Jesus’ perspective expanded as he remained open to new revelations from God.

This revelation of Love described in Mark and Matthew resulted in a transformation of Jesus’ self-identity not limited to Jews, to Israel, but to all people. The openness of Jesus to new revelations of God-Love finds its most poetic description in the Parable of the Good Samaritan where Jesus confronted the prejudice of religious people against Samaritans by using a Samaritan to illustrate the ethical imperative to Love God and Love Other People as Oneself, as recorded in Luke 10:25-37. It also finds expression in the Gospel of John, written a generation or more after Mark, when the extension of Jesus’s ministry far beyond Israel to both Jews and Gentiles (settled at the Council of Jerusalem) was firmly established, and where the public ministry of Jesus is described as God’s great outpouring of love for the entire world not limited to one people but to all people (John 3:11-17).

Mark does not report any dramatic transformation in Jesus that took place after this encounter. But when Jesus returns to Galilee after this encounter with this Gentile woman, Mark reports that the deaf hear, that those who cannot speak, speak, and that those who asked for signs are denied signs and told there will be no signs (Mark 7:31-35, 8:11-13, 22-25).

Then, accord to Mark, Jesus begins to teach his followers that his fate is not to rule as the desired Messiah of Israel to liberate it from Rome, but to suffer as the Son of Man in obedience of God, and that if they continue to follow him, they must take up
their own cross (Mark 8:27-33).

What is the relevance of Jesus’ encounter with the Syro-Phoenician Gentile woman in Tyre regarding the narrow issue of this Commentary and the issues surrounding the language of the Discipline and persecution of homosexual believers by heterosexual believers within the church and society today?

It is this: In the everyday life of every believer, there is an encounter with a Syro-Phoenician woman in Tyre waiting to happen.

If Jesus was open to God’s revelation of Love and Faith, as revealed in the encounter with a Syro-Phoenician woman who was previously excluded from his vision of ministry and who he tried to dismiss as an unworthy dog until God revealed to him a depth of Love, —the love of a mother for her daughter, —that reached out to all people, Jew and Gentile alike, without distinction, then it is still possible for those who profess to follow Jesus and desire God to experience the same revelation of Love and Faith from God in their encounters with homosexual believers and followers so that they may yet become more aware of God’s Love and Salvation to all people, heterosexual and homosexual alike, without distinction.

If God could use a Syro-Phoenician woman to reveal to Jesus, the Beloved Son of Man and Anointed One, a breadth and depth of love of God beyond Jesus’ narrow vision, then God can use homosexual and gay and lesbian and transsexual transgender and any nonheterosexual person, who has the same depth of love for others and the faith in their heart that the Syro-Phoenician woman had to reveal to the Christian Church, today, in our time, a breadth and depth of love of God for all far beyond its narrow vision.

Tongues of the silent have been loosened! Those who ask for signs are denied signs! Those who could not hear, hear! Scales of blindness fall away and those who follow Jesus and desire God see with new eyes!
Witness from Our Tradition

"Open My Eyes, That I May See"

Open my eyes, that I may see Glimpses of truth thou hast for me;  
Place in my hands the wonderful key That shall unclasp and set me free  
Silently now I wait for thee, Ready, my God thy will to see;  
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my ears, that I may hear Voices of truth thou sendest clear;  
And while the wave-notes fall on my ear, Everything false will disappear.  
Silently now I wait for thee, Ready my God thy will to see;  
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Open my mouth, and let me hear Gladly the warm truth everywhere;  
Open my heart and let me prepare Love with thy children thus to share.  
Silently now I wait for thee, Ready, my God thy will to see;  
Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!

(Written by: Clara H. Scott, 1841-1897; Music by: Clara H. Scott, 1841-1897  
United Methodist Hymnal at page 267)
Chapter 10. Jesus Welcomes All Children. All Means All.

Read Mark 9:33-37, 42-49.

King James Version

Mark 9: 33: “And he came to Ca-per’na-um: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? 34 But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. 35 And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. 36 And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them; and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, 37 Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not one, but him that sent me.

... 42 And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

New Revised Standard Version

Mark 9:33: “Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, What were you arguing about on the way?” 34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 35 He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.’ 36 Then he took a little child and put it among them, and taking it in his arms, he said to them. 37 ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’ ... 42 ‘If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.

Commentary by Writer

The Twelve who were closest to Jesus anticipated the establishment of the kingdom of God, and begin to argue and debate among themselves. Who will be selected for leadership? Who will be elected Bishop? Who will assigned to the largest church? Who has brought in the most followers? Who has demonstrated the most zeal? Who will be the greatest among them?

Anytime that pastors and leaders of the Church of any denomination gather, it is humanly impossible for them not to think these thoughts among themselves and with

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each other. This was true for the twelve disciples closest to Jesus, and it is true today.

Time and again, Jesus dealt with this issue among the Twelve. In the last Gospel written, The Gospel of John, John reports that Jesus dealt with this issue in a manner not reported in Mark, Matthew, or Luke. John reports at the Last Supper on the eve of his Final Entry into Jerusalem, Jesus humbled himself to wash the feet of each of the Twelve, even the feet of Judas and Peter, who would betray and deny him.

In this way, Jesus demonstrated the depth of love and respect that Jesus had for the Twelve. It may seem inconsequential --the washing of the feet is a rite seldom incorporated in the celebration of the Last Supper in the Eucharist of Communion --but if Jesus had not demonstrated this servant-love in the washing of the feet of the Twelve, it is difficult to imagine that he would have had the depth of Love necessary to withstand the pain of betrayal, even from these, to endure trial and crucifixion on a cross.

In this context, the Gospel of John reports a New Commandment from Jesus to his disciples and us when Jesus said, “A new commandment I give you that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciple.” (John 13:24-75).

The account of the washing of the feet is reported only in John, the last Gospel written after the death of Jesus (about 80-90 A.D) for third or fourth Generation Christians, for many of whom there was no earthly memory of Jesus. Seeing Jesus wash the feet of his disciples allowed them --and us --to relive the intimate experience of Jesus not as Lord and Savior but as Humble Servant, not performing some great miraculous act, but doing the ordinary chore, and reveals the most extraordinary love for his disciples and for each of us.

The image of Jesus washing the feet of Peter and Judas and the Twelve in John empowers all people to be servants, one to another. But in Mark, the lesson was immediate. Jesus took up a child, confronted his followers, and proclaimed, “Whoever wants to be the first must be last of all and servant to all. (Mark 9:35).

Then, taking the child into his arms, he said to the Twelve, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not me, but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9:37).

There is something powerful, unconditional, all encompassing, and earthy in this act that penetrates all of us. It is an act that every parent can understand. It says, “Whoever welcomes my child, whoever knows and can accept the stench of changing diapers, the insistent crying, the tantrums, and misbehaving, and holds my child, my most beautiful, innocent child in their arms, welcomes me.” This is something every parent understands and every parent understands the depth of Jesus’ passionate Love for their
child and for them, when Jesus added these words, "But if any one of you puts a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea." (Mark 9:42).

So, let me suggest, today when pastors and church members and good Christians alike inwardly and outwardly compare ourselves to each other and measure greatness and "gifts of grace" for ministry by evidence of personal piety, conversions, church growth, and popularity, --all in the name of Jesus, --then the Living Jesus comes and stands among us and we are humbled as he stoops to wash our feet.

Then the Living Jesus picks up a child and admonishes us, that whoever welcomes this child, welcomes him, and through him God the Father, and admonishes us not to put a stumbling block before any one of these little ones who believe in him.

So on this issue, today, let me suggest that as we debate the place of homosexuals and nonheterosexuals in the church, the Living Jesus also comes in our midst. He tells us that greatness in his Church is measured by service. Then, the Living Jesus calls a gay or lesbian young person to his side. He puts his arm around him or her and speaks directly to the pastors and bishops and General Conference delegates assembled, and says, "Whoever welcomes this young person, welcomes me and welcomes God."

Then, for emphasis, Jesus, this Living Jesus comes into our midst and admonishes us, "I tell you if any one of you puts a stumbling block before any one of these young persons who believes in me, if any one of you persecutes and drives one of these young persons away from my church, or denies one of these young persons the ability to serve my church as a servant or to become a pastor, or withholds my blessing from any one of these in any aspect of life, in Holy Union or Marriage, I tell you it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea."

Are these words too strong? Only in our self-righteousness because the picture of Jesus embracing a young adult, who happens to be gay or lesbian or transsexual or has another nonheterosexual identity, in midst of pastors, Bishops and delegates to General Conference while we debate the crafting of church policy and Social Principles in the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church for 2016 is no more strange than the actions of Jesus holding up a child in the midst of his chosen Twelve while they debate who will the greatest among them.

In this day, on the narrow issue of this Commentary, this image provides but a glimpse of the depth of passionate love revealed in Jesus for all people, including the disciples who betrayed him, Peter and Judas, so that he washed their feet, and ours, so we might see the Light and so that our personal scales of blindness are peeled away.
This was true also for Saul become Paul. Let me suggest if Paul were among us, in this day, on the narrow issue of this Commentary, Paul would write to each pastor and Bishop and delegate to General Conference, and say to those who hesitate:

“For the love of Christ urges us on because we are convinced that one died for all. Therefore, from now on, we will regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away. All this is from God, reconciling the church itself to God, not counting the church’s trespasses against it. So as ambassadors of Christ, we entreat you on behalf of Christ. Be reconciled to God and with each other. For the sake of all of us, Christ humbled himself before all his disciples and died that we might live, even though there was no reason for him to die for us, so that we might yet listen to his words and example and become the righteousness of God.” Compare II Corinthians 5:16-21.

And let suggest that Paul, in this day, on this issue, is in our midst, and says to all, heterosexual and nonheterosexual believers alike, the churched and unchurched: “Is God the God of heterosexuals only? Is God not also the God of nonheterosexuals. Yes, of homosexuals, gays, and lesbians, transsexuals and transgenders, and those who are asexual or nonsexual, too, since God is One; and God will justify the heterosexual on the ground of faith, and the nonheterosexual through the same faith.” Compare Romans 3:27-30.

So, let us listen to Jesus, and not put any stumbling block in the way of any believers or followers, heterosexual, nonheterosexual, homosexual, gay, lesbian, transexual, transgender, or anyone else, not one!

For I suggest that Paul, in this day, even on this issue, writes:

“For you were called to freedom brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become servants to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor’s work, will become a source of pride. So, then, whenever we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. See what large letters I make when I write in my own hand! May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision [heterosexuality nor nonheterosexuality] is anything; but a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule —my peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. From now
on, let no make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus on my body.”

Compare Galatians 5:14-6:17.

Then Jesus calls all of us to greatness through service, and to do even greater works (John 14:12), and Paul wrote plain words on the issue of circumcision and uncircumcision to the First Century Church in ways that are relevant to the issue of heterosexuality and nonheterosexuality, to heterosexual and nonheterosexuals, gay, lesbian, transexual, and transgender alike and to all of us in the Twenty-first Century Church.

But, we say, “Lord, it is too much for us. We are uncomfortable with people not like us. How to explain this to others?” Then, Jesus smiles, and says to us, “My little children. You have grown too old. Enter the kingdom as children.”

Commentary by Reader

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And we remember and sing together the songs we loved as children:

**Witness from Our Tradition**

"Jesus Love Me, This I know"

Jesus loves me this I know.  
For the Bible tells me so.

Little ones to Him belong.  
They are weak but he is strong.

Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me.  
Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so

"Jesus Loves the Little Children"

Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.  
Be they yellow, black or white, they are precious in his sight.  
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

"Praise Him, Praise, All ye little Children"

Praise Him, Praise Him, All ye little Children.  
God is Love! God is Love!

Praise Him, Praise Him, All ye little Children.  
God is Love! God is Love

(From Evangelical Association Sunday School Hymnal, 1931)
Chapter 11. Jesus Approves Blessing Holy Unions and Marriages in His Name

Read Mark 9:38-41.

King James Version

Mark 9: 38: “And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us.

39 But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.

40 For he that is not against us in on our part.

41 For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.

New Revised Standard Bible

Mark 9:38: “John said to him, ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’ 39 But Jesus said, ‘Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. 40 Whoever is not against us is for us. 41 For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

Commentary by Writer

In the middle of Jesus teaching about greatness and true greatness, in which Jesus seeks to redirect the priorities of the Twelve from a kingdom of Merit and Personal Piety (with a hierarchical ranking of the Priesthood) toward a kingdom of Servanthood that includes and serves all people, Jesus is interrupted by John who reports, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and tried to stop him because he was not one of us.” And Jesus replies, “Do not stop him. For no one who does a deed of power in my name will soon be able to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. Whoever gives a drink of water to you because you bear the name of Christ will not lose the reward.”

The application of this teaching to blessing of Holy Unions and Marriage Covenants centered on Christ between people of the same sex, is so obvious that someday in the future, looking back on these times, it will be declared self-evident.

But today, there are beloved pastors and disciples reporting each other to church leaders and authorities and filing charges against other pastors who do not think like
them, because other pastors have performed Holy Unions and blessed Marriages between persons of the same sex in Jesus’ name and in United Methodist Church buildings.

These beloved pastors and disciples in their zeal for doing that which is right want to stop the performance of such ceremonies to the point of bringing charges to suspend and defrock other beloved pastors.

But beloved pastors, not within this circle of beloved pastors, continue to bless people in Jesus’ name. They ask, “Can anyone dispute the right of a pastor to bless any covenant between people if the covenant is made with the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus? Does anyone, with integrity, dispute the actual presence of the Holy Spirit in the midst of a Holy Union or Marriage Vows of two nonheterosexual members of the Church any more that for two heterosexual members?” No, not integrity, today, at this time, in this United Methodist Church. Because even if we who have witnessed the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Holy Union or Marriage ceremony within our church building did not speak, the very walls of the buildings would not be silent.

So Jesus looks with compassion upon all his beloved pastors and especially to those who have brought charges out their zealous loyalty against those who have performed Holy Unions and Marriages between his nonheterosexual followers, and says to them:

“Let them be. For pastors who have conducted Holy Unions and Marriages between people of the same sex are doing things that you may not understand, and you would not do in my name. But I tell you, whoever does a deed of power like this, whoever brings new depth to relationships in my name, whoever blesses Holy Unions and Marriages in my name, and in this manner, will not soon speak evil of me and you.”

“Whoever is not against us is for us.”

“Whoever gives a drink of water to you because you bear the name of Christ will not lose the reward.” Whoever comes to your assistance in your moment of need because you are doing work in my name, will not lose the reward. This is true of all people who come to your assistance in your moment of need. It does not matter if they are heterosexual or homosexual. Each will receive the reward.”

For nothing is more sacred to those who seek to enter into committed Love relations for life than the Blessing of the vows they make between themselves by their pastor, in the Presence of the Holy Spirit and before God and with friends present, and if they choose, in the sanctuary of the Church were they worship and attend.
Commentary by Reader


**Witness from Our Tradition**

“O Perfect Love”

O perfect Love, all human thought transcending,
Lowly we kneel in prayer before thy throne,
That theirs may be the love which knows no ending,
Whom thou forevermore dost join in one.

O perfect Life, be thou their full assurance
Of tender charity and steadfast faith,
Of patient hope and quiet, brave endurance,
With child-like trust that fears nor pain nor death.

Grant them the joy which brightens earthly sorrow;
Grant them the peace which calms all earthly strife,
And to life’s day the glorious unknown tomorrow
That dawns upon eternal love and life.

(Written by: Dorothy B. Gurney, 1852-1932; Arrangement by: Joseph Barnby, 1838-1896; United Methodist Hymnal, page 333)
Chapter 12. Jesus Honors Heterosexual Marriages [And those who do not marry]

Read Mark 10:1-12

King James Version

Mark 10: 1: “And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again. 2 And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? Tempting him. 3 And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? 4 And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. 5 And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. 6 But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. 7 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; 8 And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. 9 What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. 10 And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. 11 And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. 12 And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.

New Revised Standard Version

Mark 10: 1: “He left that place and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And crowds again gathered around him; and, as was his custom, he gain taught them. 2 Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’ 3 He answered them, ‘What did Moses command you?’ 4 They said, ‘Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.’ 5 But Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. 6 But from the beginning of creation, “God made them male and female.” 7 “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,” 8 and the two shall become one flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’ 10 Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11 He said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; 12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.’
Wherever Jesus went, whenever crowds gathered around him, Jesus taught. As Jesus enlarged the geographical location of his ministry, while traveling from Capernaum to Jerusalem through Judea, some righteous religious leaders, - Pharisees, - tested him about divorce.

They asked him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” Mark reports that Jesus replied, “What did Moses command?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and divorce her.” Then Jesus replied, “Because of your hardness of heart, Moses wrote this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made male and female. For this reason, a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to a wife, and the two shall become one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Then, Mark reports that Jesus was asked about this privately by his disciples, and he told them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery and if she divorces her husband, she commits adultery.”

This teaching on marriage, divorce, and adultery is an example of Jesus’ profound respect for the sanctity of marriage, and for family and the commandment to honor mother and father. It is a respect for the “sanctity of marriage” that is reflected in all the Gospel accounts of his own family life.

There are many glimpses of Jesus’ family life in the Gospels. Mark tells us that Jesus was a member of a close knit family that cared for each other and for him (Mark 3:1-22). Although Mark says nothing about Jesus’ childhood, the love that Jesus experienced from his father as Abba Joseph (Daddy Joseph) is reflected from the beginning to the end of his life in the other Gospels, especially in Matthew and Luke, and the new way that Jesus talks about God and prays to God as Abba Father in the Gospel of John.

Jesus’ respect for family, -- born into a healthy, loving family life, --is rooted in the way that Joseph was open to God’s purpose concerning the birth of Jesus and in Joseph’s decision to marry Mary, when impregnated, and in the steps that Joseph took to protect Jesus from birth as recorded in Matthew 1:20-25 and Matthew 2:13-15.

Jesus’ respect for family is rooted in the manner in which Joseph and Mary oversaw the religious upbringing of Jesus. We are told they presented him for circumcision at the Temple in Jerusalem, where they also consecrated Jesus, their First Born, to the Lord (Luke 2:21-24). We are told they were good parents. We are told Jesus as a child and youth grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, in favor with God and others (Luke 2:39-40). We are told that Joseph and Mary took Jesus to festivals in
Jerusalem, that he loved to be in the Temple, talking with the teachers; and that when he lost track of time while talking to the teacher, and he was left behind, they found him them, and he was obedient to them (Luke 2:41-52).

When Jesus taught his Disciples to pray, he addressed God as “Abba, Daddy who art in Heaven.” In this manner, Jesus taught his disciples to speak to God as if they were speaking to their own father.

Where the image of God as Father has roots in the Law and Prophets (Exodus 4:22; Isaiah 1:2, 63:16, 64:7), God as Good Father was a central theme in the teaching of Jesus in his parables and in his own way of speaking about God.

More is written about Mary, the mother of Jesus, than Joseph as his father except that the messianic genealogy of Jesus traced through the House of Joseph to David at Matthew 1 and Luke 3, we also know that Joseph was a good father from what is written about Joseph and the intimate way in which Jesus talked about God as Father, Abba-daddy. For who can speak of the Divine as Father in the way that Jesus did if it did not in some way reflect his own experience with his earthly father.

In the Gospel of John, the first miracle occurs at a wedding in response to a request from Jesus’ mother (John 2:1-17). And on the cross, shortly before his own death, the last instruction from Jesus to his disciples is take care of his mother (John 19:25-27).

Clearly, Jesus loved his family and had profound respect for the traditional family, heterosexual in nature.

If there is any teaching of Jesus that might be used—and has been used—to justify the restriction of Holy Union and Marriage to heterosexual families in order to protect the “sanctity of marriage,” it is this the teaching of Jesus.

Conversely, if there is any teaching of Jesus that might be used—and has been used—to justify persecution and oppression and discrimination against nonheterosexual people who want to make a commitment of Love and Wedding Vows in Holy Union and Marriage, and to persecute and oppress the pastors who Bless Holy Unions and perform Marriages, it is this teaching of Jesus.

Let me suggest for all the reasons that follow that the attempt to use this teaching in the context of heterosexual divorce to prevent the making of Wedding Vows in Holy Union and Marriage between nonheterosexual people is a seriously flawed misuse of scripture for the following reasons:

First, the question to Jesus was limited to heterosexual divorce. It had nothing to
do with committed relations between nonheterosexual people.

Second, the answer that Jesus gave was limited to the question about heterosexual divorce.

Third, Jesus answered the question with a reference to the original creation story regarding the creation of male and female, and the two becoming one flesh, and made a very strong statement against divorce as adultery. Within the United Methodist Church as with all Christian Churches, the teaching has never been used to justify persecution or oppression of heterosexual people. No one with integrity argues that the teaching of Jesus on divorce, marriage and adultery would justify abusive conduct under any circumstance. No one, with integrity, would deny a divorce for continued, abusive conduct.

If then, this teaching on Divorce is not intended to justify persecution or oppression of heterosexual people within the marriage relation, it is even less applicable to justify continued persecution, oppression and discrimination against nonheterosexual people, that would prohibit them for into committed relationships and make Marriage Vows in the Presence of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, any attempt to “twist” this teaching of Jesus into a tool of persecution and oppression that prohibited blessing Holy Unions and Marriages is sad and tragic because if there is one absolute in interpretation of Christian scripture from both Jewish and Christian roots, from both the Law and the Prophets, it is this:

**Any attempt to use or quote scripture to justify the persecution or oppression of others is a misuse of scripture, not worthy of God.**

This principle of interpretation rests on the foundation of the Christian Faith. The First of the Ten Commandments given to Moses by divine revelation states: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other god before me.” (Exodus 20:1, Revised Standard Version).

This principle of interpretation is the foundation of the Gospel. It is traced to the words that Jesus read from the Prophet Isaiah when Jesus publicly announced his own anointing, “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, and to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:14-19). It can be seen in the manner in which Jesus responded to the Tempter, who quoted from scripture, not for the edification, but to tempt and mislead Jesus (Matthew 4:1-12).

This principle of interpretation is also traced to Paul’s pronouncement in
interpreting the decision of the Council of Jerusalem on circumcision, when Paul writes
to the Church in Galatia: “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, do
not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1)

Fifth, For these reasons, and all the teachings reviewed in this Commentary, let
me suggest that any temptation to “twist” this teaching on the great respect that Jesus had
for the institution of marriage and family into a tool to oppress and persecute
nonheterosexual people to deny them the benefits of the institution of marriage and
family is contrary to all that Jesus stood and died for.

Sixth, Jesus had strong relationships with nontraditional families. Perhaps his
strongest “family” ties were with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. If Jesus had strong family
ties with this nontraditional family, it was an extension of the strong family values of his
birth family. The picture is limited, but it is clear enough to show that there was a strong
reciprocal love between Jesus and Mary and Martha and Lazarus (John 11:1-12:17).

Seventh, Jesus was profoundly influenced by the love of a Gentile mother for her
child. It mattered not whether she was married or not (Chapter 9: Jesus [and his
Disciples] are Open to New Revelations, page 53, above).

In the Gospel of John, Jesus reveals his purpose and identity to a Samaritan
woman, who had had five husbands, and was living with another man who is not her
husband. She became the identified evangelist in the Gospel of John, whose testimony
caused many to believe in Jesus (John 4:1-39).

Eighth, the Good News of Jesus is something to be shared, not hoarded, not kept
under a lamp. If there is a benefit to the people involved to be in a committed Love
relationship, then it is a benefit that should be shared. Since ancient wisdom literature, it
has always been recognized that “Two are better than one, because they have a good
reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other …Again, if two lie together,
they keep warm: but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail
against another, two will withstand one. A three fold cord [two united in the Holy Spirit]
is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

Ninth, on this issue, at this time, for these reasons, let me suggest that if anyone is
tempted to misuse the teaching of Jesus on divorce in Mark and succumbs to the
temptation to misuse this teaching to justify persecution of non-heterosexuals and a
prohibition on the performance of Holy Unions and Marriages, the motivation comes not
from scripture, but from themselves, and not from Jesus. It does not show love in the
manner of Jesus to the point of washing each other’s feet and serving each other.

Tenth, if all this counted for naught, any attempt to misuse the abbreviated
teaching of Jesus on divorce, marriage, and adultery in Mark must fail because it does not
consider the expanded teaching of Jesus in response to the same question in Matthew.

Read Matthew 19:3-15.

King James Version

Matthew 19:3:”And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judæa beyond Jordan; 2 And great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.
3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?
5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?
6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.
7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?
8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so.
9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.
10 His disciples say unto him, if the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.
11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.
12 For there are some eunuchs, which

New Revised Standard Version

Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” 4 He answered, ‘Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning “made them male and female”, 5 and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’ 7 They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?’ 8 He said to them, ‘It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but at the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.’

10 His disciples said to him, ‘If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.’ 11 But he said to them, ‘Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. 12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.’

13 Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The
were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

13 Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.

14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

15 And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.

disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; 14 but Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.' 15 And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

Commentary by Writer

In Matthew, unlike Mark (where the focus was the identity of Jesus and an action drama that climaxed with the words of the Roman Centurion who said, "Truly, this man was a son of God," (Mark 15:39)), there focus is on the teaching and its application.

In Matthew, the question posed to Jesus is more detailed, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce a wife for any cause?" (Matthew 19:3). In Matthew, the answer is more specific and qualified. Here, Jesus answers, "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning made them male and female? The two became one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together let no one separate. Moses allowed people to divorce because of their hardness of heart, but I tell you, 'Anyone who divorced his wife, except for unchastity, committed adultery'" (Matthew 19:8).

In Matthew, when the disciples ask Jesus in private, "If that is the case with a man and his wife, then it was better not to marry," there is an expanded answer. Jesus replies, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let everyone accept this who can." (Matthew 19:100-12).

In this way, even in the context of heterosexual marriage and divorce, Jesus was very clear that no one can put limits on God and that all people, married or unmarried who seek the kingdom of God, whether heterosexual, eunuch, homosexual, or
nonheterosexual, are welcome and may be included in the kingdom of God. As a result, the teaching on divorce provides no justification to persecute homosexual members of the church as lesser members with lesser rights than heterosexual members.

Some will argue that eunuchs are not the historical equivalent of homosexuals. This argument fails to consider what we actually know about the historical context of this teaching. There was a long historical and legal tradition that excluded eunuchs from the House of the Lord as documented in Deuteronomy 23:1.

This early historical and legal tradition stood in contrast to a later prophetic tradition that included eunuchs in the House of the Lord. Isaiah, concerning eunuchs, wrote: “(D)o not let the eunuch say, “I am just a dry tree.” For thus says the Lord, “To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast to my covenants, I will give, in my house and within the walls, a monument and name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off” (Isaiah 56:3-5).

Therefore, when Jesus chose to include eunuchs in the kingdom of God (described as kingdom of Heaven in Matthew) in the teaching of divorce, marriage and adultery, as recorded in Matthew, it was a significant choice that all people, male, female, or eunuch, whether married or unmarried were included in the kingdom of God; and there is nothing in the Mark account to the contrary.

Eleventh, let me also suggest that those who dwell too upon the reference to the creation story in reference to Jesus’ teaching on divorce as authority for denying Holy Unions and Marriage to nonheterosexual people in committed Love relationships, would themselves do well to consider the implications of Jesus’ specific teaching on marriage when he was questioned about “marriage” under Mosaic Law in the Resurrection, and responded, “They neither marry nor are given to marry, but are like angels in heaven” (Mark 12:26) and also responded: “(H)ave you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?” He is God not of the dead, but of the living.” (Mark 12:27).

These brief teachings put some perspective on those who would raise “sanctity of marriage” to the level of an ultimate absolute. Further, since God is God of the living, and God of abundant life, when a commitment between two people in Holy Union or Marriage in the presence of the Holy Spirit before God enhances life and God gives abundant life, who can truly be against this “life” and “abundant life” and would deny it to others in the name of God?

Therefore, whatever authority may be found for the exclusion, persecution, and oppression of nonheterosexual people, that would deny to them the Blessing of a Holy Union or Marriage as nonheterosexual members of the church in the presence of the Holy Spirit before God, it may be traced to human roots; but such authority does not come from the Gospel of Jesus.
Witness from Our Tradition

"A Mighty Fortress is our God"

A mighty fortress is our God. A bulwark never failing;
Our helper he amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe.
His craft and power are great. And armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing
Were not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth, his name, From age to age the same;
And he must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us
The Prince of Darkness grim, We tremble not from him;
His rage we can endure, For lo, his doom is sure;
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earth powers, No thanks to them, abideth
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through him who with us sideeth;
Let good and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill; God’s truth abideth still.
His kingdom is forever.

(Written by Martin Luther, 1483-1546; Translated by Frederick H. Hedge, 1805-1890; Melody by Matin Luther, 1483-1546; United Methodist Hymnal, page 20)
Chapter 13. Jesus Calls Good People To Examine Their Priorities

Read Mark 10:17-31

King James Version

Mark 10: 17: “And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?
18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.
19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother,
20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.
21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.
22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.
23 And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!
24 And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!
25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

New Revised Standard Version

Mark 10: 17: “As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’
18 Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.’ 20 He said to him, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.’ 21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ 22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.
23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ 24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!’ 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’ 26 They were greatly astounded and said to one another, ‘Then who can be saved?’ 27 Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.’
26 And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?
27 And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.
28 Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.
29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's,
30 But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.
31 But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.

28 Peter began to say to him, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you.' 29 Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news. 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age--houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions--and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.'

Commentary by Writer

A good man blessed with many possessions responded to Jesus' proclamation of the Good News. He sought out Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life and enter into the Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed. Jesus suggested two steps: The first step was to be in right relation with God, to worship God, not Jesus, because no one was good but God. The second step was to be in right relationship with other people, to know and keep the commandments that provided guidance for being in right relationship with other people and with one's own family, to not murder, not commit adultery, not steal, not bear false witness, not defraud others, and to honor one's parents.

All this the man had done. For this Jesus looked upon him with approval and love. Then looking deep into the man's earnestness, Jesus identified the one thing the man lacked if he were to enjoy eternal life and enter into the Kingdom of God, --a value system that put priority in eternal values and trust in God rather than in oneself and the value of one's own possessions. So, Jesus put this challenge before the man: to sell what he owned and give to the poor; and follow Jesus. Mark reports the man went away grieving because he was not ready to re-orient his own priorities, to give to the poor and
lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth.

The disciples were astonished by what Jesus had said because the man was a good man, a pillar in his community and church. His wealth had come to him as a result of right living. If someone who had lived in right relation to God and with other people and had been rewarded with great wealth as a result of good living still had not earned eternal life and was required to profoundly re-orient his values followed by action in order to enjoy eternal life in the Kingdom of God, then who could be saved?

Jesus gave a three fold reply to their question.

First, Jesus replied that what might seem impossible to people was possible for God.

Second, Jesus responded that all those who had already let go of their attachment to possessions and the security of family for the sake of the Good News (the Twelve and other followers) were receiving a hundred fold reward in this world and eternal life in the age to come even amidst persecution.

Third, Jesus replied that many who appeared to be first would be last and many who appeared to be last would be first.

What is the relevance of this teaching to the issues of this Commentary that arise in the context of heterosexual and non-heterosexual believers? It is this: Both heterosexual and non-heterosexual people carry a lot of baggage with them and possess attitudes, resentments, and false conceptions deeply held toward each other in judgment of each other about things they do not understand so that they are not able to view other people as beloved children of One God in the same manner they view themselves.

No matter how good heterosexual people may be, no matter how right their relation with God and in their behavior toward others, it is not possible for heterosexual people who carry this kind of baggage (attitudes, resentments, and false conceptions toward nonheterosexual people in judgment of them about things that prevent them from viewing nonheterosexual people as beloved Children of One God in the same manner as they view themselves) to enter into the full Joy of Jerusalem through the Gate at the Eye of the Needle unless they first let go of this baggage.

Similarly, no matter how good nonheterosexual people may be, no matter how right their relation with God and in their behavior towards others, it is not possible for nonheterosexual people who carry this kind of baggage (attitudes, resentments that prevent them from viewing heterosexual people as beloved Children of One God in the same manner they view themselves) to enter into the full Joy of Jerusalem through the Gate at the Eye of the Needle unless they first let go of this baggage.

For all, it is a shedding of the old to take on the new, in humble humility together.
Witness from Our Tradition

"Have Thine Own Way, Lord"

Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!
Thou art the potter; I am the clay,
Mold me and make me After thy will,
While I am waiting, Yielded and still.

Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!
Search me and try me, Master, today!
Whiter than snow, Lord, Wash me just now,
As in thy presence Humbly I bow.

Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!
Wounded and weary, Help me, I pray!
Power, all power, Surely is thine!
Touch me and heal me, Savior divine!

Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!
Hold o'er my being Absolute sway!
Fill with thy spirit till all shall see
Christ only, always, Living in me!

(Written by: Adelaide A. Pollard, 1862-1934; Music by: George C. Stebbeins, 1846-1943; United Methodist Hymnal, page 154)
Chapter 14. Jesus identifies A Unified Love Ethic

Jesus taught everywhere in almost every synagogue throughout Galilee, but he knew his teaching was in vain, unless he returned to the Temple in Jerusalem, where he first sat at the hands of the religious teachers, and taught there, even though he knew it would mean his death at the hands of those who opposed the teaching that offended them.

So, Jesus prepared his disciples as best he could and went to Jerusalem, teaching in the Temple during the day, while returning to Bethany where he stayed in the house of Simon the Leper. As they were going up to Jerusalem, Jesus walked in front of the others. They were amazed and those who followed were afraid. (Mark 10:32). When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he went to the Temple, and when he had looked around at everything, as it was late, he returned to Bethany with the Twelve (Mark 11:11).

The following day, he returned to the Temple and began to teach, first, about the Temple as a House of Prayer for all nations (Mark 11:12-18).

In his teaching Jesus was recognized as one who taught with sincerity, who did not regard people with partiality, but taught the way of God in accordance with truth (Mark 12:24). So, in the midst of disputed theological debate with Herodians over the legality of paying taxes to Caesar and with Sadducees over the institution of marriage in the resurrection (Mark 12:13-27), a scribe, who was impressed by the way Jesus answered these questions, asked him what commandment was first of all.

Read Mark 12:28-34.

King James Version

Mark 12: 28: And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?
    29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God is one Lord:
    30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.
    31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment

New Revised Standard Version

Mark 12: 28: “One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, ‘Which commandment is the first of all?’ 29 Jesus answered, ‘The first is, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” 31 The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’ 32 Then the scribe said to him, ‘You are right, Teacher; you have
greater than these.

32 And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:
33 And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.
34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him only question.

truly said that “he is one, and besides him there is no other”; 33 and “to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength”, and “to love one’s neighbour as oneself”,--this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.’ 34 When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ After that no one dared to ask him any question.

**Commentary by Writer**

In the account of the same exchange in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus states that “(o)n these two commandments hang all the law and prophets.” (Matthew 22:40)

What then is the relevance of these two commandments today to the debate among pastor-disciples regarding non-heterosexual disciples of Jesus and those among them who are in committed love relationships? It is this.

Among us, there are beloved pastor-disciples, and others well versed in scripture, devout in the practice of the faith, who say: “We cannot bless Holy Unions or Marriage between people of the same sex because the Bible says that it is an abomination for a man to sleep with a man in the same way as with a woman (See the Holiness Code in Leviticus at 20:13) Did not Jesus quote from Genesis, with approval, when he said that God made people to be male and female to become one flesh (Matthew 19:3-7; Genesis 2:21-25). If we blessed these Holy Unions and Marriages between people of the same sex, it would be a betrayal of our understanding of our faith.”

And among us, there are beloved pastors-disciples and others well versed in scripture and devout in practice of the faith, who say, “Does not the Bible say it is better for two to lie together than alone, without making any distinction between male or female? (From ancient wisdom literature at Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). If we discern that two people of the same sex seek to make a commitment to each other with the Holy Spirit at the center, in love, would it not be a sin against the Holy Spirit if we were to deny these
two people a ceremony that will bring new depth of meaning to their lives? (See Mark 3:28-29). Is not this what marriage is about?" See Chapter 4, pages 25-27

Then, the Living Jesus appears in the midst all these beloved pastor-disciples as only he can and asks, "**What is the most important commandment?**"

They answer with one accord, "It is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength," and "To love your neighbor as yourself."

Then, the Living Jesus, tells them an old Parable new:

"There was a young man who lived in Jericho who was beset with cancer, bone-marrow cancer for which there was no cure. He had a large circle of friends but was not a member of any church. Therefore the Priest did not know him. The Priest had a large church, services to prepare, communion to administer, and many members to whom he ministered. So the Priest did not see the young man as he went about his business. Among the young man’s friends was a Levite who lived in Jerusalem. He was busy with his work and school and family obligations. He loved his friend and visited him often but his visits were limited as he went about his business. The young man also had a friend who was from Samaria. This friend did not have work and family obligations like the Levite. He volunteered as a live-in home nurse and was with the young man when died at home."

Then, the Living Jesus, asks these beloved pastor-disciples, "**Which of these was the neighbor?**"

All reply in one voice, "The Samaritan Friend, of course! We have known this from our youth. But what does this have to do with homosexuality and blessing homosexual unions and marriages?"

Then Jesus, the Living Jesus, says to them and us,

"Did I not tell you (or did you not hear). The Priest was celibate. He had taken vows to desire only God’s will. The Levite was married and had a family. He was a good Church member. He was heterosexual. But the Samaritan had taken no such vow and had no such obligations. He was homosexual. Now tell me, Which of these was the Neighbor — the celibate priest, the heterosexual Levite, or the homosexual Samaritan?"

Some reply, "It was the homosexual Samaritan." Others murmur, "It cannot be the homosexual Samaritan! Why, homosexuality is immoral and against God’s plan."

And Jesus, the Living Jesus, begins to teach them:
“Is there homosexual sexual conduct that is immoral? Of course there is. Is there heterosexual sexual conduct that is immoral? Of course there is. Then where does the immorality come from if it does not come from the homosexuality or the heterosexuality?

“Have I not taught that the immorality comes from the unclean heart. And the unclean heart makes no distinction on the basis of sexuality, heterosexuality, homosexuality, or nonheterosexuality.”

“Listen! Restudy my Words and Teachings, all of them and walk to the Cross with me.”

“Whenever I taught about ethical values and morality, did not my teachings apply to all human relations, including the most intimate of sexual relations, whether heterosexual or non-heterosexual. Did not I always apply one ethical standard based on Love, Responsibility, Faithfulness, Joy, Sacrifice, Fulfillment
Commitment, Non-exploitation and Forgiveness in all human relations. Do not these teachings apply to all relationships, including the most intimate sexual relations between all people, both heterosexual and homosexual relations alike.”

“Did I not warn you about that Day that is to come, when all will stand in Judgement, that people will be divided, not by their sexuality, but by the way they treat others?”

“Did I not teach you about the Unforgivable Sin, the sin against the Holy Spirit and that many who say ‘Lord, Lord,’ will not enter into the Glory, but only those who do the will of God.”

“Have I not paid the price for my teaching in my own life and for daring to love in this manner.”

Then Jesus, the Living Jesus, departed. And some who heard, rejoiced. But there were also those who heard and understood and were silent, for they had large churches. They knew what it would mean to carry this Cross.

Still others were silent because they had accumulated power and authority and prestige over other people by applying the teachings of Jesus one way to some and another way to others and they were comfortable and did not want to give these up.

And there were others, who could not believe such words could come from God –so contrary to what they had been taught --and they wondered among themselves if this the Living Jesus who had appeared among them was not some Antichrist with blasphemy on his lips.

But to those who heard and understood, even when their personal Cross was heavy, it gave great comfort, and their numbers grew.
Witness from Our Tradition

“Beneath the Cross of Jesus”

Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand,
The shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land;
A home within a wilderness, a rest upon the way.
From the burning of the noontide heat, And the burden of the day.

Upon the cross of Jesus mine eyes at times can see
The very dying form of One who suffered there for me;
And from my stricken heart with tears two wonders I confess;
The wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness.

I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face.
Content to let the world go by, To know no gain nor loss,
My sinful self my only shame, My glory all the cross.

(Written by Elizabeth C. Clephane, 1830-1865; Music by
Frederick C. Maker, 1844-1927; United Methodist Hymnal, page 417)

“More Love to Thee, O Christ”

More love to thee, O Christ, More love to thee!
Hear thou the prayer I make, On bended knee;
This is my earnest plea; More love, O Christ, to thee,
More love to thee, More love to thee!

Once earthly joy I craved, Sought peace and rest;
Now thee alone I seek, Give what is best.
This all my prayer shall be: More love, O Christ, to thee,
More love to thee, More love to thee!

Let sorrow do its work, Come grief and pain;

90
Sweet are thy messengers, Sweet their refrain,
When they can sing with me, More love, O Christ, to thee
More love to thee, More love to thee!

When shall my latest breath Whisper thy praise;
This be the parting cry My heart shall raise:
This still its prayer shall be, More love, O Christ, to thee,
More love to thee, More love to thee!

(Written by: Elizabeth P. Prentiss, 1818-1878; Music by: William Doane, 1832-1915; United Methodist Hymnal, page 185)
Chapter 15: The Kingdom? All, yes All are invited! Each in a personal way.

In the Gospel according to Mark, the kingdom of God is one of the central teachings of Jesus from beginning to end. Therefore, any Commentary on the teachings of Jesus, the Living Jesus within our midst, regarding the relevance of his teachings in regards to heterosexuality and homosexuality and other forms of nonheterosexuality, is not complete without re-examining the whole of Jesus’ teachings on the Kingdom of God (Heaven). What it is? Who is invited to enter therein?

In the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God is the first public teaching of Jesus in Galilee (see Chapter 2) and Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom of God is last public teaching in the Temple in Jerusalem (See Chapter 14).

Read Mark 1:9-14

King James Version

Mark 1:9: “And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.
10 And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens open, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him;
11. And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.
12. And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness.
13. And he was there in the wilderness forty days tempted by Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.
14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,
15 And saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

New Revised Standard Version

Mark 1:9: “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.
10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 13 And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved: with you I am well pleased’.
12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.
14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news’.
Commentary by Writer

The Gospel of Mark begins with the anointing of Jesus with the Spirit of God when he is baptized by John the Baptist. Immediately thereafter, the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness where he is tempted with only angels to minister to him. Then, following the arrest of John the Baptist, when association with John the Baptist is most dangerous, Jesus begins proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom of God in Galilee, calling all to repent and believe the good news, that the kingdom of God is at hand.

What does this tell us about the kingdom of God?

It tells us that the kingdom of God is the experience of God’s grace poured out for all of us, a powerful experience that God is Love, that we may have intimate relationship with God.

It tells us that the Spirit is with all of us in the midst of the wilderness of our temptations when ministered to only by angels.

It tells us the kingdom is near to all, and all can enter the kingdom if we live out of the experience that God is Love in the midst of temptations and persecutions.

It tells about the enduring reality of the kingdom of God in the midst of temptation in the wilderness among wild beasts, where our own strength is insufficient, and angels minister to us. It tells us that to enter the kingdom of God is to live out of the enduring reality of the kingdom of God, even in the midst of persecution from others.

The gospel of Mark tells us that to enter the kingdom God need not be done with reckless abandon. Jesus did not immediately proceed to Jerusalem but went to Galilee where he grew in his knowledge of the kingdom of God and his own calling.

How is this relevant to heterosexual and nonheterosexual people? It is this: All may enter into the Kingdom. All, who have experienced the Love of God, and repent (that is, who turn toward that which is greater than themselves, God of Love, and live the experience of the love of God and for other persons). It involves a personal decision, not in judgment of others, but in the midst of our own lives and passions. It means that each person may enter into the kingdom of God by the way each one lives in love toward God, oneself, and others, regardless of anything else that might divide us, across the entire spectrum of sexuality from asexuality to heterosexuality to non-heterosexuality.

The last teaching of Jesus on the kingdom of God in Mark is in the Temple of Jerusalem when Jesus is questioned by the scribe about the first commandment.

Read Mark 12:32-34
King James Version

Mark 12:32: “And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:
33 And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.
34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.

New Revised Standard Version

Mark 12:32: “Then the scribe said to him, ‘You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that “he is one, and besides him there is no other”; 33 and “to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength”, and “to love one’s neighbour as oneself”,—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.’ 34 When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’

Commentary

What this tells about the kingdom of God is that scribe was not far from the kingdom of God because he knew what was important; and when the scribe begins to live out the first commandment, to love God, to love others as he loves himself, then he will enter into the Kingdom of God.

This is relevant to Christian doctrine regarding heterosexual and homosexual practices because it is not so much important what people say they believe about each other, —although right language is a first step,—as the way that we treat each other.

Jesus had strong words for those who lay burdens upon others that they themselves were not able to bear (Luke 11:46).

For these reason alone, it is important to remove language from the Book of Discipline that lays burdens on others with prohibitions and oppressions that we would not apply to ourselves, but no change in language will bring us into the kingdom of God in its fullest sense until we live out the Commandment to Love God and Love Others, even as Jesus loved his disciples by washing the feet of all disciples and stepping forward to lay his life down for them and us, rather than sacrifice their lives for him.

The Apostles understood this well. Peter, Paul, James, and John had many disagreements over doctrinal disputes that divided them and divide us, but they was unanimous on the one thing that was pre-eminent: Love of God and Love others as
oneself. Without the love that Jesus taught and demonstrated,—love of God and others,—we would be, merely a "noisy gong or clanging cymbal...nothing" (I Corinthians 13: 2).

If we cannot listen to each other, let us listen to what Peter and Paul, James and John said about the commandment to Love God and others to this matter so that together, we might all enter more fully into the joy of the kingdom of God. See the witness of Peter at I Peter 3: 8-9; 4: 8, 5: 5; the witness of Paul at Galatians 5: 13-14 and 6: 10 and Romans 12: 1 and 13: 8-10; the witness of James at James 2: 8; and the witness of John in I John 4: 7-19, and apply it, now.

When we live out of this Love of God and others, then we will find words and language for the Book of Discipline that removes language that is oppressive and makes false distinctions to some and replace it with language that builds up one another in service to one another.

After Jesus taught the scribe about the kingdom of God in Mark, the next time Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God was not a teaching for others, but in reference to his only life.

Read Mark 14: 25

King James Version
14.25: "Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the Kingdom of God..

Revised Standard Version
14.25: "Truly, I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God."

Commentary by Writer

From his baptism to his crucifixion for Jesus, to enter into the kingdom of God was a process, an unfolding process, open to God all around him, even in a mother’s love for her child. It meant living what he had experienced; it meant living what he was teaching and preaching. Love of God in the fullest sense and Love of others, even to love of one’s enemy.

Taken in historical context, it may be said of the crucifixion of Jesus, that no one did more to put an end to the Roman practice of crucifixion; no one did more to defeat the oppression of Rome; no one did more to defeat the power of Death --not by resurrection -- but by submitting to crucifixion. For this reason, let me suggest that the Roman
Centurion, who stood and watch Jesus as he breathed his last, said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Mark 15:9); and Paul proclaimed, "I preach Christ crucified." (I Corinthians 1:23)

The relevance of these kingdom accounts to the issues of sexuality for heterosexual and nonheterosexual people is that all people are invited to enter into the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is an unfolding process for each according to the unique circumstances of each. The kingdom of God is like scattered seed. It is not static. It grows. It can grow even from the smallest seed into the greatest of trees (Mark 4:26-30).

The last reference to the kingdom of God in Mark is most remarkable.

Read Mark 15:42-43)

King James Version

15.42: And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day of the sabbath.
43 Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which was also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body.

New Revised Standard Version

15.42 When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Commentary by Writer

Joseph of Arimathaea was a respected member of the council, the same council that turned Jesus over to Pilate for crucifixion. This Joseph was also waiting for the kingdom of God; and let me suggest that Joseph of Arimathaea entered into the kingdom of God when he went boldly to Pilate and "craved the body". By these actions, Joseph of Arimathea puts to shame all of us who have not been willing or able to take bold action on behalf of each other on this issue, in this time.

In the Gospel of John, there is reported another encounter between Jesus and a religious ruler regarding entry into the kingdom of God. It is a long narrative, but it is worth reading in its entirety in the context of these teachings about the kingdom of God in Mark. It is found at John 3:1-11 and it concerns another religious leader, also a member of the Council, who was seeking the kingdom of God.

King James Version

John 3:1: "There was a man of the

New Revised Standard Version

John 3:1 "Now there was a Pharisee
Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.
2 The same came to Jesus by night and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.
3. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee. Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
4. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?
5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.
6. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.
8. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and though hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.
9. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?
10 Jesus answered and said unto him. Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?
11. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen..."

Commentary

These words are spoken to Nicodemus, the Pharisee, another member of the Council. They are not spoken to the Twelve. They are not spoken to those round about
Jesus with the twelve. They are not spoke to the rich young ruler. They are not spoken to Joseph of Arimathea.

They are spoken only to Nicodemus, a respected religious authority, one who recognized Jesus as a Rabbi, was well versed in scripture, and devoted to pious living.

Today, I tell you there are many religious leaders, who recognize Jesus as Lord, who are well versed in scripture, and lead a pious life, who when it comes to this subject are born-again dead in their self-righteousness. They are lost in their obsession of fleshiness. They are blind to the movement of the Spirit

To these, on this issue, in this day, Jesus speaks a special word and extends a special invitation to enter into the full joy of the kingdom of God.

These are beloved leaders who know the Spirit is like a wind that blows where it will. To these beloved leaders, has been given the gift of discernment, for a testing of the spirits. In their own lives, these beloved leaders have experienced the movement of Spirit, far beyond many, and these know the Spirit blows where it will and can alight upon anyone, heterosexual or nonheterosexual.

But to these beloved leaders is given the task of pastoring lest any be lost so that in pursuit of the one, there remains a concern for the safe keeping of all

So to these, I write with great love on the very narrow topic of language in the Book of Discipline to which this Commentary is addressed for myself and others:

"We speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen."

"Test our Spirit! See from whence the Spirit comes, so that when the Spirits are tested, and questions answered to the satisfied and discernment of all, together we may be born anew, and see what we have not seen, and enter more fully into the joy of the kingdom of God, so that it may grow to full maturity within us and about us.

"Do not underestimate our love for you."

For we have a story to tell. If not now, when?
From our tradition

"We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations"

We’ve a story to tell to the nations, That shall turn their hearts to the right,
A story of truth and mercy, A story of peace and light,
A story of peace and light. For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
And the dawning to noon - day bright, And Christ’s great kingdom shall come on earth, The kingdom of love and light.

We’ve a song to be sung to the nations, That shall lift their hearts to the Lord,
‘A song that shall conquer evil And shatter the spear and sword,
And shatter the spear and sword. For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
And the dawning to noon - day bright, And Christ’s great kingdom shall come on earth, The kingdom of love and light.

We’ve a message to give to the nations, That the Lord who reigneth above,
Hath sent us his Son to save us, And show us that God is love,
And show us that God is love. For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
And the dawning to noon - day bright, And Christ’s great kingdom shall come on earth, The kingdom of love and light.

We’ve a Savior to show to the nations, Who the path of sorrow hath trod,
That all of the world’s great peoples Might come to the truth of God,
Might come to the truth of God! For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
And the dawning to noon - day bright, And Christ’s great kingdom shall come on earth, The kingdom of love and light.

(Written by: H. Ernest Nichol, 1862-1928; Music by: H. Ernest Nichol, 1862-1928; United Methodist Hymnal, page 410)

"MAY THIS WITNESS BE HEARD SO THAT ALL MAY ENTER THE KINGDOM TOGETHER. AND MAY SILENT LIPS BE GIVEN WORDS TO SPEAK, FOR WE ARE ONE FAMILY AND WITNESS TO THESE THINGS, NOW, IN THIS DAY."
POSTSCRIPT: THE WITNESS OF PAUL AND THE SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

Still some will say, what about Romans 1:26-27 and I Corinthians 6:9? Were not these verses written by Paul under the inspiration of the Spirit? Do not these verses pass judgment on homosexual relationships?

When I have heard people --even respected scholars -- misrepresent Paul by taking these verses taken out of context, I am tempted to say, “You do not worship God at all. You worship only yourselves. You read these scriptures as justification for your persecution of homosexuals and those you do not understand. You read these verses not for edification or the uplifting of the spirit, but only to prevent an examination of yourself. You do not worship God at all but only your own interpretations, your own visions, your own prejudices because God is so much bigger than you.”

Then, I am reminded by my Cloud of Witnesses

“Read scripture together.”

“Continue to read scripture together with anyone and everyone.”

“Listen! Do not judge! Let God be God!”

“If there is to be any change of heart, including any change of your own heart, it will not come from you and your own arrogant righteousness. It will not come from your willfulness or from you.”

“When Change comes, it will come in God’s time, not yours. That all may enter into the kingdom together, and none are lost.”

And I am reminded of Bishop Otto Debilius, the Bishop of East Berlin, both under Nazi rule and Communist rule, who foresaw a time when the Berlin Wall would come done and that God cast a line wide enough that all may be saved, and none lost. *

Then my Cloud of Witnesses shows me Jesus stooping to wash the feet of his followers, even those who will betray him, healing those who come to him on the Sabbath, who touch the hem of his garment, laying his life down for his followers, putting their lives before his own.

So, then, together, we read Romans, not just for ourselves, but for Paul, and not just part of Romans, but all of Romans. What does Paul tell us about his sexuality, our sexuality, whether heterosexual or homosexual or other, and what does Paul tell us about his spiritual journey, his salvation and our salvation, however we define sexuality and salvation.

*See Day is Dawning, the Story of Bishop Otto Debilius, pp 158-159, etc.
First, we note that Paul is writing to all people, that Paul identifies himself as a servant of Jesus, "through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring the obedience of faith among all Gentiles."

By this, Paul repeatedly tells us that it is his purpose to witness to all people loved by God without distinction, to witness to all people, heterosexual and homosexual alike, who comprise the family of Jesus (See Romans 1:5, 1:7, 1:8). And we note that Paul writes from a sense of urgency from the obligation he feels to all people, to heterosexual and homosexual alike (Romans 1:14), because in Rome, Paul identifies people, heterosexual and homosexual, who are worshiping images of mortal beings instead of God, who are worshiping their own greediness and lusts in service of themselves, rather than the Creator (Romans 1:18-28).

Second, we note the division that Paul makes in Romans is not a division between heterosexuals and homosexuals but between the righteous and unrighteous. For when Paul describes the unrighteous who forsake knowledge of God as those who are full of "every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice" (Romans 1:28) and "(f)ull of envy, murder strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, and ruthless: (Romans 1:29-32), Paul does not write about faithful homosexual believers and followers of Jesus. All faithful believers are excluded from the list of the unrighteous who worship themselves instead of God.

Third, even if Paul, in his humanness, meant to describe unrighteous people who worship themselves instead of God to a strict division of people on the basis of sexuality so that only homosexual people were condemned, --which he does not do, --Paul goes on to address the righteous who make these judgments against others in even stronger words: "You have no excuse, whoever you are, because you, the judge, are doing the very same thing." (Romans 2:1).

Fourth, Paul gives his own personal witness. It is that all people, circumcised or uncircumcised, righteous and unrighteous, [heterosexual or nonheterosexual] are equal in God’s sight. “For God shows no partiality.” (Romans 2:1-11).

Fifth, Paul becomes very specific. “To those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality [whether they be heterosexual or nonheterosexual], God will give eternal life.” (Romans 2:1-6). Those who are self-seeking and obey not the law, will experience wrath and fury (Romans 2:8). There will be “glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek [be they heterosexual or nonheterosexual] for “God shows no partiality (Romans 2:9).

Then, Paul writes, "There is nothing that separates people with respect to salvation because salvation does not come by works, whether a person is circumcised of
uncircumcised, [that is, without regard to heterosexuality or nonheterosexuality]” (Romans 2:12-3:10). For Paul writes from his own experience: “A person is justified by faith apart from works. Is God the God of Jews only? Is God the God of Gentiles also? Since God is one, God will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through their faith.” (Romans 3:28-30).

So, when we read Paul for Paul, and not our preconceived notions, Paul gives witness to Jesus as Lord, and delivers a Word writ large in his life, that God is one God, God of the Jew, God of the Gentile, God of the heterosexual, God of the nonheterosexual, God of the asexual, God of the homosexual, God of the lesbian, God of the gay, God of the transsexuals, God of the transgender, God of those engage in sexual activities, and God of those who do not. And because God is One, God justifies the heterosexual by faith and the homosexual through faith. (Compare Romans 3:29). And our eyes are opened as we see Jesus through the eyes of Paul.

Then Paul continues, “There is no distinction between you. Jesus is Lord of all, for everyone who calls on the name of Jesus will be saved.” (Romans 10:12-13). And Paul admonishes each of us, “By the grace given to me I say to everyone among you, think not of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Let love be genuine. Outdo one another in showing honor to each other for we are one body in Christ... For the law is summed up in the word, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself because love is the fulfillment of all the commandments.’ (Romans 12:3-5, 9)

Now, I ask, for Paul:

How can “love be genuine among us” as United Methodists, how can “we outdo one another in showing honor to each other” as United Methodists, if we do not excise from the Book of Discipline or change the blanket language in the Social Principles that states, “(W)e .... consider the [practice of homosexuality] ....”incompatible with Christian teachings” and substitute appropriate language that shows honor to each other.

Together we read what Paul writes in I Corinthians 6:9, which some use to justify their persecution and oppression of nonheterosexuals, and not just I Corinthians 6:9 but all of I Corinthians, and we read it not just for ourselves, but with Paul for Paul.

Read alone, I Corinthians 6:9 is a strange verse unrelated to the question that was before Paul: What to do with a man who apparently is living with his mother, in heterosexual sexual sin and heterosexual fornication with her (I Corinthians 5:1-7:1). Read alone, even under the most narrow, literal interpretation, I Corinthian 6:9 is not addressed to responsible, committed, loving relations between homosexual men; it is directed toward male prostitution.
And if we read Paul for Paul, and not for our presupposed prejudices, we cannot read I Corinthians 6:9 without reference to what follows in I Corinthians 7, where Paul addresses the issue of whether or not to marry.

We cannot read it without an awareness that Paul was careful in his writings to distinguish those matter in which he was expressing a personal opinions from other instances where he attributed his opinion to divine revelation. This verse was not attributed to the latter.

We cannot read I Corinthian 6:9 without further reference to Paul’s continued testimony that there is no distinction between believers, but One Spirit working through each believer with a diversity of gifts and Paul’s admonition that all members of the Church should have the same care for each other as members of the Body so that when one member suffers, all the members suffer, and when one is honored, all the members are honored (I Corinthians 12:25-17).

And we cannot read I Corinthians 6:9 without reference to the greater issues toward the letter is directed: Faith, Hope, and Love, and that nothing matters without love (I Corinthians 13)

Most important, as in all his letters, from whatever his human perspective, Paul points to Jesus. So that when we read Paul for Paul, we see that Paul never put himself or his teaching above that of Jesus and Jesus’ teaching.

Commentary by Reader
Commentary by Reader


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So, when we read Paul for Paul, and not for ourselves, our eyes are opened as we see Jesus through the eyes of Paul, and we cannot but sing together, “Amazing Grace,” “Oh for a Thousand Tongues to Sing.”

**Witness from Our Tradition**

“Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound”

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.

Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved; How precious did that grace appear The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come; Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures; He will my shield and portion be As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail, And mortal life shall cease, I shall possess, within the veil, A life of joy and peace.

(Written by John Newton, 1725-1807; Early American Melody; United Methodist Hymnal, page 92)

“O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing”

O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemers praise, The glories of my God and King, the Triumph of his grace!

My gracious Master and my God, Assist me to proclaim, To spread thro’ all the world abroad, the honors of your name.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears, That bids our sorrows cease, ‘Tis music in the sinners ears, ‘Tis life, and health, and peace.

He breaks the power of canceled sin, He sets the prisoner free; His blood can make the foulest clean; His blood availed for me.

He speaks, and listening to his voice, New life the dead receive; The mournful, broken hearts rejoice; The humble poor, believe.
Witness from Our Tradition

Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb, Your loosened lips employ; 
Ye blind, behold your Savior comes; And leap, ye lame, for joy

(Written by Charles Wesley, 1707-1788; Music by Carl G. Glaesser, 
1784-1829; Arranged by Lowell Mason, 1792-1872; United 
Methodist Hymnal, page 1)

--And Jesus blessed the loaves, and broke the bread, and divided the two fish; 
and those who partook were filled, and when they ate their fill, they took up twelve 
baskets of broken pieces and fish. (Mark 6:31-44)
“JUST A CLOSER WALK ...

... Part III: To do what we have not yet done
PART III: “DO”

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"READING GALATIANS THE WAY PAUL THE LAWYER WROTE IT"

Introduction

Reading, studying, and applying Galatians the way Paul the Lawyer wrote it can be a significant tool to bridging the gaps that presently divide the United Methodist Church and the Church in General regarding equal treatment of heterosexual and non-heterosexual persons in ordination, marriage, and full participation in the church.

That is because Paul "got the message of Jesus" in a very personal way. He understood what it meant to preach "freedom in Christ" and the Gospel of Christ from his own persecution of the church and the witness of Steven, and from his own conversion, and missionary work among Gentiles in a much deeper, more personal, more passionate way than was evident from the compromise decision of the Council of Jerusalem to accept Gentiles into the church so long as they followed the Mosaic law by eating kosher food and not food that was sacrificed to idols, and by giving to the poor, while abstaining from fornication. (Acts 15: 1-29; Galatians 3:9–10).

This attempt to read and study Galatians, the way Paul, the lawyer wrote it, has an advantage to all parties regarding the dispute over the present Discipline language that has divided us. That is, because studying Galatians by use of legal
briefing techniques applied to all legal opinions—and *Galatians* can be read this way. It allows all parties to focus afresh on what Paul wrote and what Paul meant without other preconceived theological points of view or agendas.

This approach is also important because in fairness to Paul, he has been subject to much misquotation and mis-application when people have read Paul from their own point of view, without regard to Paul’s point of view.

This is also important because Paul often makes a distinction regarding his own authority when he says he is writing under the Authority of the Holy Spirit, the Promised Advocate, in contrast to other times, when he is addressing administration or other issues for which he makes no claim to write under the Authority of the Holy Spirit.

This study can be completed in two to three sessions, but here it is broken into five sessions. This writer has copied the entire *Epistle to Galatians* in both (1) the Authorized Kings James version and (2) the New Revised Standard Version in parallel columns following this Introduction.

The purpose of this is to (1) allow students to freely mark these texts as instructed by the study that follows; (2) to experience the beauty, clarity, and power of *Galatians* in both the Authorized Kings James Version and the New Revised Standard Version, and (3) most important, to hear Paul speak for Paul.
Because this study applies briefing techniques familiar to all lawyers or law students, this writer suggests that all students --lay and clergy --will benefit most when this study is made by a group if it is taught by a lawyer or law student because, here, we see Paul writing most like the lawyer that he was.

These briefing techniques include identification of the facts, the issues to be decided, the holding made, the rule applied in the present case, the rationale from the rule, and the precedential value of the rule.

The circumstances under which it was written, the issues addressed in both its narrow and broad application from Paul's own background as a student in the Sanhedrin at the knee of Gamaliel provide for a unique reading and understanding of Galatians, not readily applied to the other gospels or epistles to help bridge the cultural, heterosexual, and non-heterosexual divide that exists.
Galatians, as translated in the Authorized King James Version and in the New Revised Standard Version

GALATIANS

Authorized King James Version

CHAPTER 1

Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead),
2 And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:
3 Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ,
4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father;
5 To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.
8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.
9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.
10 For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.
11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.
12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.
13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:
14 And profited in the Jews' religion above many of mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers,
15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,
16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

New Revised Standard Version

1 Paul, an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—
2 and all the members of God's family who are with me,
To the churches of Galatia:
3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.
8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!
10 Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be the servant of Christ.
11 For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.
13 You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might
17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. 18. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. 19 But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother. 20. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. 21. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; 22. And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ: 23. But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. 24. And they glorified God in me.

CHAPTER 2

Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. 2. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. 3. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: 4. And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage; 5. To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. 6. But of these who seemed to be some-what, (whatevsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man’s person,) for they who seemed to be some-what in conference added nothing to me: 7. But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; 8. (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles) proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus. 18. Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; 19 but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord’s brother. 20. In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! 21. Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, 22. and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; 23. they only heard it said, “The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy.” 24. And they glorified God because of me.

2 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. 2. I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain. 3. But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. 4. But because of false believers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us— 5. we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you. 6. And from those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those leaders contributed nothing to me. 7. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised 8. (for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to
9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.
10 Only they that we should remember the poor, the same which I also was forward to do.
11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.
12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.
13 And the other Jews assembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.
14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?
15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,
16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.
17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.
18 For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.
19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.
20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.
21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

CHAPTER 3

O FOOLISH Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

3 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes
2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?
3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?
4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.
5 But if it be otherwise, who is that ministreth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?
6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.
7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.
8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.
9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.
10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.
11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.
12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.
13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.
14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.
15 Brethren, I speak after the manner of men: Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.
16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.
17 And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.
18 For if the inheritance of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.
19 Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.
20 Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.
21 Is the law then against the promises of God? that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified!
22 The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? 4 Did you experience so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing. 5 Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?
6 Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,”
7 so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. 8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.” 9 For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.
10 For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.”
11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”
12 But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, “Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.
14 Brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life: once a person’s will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it. 15 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, “And to offsprings,” as of many; but it says, “And to your offspring,” that is, to one person, who is Christ. 17 My point is this: the law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. 18 For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the
of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

22. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

23. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

24. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

26. For ye are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

27. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

29. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

CHAPTER 4

NOW I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;

2 But I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;

3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world;

4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

8 Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

10 Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

11 I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

12 Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all.

13 Ye know how through infirmity of promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise.

19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator. 20 Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one.

21 Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. 22 But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

23 Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. 27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.

My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves, though they are the owners of all the property; but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. 3 So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world. 4 But when the fulness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. 6 And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7 So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by
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the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first, 14 And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. 15 Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. 16 Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? 17 They zealously affect you, but not well; yes, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them. 18 But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you. 19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, 20 I desire that you be present with you now, and to change my voice, for I stand in doubt of you. 21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? 22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. 24 Which things are an allegory; for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount S' ma'i, which gendereth to bondage, which is A'gar. 25 For this A'gar is mount S' ma'i in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. 26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27 For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. 28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. 29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. 30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.  

CHAPTER 5

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. 2 Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye

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nature are not gods. 9 Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? 10 How can you want to be enslaved to them again? 11 You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years. 12 I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted. 13 Friends, I beg you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong. 14 You know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you; 15 though my condition put you to the test, you did not scorn or despise me, but welcomed me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. 16 What has become of the good will you felt? For I testify that, had it been possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. 17 Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? 18 They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to exclude you, so that you may make much of them. 19 It is good to be made much of for a good purpose at all times, and not only when I am present with you. 20 My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, 21 I wish I were present with you now and could change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. 22 Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law? 23 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. 24 One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise. 25 Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. 26 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 27 But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother. 28 For it is written, "Rejoice, you childless one, you who bear no children, burst into song and shout, you who endure no birth pangs;
be circumcised, Christ shall profite you nothing.
3 For I testify again to every man that is
circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the
whole law.
4 Christ is become of no effect unto you,
whosoever of you are justified by the law;
ye are fallen from grace.
5 For we through the Spirit wait for the
hope of righteousness by faith.
6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumci-
sion avaleth any thing, nor uncircumci-
sion; but faith which worketh by love.
7 Ye did run well; who did hinder you
that ye should not obey the truth?
8 This persuasion cometh not of him
that calleth you.
9 A little leaven leaveneth the whole
lump.
10 I have confidence in you through the
Lord, that ye will be none otherwise
minded: but he that troubleth you shall
bear his judgment, whosesoever he be.
11 And I, brethren, if I yet preach cir-
cumcision, why do I yet suffer persecu-
tion? then is the offence of the cross
cleared.
12 I would they were even cut off which
trouble you.
13 For, brethren, ye have been called
unto liberty; only use not liberty for an
occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one
another.
14 For the law is fulfilled in one
word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour
as thyself.
15 But if ye bite and devour one another,
take heed that ye be not consumed one
of another.
16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit,
and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.
17 For the flesh lusteth against the
Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and
these are contrary the one to the other: so
that ye cannot do the things that ye would.
18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are
not under the law.
19 Now the works of the flesh are mani-
ifest, which are these: Adultery, fornic-
tation, uncleanness, lasciviousness.
20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, var-
iance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions,
heresies,
21 Envysings, murders, drunkenness,
revellings, and such like: of the which I
tell you before, as I have also told you in
time past, that they which do such things
shall not inherit the kingdom of God.
22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,
peace, longsuffering, gentleness, good-
ness, faith,
23 Meekness, temperance: against such
there is no law.
24 And they that are Christ's have cruci-
fied the flesh with the affections and lusts.

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for the children of the desolate
woman are more numerous
than the children of the one who
is married."
28 Now you, my friends, are children of
the promise, like Isaac. 29 But just as at that
time the child who was born according to
the flesh persecuted the child who was born
according to the Spirit, so it is now also.
30 But what does the scripture say? "Drive
out the slave and her child; for the child of
the slave will not share the inheritance with
the child of the free woman." 31 So then,
friends, we are children, not of the slave
but of the free woman. 1 For freedom
Christ has set us free. Stand firm,
therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke
of slavery.

2 Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if
you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ
will be of no benefit to you. 3 Once again I
testify to every man who lets himself be
circumcised that he is obliged to obey the
entire law. 4 You who want to be justified
by the law have cut yourselves off from
Christ; you have fallen away from grace.
5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly
wait for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in
Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncir-
cumcision counts for anything; the only
thing that counts is faith working through
love.

7 You were running well; who prevent-
ed you from obeying the truth? 8 Such per-
suasion does not come from the one who
calls you. 9 A little yeast leavens the whole
batch of dough. 10 I am confident about
you in the Lord that you will not think
otherwise. But whoever it is that is confus-
ing you will pay the penalty. 11 But my
friends, why am I still being persecuted if
I am still preaching circumcision? In that
case the offense of the cross has been re-
moved. 12 I wish those who unsettle you
would castrate themselves!

13 For you were called to freedom,
brothers and sisters; only do not use your
freedom as an opportunity for self-
indulgence, but through love become slaves
to one another. 14 For the whole law
is summed up in a single commandment,
"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
GALATIANS

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25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory provoking one another, envying one another.

CHAPTER 6

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. 2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. 4 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. 5 For every man shall bear his own burden. 6 Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. 7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. 8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

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other, take care that you are not consumed by one another. 16 Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other to prevent you from doing what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, immorality, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. 4 All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. 5 For all must carry their own load. 6 Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher. 7 Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for we reap whatever we sow. 8 If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. 9 So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. 10 So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.
9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

11 Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.

12 As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

13 For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

17 From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

18 Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.
SESSION ONE: Introduction

A. Paul the lawyer  “At the knee of Gamaliel”  Act 22:1-3
                  Acts 5:5-42

Gamaliel was a “teacher of law” (Acts 5:34). He was greatly respected by all people and he gave counsel to the Sanhedrin that saved Peter’s life (Act 5:35-44). Although we do not know all the circumstances, later, while Paul was imprisoned in Jerusalem, and given permission by the tribune to speak to the people to answer charges against him, he is reported as saying, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today.” (Acts 22:3-4)

This, in itself, although not much, is sufficient to apply standard legal research tools to unlock and understand Galatians, and its application today. To this writers’s knowledge, Galatians is the only book of the Bible that can be read in this fashion.

B. Introduction to Briefing Techniques

Facts, Issue(s), Holding(s), Rule(s), Argument or Rationale, Dicta

D. Dynamic of Law and Grace
   i.e. Relation of Exodus (Grace Event) to Law (Exodus 20:1-2)
   i.e. Resisting temptation by law, not grace (Matthew 3:13-4:11; Luke 4:13)

C. Introduction to legal process: General Rule, Exception, New Rule
   Roman law: Paul as Roman Citizen
   Jewish Law: Covenants: Common Law; Legislative Codes

Transformative questions (for class or home)
1. The long version of the First Commandment (Exodus 20:1-2) and quotations from the Law to resist temptation (Matthew 3:13-4:11) are two examples of a dynamic relationship between Law and Grace.

Why are these examples? Can you think of others.
SESSION TWO: Briefing *Galatians*: Identifying Facts, Issue(s), Holding(s)

A. Read *Galatians* 1:1 to 3:5

**Circle** all facts

**Underline** the issue(s). These are questions to be addressed.

**Identify** the holding(s). These are stated or inferred. Usually Yes or No to issue(s)

**Transformative questions (for class or home)**

1. In *Galatians* 1:11-12, Paul writes that the Gospel proclaim by him did not come from human origins or source, but was received by revelation from Jesus Christ.

What Gospel, what born again experience, what transformative insight have you received by revelation of Jesus Christ, or otherwise?


What is the purpose of Paul in listing these questions?

Is Paul writing from a narrow scope or a broad scope?

Explain.
SESSION THREE: Briefing Galatians: Rule, Restatement of Rule, Rationale or Argument, Dicta

Read Galatians 3:6 to end

**Identify** Rule or Restatement of Rule with Roman Numeral.

**Identify** rationale or arguments with numbers. These are arguments that support the Rule. They are not statements of the rule.

**Identify** Dicta with (a), (b), (c). Dicta are related to rule, but not essential to the rule. However, they may be helpful in the future applications of rule.

**Transformative questions**

1. In Galatians 4:13, Paul identifies the fact that it was because of an illness, that he first preached to the Galatians.

Have you had an illness or unfortunate circumstance that has allowed you to give a witness, where you would not have otherwise done so? Share it if you wish.

2. Twice Paul identifies the “entire law” (Galatians 5:14-15) and fulfilling the “law of Jesus” (Galatians 6:1-3).
   - What is the “entire law” to which Paul refers?
   - What is the “law of Jesus” to which Paul refers?

3. In Galatians 3:26-29, Paul writes that on the basis of faith and baptism, “there is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male or female for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”
   - To whom was Paul writing in Galatians?

4. Review the statement and restatement of the Rule(s) in Galatians.
   - What is the precedential application of Galatians today with respect to the place of heterosexual and non-heterosexual persons in the church today?

5. Re-write the statement and restatement of the Rule(s) in Galatians as you think Paul would write it today?
PART TWO: Breaking into the Dynamics of Galatians
SESSION 4
A. Paul and Law (Circumcision of Gentiles) in Galatians

1. Why was this question so important to Paul in Galatians
   (a) Use brief of Galatians (facts, etc) for answer
   (b) Paul’s experience with law, persecution, conversion
   (c) Compare Acts 15:22-31 with Paul’s description (Galatians 2:2-10)

2. Why was Galatians pivotal in New Testament Church, Reformation, Today?
   (a) Did the Jerusalem Council address the real issue?
   (b) Did the Jerusalem Council witness to the Gospel?
   (c) Chart dates when each Epistle and Gospel was written.

B. Jesus and Law (Circumcision of Gentiles) in Gospels.
1. What was Jesus relation to Law (Matthew 5:17)
   (a) Resisting temptation by quoting law (Matthews 4:1-11)
   (b) Healing on Sabbath: Law to do good (Mark 3:1-6)

2. What was Jesus relation to Gentiles
   (a) Read Macabees for despoilage of Temple by Gentile dogs.
   (b) Read Mark, Matthew 5:21-28, Syrophoenician Canaanite woman

3. What was Jesus relation to Law and Love
   (a) Legal Synthesis of law, love : Leviticus 19:18-34, Deuteronomy 6:4-3
   (b) Parable of Good Samaritan: Mark 12: 28-33; Matthew 22:34-40

Transformative questions
1. In what ways did Jesus’ encounter with the Gentile woman, the
   Syrophoenician Canaanite woman transform his life and sense of purpose?

2. What did “taking up the cross mean” after Jesus met the Gentile women?

3. Have you had an encounter with a Good Samaritan Incarnate who went above
   and beyond what others have done, or you have done. What was it?
   Did it open up the reading of scripture for you to a new level? If so, how?
SESSION FIVE

A. From Jesus to Paul

Testimony of Steven: Acts 6:6-12
   Promise plus covenant Acts 7:2-8
   Uncircumcised heart Acts 7:51-53
   Do not hold this against them Acts 7:55-8:1
Paul’s conversion

B. Paul and Law (circumcision) in Romans after Galatians

   Value of Circumcision Romans 2:25-3:4
   Salvation of circumcised and uncircumcised Romans 3:27-31
   Paul: Love your neighbor Romans 13:8-10

C. Jesus and Paul on the topic of Liberation and Freedom

   Jesus: Came not to condemn, but to save John 3:17
   Think of other texts -there are many

   Paul: Freedom in Christ, Galatians 5:1, Galatians 5:13
   Freedom to be new creation, Galatians 6:15
   Salvation is free gift from God, Romans 5:15-17, Romans 6:18-23
   Freedom to use gift that God has given us, Romans 8:28
   No longer view others from a human point of view, 2 Cor 5:16-17

Transformative questions
1. In what way did Paul “get” what Jesus was about, the other disciples may not?

2. One of Paul’s tasks (if not his principal task) in Galatians and later in Romans was to lay a theological foundation regarding an issue that Jesus did not specifically address in his teachings (i.e. circumcision).

   Does Paul’s letter to Galatians provide a model to provide a firm theological foundation on other issues Jesus did not address specifically address?

3. In what way, if at all, did the Gospels provide a corrective to Paul?
ENDNOTE: ON ABSOLUTES

As a result of this study, this writer offers three absolutes to those who want absolutes:

1. Love of God and Neighbor is an absolute that will vary with the specific situation for the purpose of doing what is helpful to free people from oppression or to become a new creation.

2. Any time the Bible, or a portion of it, is used to oppress or persecute people, it is a misuse of the Bible.

3. Without love, we are nothing.
“HAMILTON STATEMENT”

Introduction

The Hamilton Statement was a collaborative effort of a small local church congregation. It is four pages long. It was drafted in 1991 and was sent to delegates of the 1992 General Conference.

The purpose of the Statement was “to witness to our deepest individual and congregational religious experience as United Methodists and to the Biblical foundation of our faith.” It was written in response to the 1988 General Conference Mandate to the Committee on the Study of Homosexuality to propose amendments to the United Methodist Social Principles and Discipline for the 1992 and 1996 General Conference.

The Hamilton Statement was and is directed to Discipline amendments that were adopted by a narrow margin, and have continued to remain unchanged in succeeding General Conferences since 1984, that said (1) United Methodists considered all homosexual practice incompatible with Christian teaching, and (2) Therefore, self-avowed, practicing homosexuals are prohibited from ordination as ministers, or other appointment to serve in the United Methodist Church.

It looks to the United Methodist Quadrilateral (REST, Reason including revelation, Experience, Scripture, Tradition as a unifying authority for a
theological statement from a local church to the General Conference.

It demonstrates what lay members of United Methodist congregations can do on their own initiative or when invited to share in writing with each other the scriptures and hymns and experiences that were most significant in their lives, that bind them together in Christian fellowship, regardless of sexual orientation or self-identification.

The Hamilton Statement was also used as the foundation for the Four Amendment on Ordination that follow that the congregation submitted to the 1995 Northern California-Nevada Annual Conference, were approved by ratio of 60% to 40% for submission to the 1996 Annual Conference, and from information obtained by this writer still awaits a floor vote of the General Conference.

This writer recommends that all congregations of all United Methodist Churches and delegates to General Conference 2016 read and adopt the Hamilton Statement, or use it a resource to identify and give witness to their own deepest individual and congregational experience as United Methodists, and to Biblical foundation of our faith in preparation for General Conference 2016.
ORIGIN: This Statement originated from the congregation of Hamilton United Methodist Church in San Francisco, California, and is endorsed by those who have signed it.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Statement is to witness to our deepest individual and congregational religious experience as United Methodists and to the Biblical foundation of our faith. It is in response to the 1988 General Conference Mandate to the Committee on the Study of Homosexuality to propose amendments to the United Methodist Social Principles and Discipline for the 1992 General Conference, and for the 1996 General Conference.

It is directed toward two Discipline amendments adopted by a very divided General Conference in 1984, that said (1) we consider all homosexual practice incompatible with Christian teaching, and (2) therefore, self-avaowed, practicing homosexuals are prohibited from ordination as ministers, or other appointment to serve in the United Methodist Church.

THE BIBLICAL WITNESS: Some of us look to the primacy of the Gospel Good News, the proclaims: "For God so loved the world that God gave God's very Offspring, Jesus Christ, for us, that whoever believes in Jesus Christ, should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent Christ into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Christ. Anyone who believes in Christ is not condemned." (John 3:16,17) Therefore, we believe that anyone who believes in Christ is not condemned, whether heterosexual or homosexual.

1. The Great Commandment: Some of us look to the Jesus' teaching in the Parable of the Good Samaritan concerning the Great Commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, strength, and mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." (Luke 10:19-37) Because this parable illustrates that what it means to love as the Good Samaritan is not dependent on sexual orientation, we find that the prohibition of self-acknowledged, practicing homosexuals from being ordained in ministry or appointed to service as Good Samaritans within the United Methodist Church is incompatible with Jesus' teaching on the Great Commandment.

2. The New Commandment: Some of us look to Jesus' New Commandment: "A New Commandment I give you, that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35) Because this Discipleship is determined by an express quality of love between people, and is not limited to heterosexuality or homosexuality, we find that the prohibition of self-acknowledged, practicing homosexuals from being ordained in ministry or appointed to serve as Jesus' Disciples within the United Methodist Church is incompatible with Jesus' New Commandment.

3. The Last Judgement: Some of us look to Jesus' Parable of the Last Judgement (Matthew 25:31-46). Because the nations and peoples are divided according to their charitable treatment of others, without regard to their heterosexuality or homosexuality, we find the prohibition of self-acknowledged, practicing homosexuals from being ordained in ministry or appointed to serve within the United Methodist Church is incompatible with Jesus' teaching on the Last Judgement.

4. Jesus' Teaching Concerning Nonheterosexuality: Some of us find it helpful to review Biblical attitudes toward nonheterosexual persons over time particularly those identified as eunuchs. Eunuchs were not admitted into the Congregation under the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 23:2), but Isaiah the Prophet said, "Thus saith the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbath, who choose the things that please me and hold and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name" (Isaiah 56:3-5)
Jesus also taught, "Not all people can receive this precept, but those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by people, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 19:10-12) So Phillip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch without regard to his sexuality. (Acts 8:27-38)

Therefore, we find that the prohibition of self-acknowledged, practicing homosexuals from being ordained in ministry or appointed to serve within the United Methodist is a backward reversion to the Old Law of Moses, unworthy or both the Prophets and Jesus.

5. Jesus' Teaching on Heterosexual Humility: Some of us are humbled at any attempt at heterosexual self-righteousness by Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount concerning heterosexual lust (Matthew 5:27-29) or the sexual question he asked the devout, heterosexual religious leaders concerning their own authority to condemn. (John 8:3-11)

6. Concerning Romans 1:24-26; 1 Corinthians 6:9: All of us read and study the Bible at different levels, and particularly these two verses, sometimes quoted as authority regarding homosexuality. Some of us are more familiar with the problems of translating Greek words from ancient Roman and Greek cultures. We know that neither verse is well translated. One refers to a practice of idolatrous temple sexual prostitution. The other translates two Greek words, the Greek references of which are unclear.

Some of us distrust any attempt to proof-text as dangerous misuse of Scripture. Even the tempter quoted the Scripture (Psalms 91:11,12) to Jesus and said: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written: He will give his angels charge of you. and 'On their hands they will bear you up.'" (Matthew 4:5,6) Jesus resisted the tempter. So ought we.

Some of us read the Bible literally. We also read Paul literally when he continues, "You have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment, you condemn yourself" (Romans 2:1) and concludes, "For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of the God, they are justified by God's grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith." (Romans 3:22-25)

Some of us are mindful of the United Methodist quadrilateral that looks not only to Scripture, but also Tradition, Experience, and Reason for authority. We know that any Scripture must be interpreted in the context of culture, other Scriptures, and the normative revelation of God's Love for us and our experience of God's undeserved Grace to us.

Therefore, we find that no reading of Paul justifies the arbitrary prohibition in the 1984 Discipline Amendments against ordained ministry or appointed service in the United Methodist Church on the basis of a candidate's self-acknowledgment as a practicing homosexual, rather than an examination of the candidate's call from God, and the candidate's Gifts and Graces for ministry or service.

7. The Evangelical Proclamation: Some of us trace our United Methodist heritage to the Evangelical Association and Evangelische Gemeinschaft. As evangelicals, we look for specific guidance from the historical development of Evangelical Proclamation of Salvation by Faith through Grace in the midst of the First Century spiritual-sexual-crisis concerning circumcision, that threatened to divide the Church on outward sexual identifications.
Paul identified the threat as preaching a different Gospel than Christ. Amidst sexual spying, Paul welcomed the uncircumcised Titus, Peter baptized the uncircumcised Cornelius. A General Conference was convened by James in Jerusalem. The issue was debated. The circumcision party was transformed. James proposed a decision that was adopted by consensus. Ministers were ordained without regard to their sexual circumcision and sent out. See Galatians, Titus 1:10-16; Acts 10:1-15:34; Romans 2:17-4:16.

Paul proclaimed, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6) and later explained, "That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all" (Romans 4:16)

With Paul, we proclaim, "For in Christ Jesus neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality is of any avail, but faith working through love" (cf. Galatians 5:6) When asked, with Paul, we answer, "What are the advantages of heterosexuality? Much in every way" (cf. Romans 3:1) "What then, are heterosexuals better off? No, not all" (cf. Romans 3:9) "Is God only the God of heterosexuals? Is God not the God of homosexuals also? Yes, of homosexuals also, since God is one; and God will justify the heterosexuals on the ground of their faith and the homosexuals through their faith" (cf. Romans 3:29-30)

Therefore, we find that the prohibition of self-acknowledged, practicing homosexuals from ordination in ministry or appointment to service in the United Methodist Church is a fundamental contradiction of the Evangelical Proclamation of Salvation by Faith through Grace, not works or sacrament, available to all, without regards to heterosexuality or homosexuality.

**THE WITNESS OF EXPERIENCE AND TRADITION:** Some of us find expression of our deepest religious experience in favorite Scripture verses, such as Deuteronomy 10:12, Psalms 23, Proverbs 10:12, 1 Corinthians 13; Romans 8.

Some of us find expression of our deepest religious experiences in the words of the traditional United Methodist hymns: How Great Thou Art, Just As I Am, Great is Thy Faithfulness, On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand, Fairest Lord Jesus, Once to Every Time and Nation, We've a Story to Tell to the Nations.

These bind us together in Christian fellowship, regardless of our sexual orientation or self-identification.

Some of us have acknowledged our homosexuality and know ourselves to be fully created in the image of God. This knowledge is based on our deeply rooted personal experience of God's Love for us, just as we are.

For all of us, our story is a story of truth and mercy, a story of peace and Light, that all of the World's great peoples might come to the truth of God. It is not a story of prejudice and bigotry. This is the time to tell our story.

But for some of us, as United Methodists, there is no story to tell, there is no solid rock, until the 1984 amendments are repealed and we preach again the Gospel of Christ - A Gospel that can awaken the Twentyfirst Century amidst the threat of a divided church, just as it did in the First Century.

So, THEREFORE, as individual United Methodists, local United Methodist Churches, United Methodist Boards and Committees, and as ordained clergy, having studied Scripture, reasoned, and worshipped together, and having examined the traditions that proceed us and the implications of the tradition we here establish,
BEFORE GOD AND ONE ANOTHER

1. WE AFFIRM the Discipleship of Love in Christ given to all who believe without regards to their self-acknowledged heterosexuality or homosexuality, including the Discipleship of ordained ministry and service within the United Methodist Church;

2. WE AFFIRM the ethical teachings of Jesus regarding Love, Responsibility, Faithfulness, Sacrifice, Fulfillment, Commitment, Nonexploitation, and Forgiveness as United Methodist guiding principles for behavior in all human relations, including the most intimate sexual relations between all people, in both heterosexual and homosexual relations alike;

3. WE AFFIRM the Evangelical Proclamation of Salvation by Faith through Grace, that is available to all people without regards to their heterosexuality or homosexuality;

4. WE ACKNOWLEDGE in humility that we stand, as equals, mortal before God, that certain heterosexual practices, as well as certain homosexual practices, are not healthy, may be life threatening and must be treated as medical problems, and that obstacles to treatment estrange us from each other and from God; and

5. WE AFFIRM all specific and necessary amendments to incorporate these affirmations and acknowledgments in the United Methodist Social Principles and Discipline, including the repeal of the 1984 Amendments and adoption of any amendments proposed by the Committee on the Study of Homosexuality under Mandate of the General Conference, that are consistent with these affirmation and acknowledgments
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FOUR PROPOSED AMENDMENTS ON ORDINATION

Introduction

In 1995, the Hamilton, San Francisco, California, United Methodist Congregation proposed four amendments to the Discipline on Ordination. Those proposals are attached hereto.

These Four Amendments were also based on the United Methodist Quadrilateral (REST) Reason or revelation, Experience, Scripture, and Tradition as authority in the preceding Hamilton Statement.

These Four Amendments on Ordination were adopted by the 1995 Northern California-Nevada Annual Conference by a margin of 60% to 40% as confirmed by a hand count, and were submitted to the 1996 General Conference. To the knowledge of this writer, they were never presented to the 1996 General Conference for a floor vote.

Twenty years have passed and there have been five General Conferences in 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012. Therefore, it may be said that these four ordination amendments proposed by lay members of the United Methodist Church are still awaiting a floor vote and adoption by the United Methodist Church at General Conference 2016.

These four proposed amendments on ordination follow. They
may be summarized:

Item 19 deleted language condemning all homosexual practices as “incompatible with the teachings of Jesus,” regardless of the love expressed.”

Item 20 added language that “We are equally committed to equal protection and treatment within the United Methodist Church.”

Item 21 deleted and added language so that it affirmed “the right all persons, who are called, recommended, and approved according the ordination process provided in the Book of Discipline to be ordained and appointed to service in the United Methodist Church subject to the discipline of the Church.”

Item 22 deleted and added language so that it read “While such persons set apart by the Church for the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and pressure of society, they are required to maintain the highest standard presented by the practice of faithfulness in all relationships.

It is now time that these proposed amendments be submitted to a floor vote at the General Conference of 2016 and adopted. Proposed by the lay members of the Hamilton United Methodist Church, this writer suggests they represent a benchmark against which other proposed amendments may be measured.
Motion to Annual Conference for Petition to 1996 General Conference to Amend Section 71F of the Social Principles.

1. Whereas the 1988 General Conference commissioned a Committee on the Study of Homosexuality; and

2. Whereas this motion implements the Report by the Committee on the Study of Homosexuality to the 1992 General Conference; and

3. Whereas our theological authority is the United Methodist Quadrilateral, -Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Reason, -rather any particular scripture verse quoted out of context; and

4. Whereas we recognize that all scripture must be interpreted in relation to its historical and cultural setting, difficulties in translation, and to other scriptures, within the normative revelation of God's Love and the experience of God's Grace for each of us, and

5. Whereas we stand equal before God without regards to our differences. As taught us by Paul who writes, "You have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge one another; for in passing judgment you condemn yourself (Romans 2:1) and then concludes: "For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by God's grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith (Romans 3:22-25); and

6. Whereas some of us have acknowledged our homosexuality and know ourselves to be fully created in the image of God no less than those who are heterosexual; and

7. Whereas some of us as evangelicals proclaim Salvation by Grace through Faith, not by heterosexuality or homosexuality; and

8. Whereas we find nothing in the teachings of Jesus that
condemns homosexuals, but many passages that speak of Jesus' concern that compassion and nonexploitation and humility be our guides in all our relationships, with each other and with those different from us.

THEREFORE WE, THE MEMBERS OF HAMILTON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, move that the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church petition the 1996 General Conference of the United Methodist Church to delete language inserted in 1984 to Section 71F that condemned all homosexual practices as "incompatible with the teachings of Jesus," regardless of the love expressed, so that the last paragraph of Section 71F of the Social Principles is amended to read as follows (with the deletion indicated by [. . . .]):

"Homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth. All persons need the ministry and guidance of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship which enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. [. . . .] We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons."

As adopted by the Administrative Board of the Hamilton United Methodist Church duly held on Sunday, March 19, 1995.

The number on Administrative Board: 11 plus 4 at large.
The number of voting members present was: 11.
The number who voted in favor was: [ ].
The number who voted against was: [ ].
The number who abstained from voting was: [ ].

Certified: 3-19-1995
by: Rev. Robert Kirk, Pastor;
by: Nancy Cave, Chair, Admin Bd;
by: Marjorie Rankin, Secretary.
Motion to Annual Conference for Petition to 1996 General Conference to Amend Section 71G of the Social Principles

1. **Equal Protection and Treatment**: Whereas, we recognize that equal protection and treatment of each other is a sacred trust in the United Methodist Church more so than under civil law, and that any concern in this regard limited to civil law is hypocritical,

**THEREFORE WE, THE MEMBERS OF HAMILTON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, move** that the California Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church petition the 1996 General Conference of the United Methodist Church to amend Section 71G of the Social Principles to read *(with added language indicated by underlining)*:

"Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to support those rights and liberties of homosexual persons. We see a clear issue of simple justice in protecting their rightful claims where they have: shared material resources, pensions, guardian relationships, mutual powers of attorney, and other such lawful claims typically attendant to contractual relationships which involve shared contributions, responsibilities, and liabilities, and equal protection before the law. We are equally committed to equal protection and treatment within the United Methodist Church. Moreover, we support efforts to stop violence and other forms of coercion against gays and lesbians."

As adopted by the Administrative Board of the Hamilton United Methodist Church duly held on Sunday, March 19, 1995.
The number of voting members present was: **11**.
The number who voted in favor was: **11**.
The number who voted against was: **0**.
The number who abstained from voting was: **0**.
The number on Administrative Board: 11 plus 4 at large.
Certified on: **3-19-95**

Motion to Annual Conference for Petition to 1996 General Conference to Amend Section 402.2 of the Book of Discipline to Affirm All Those Called by God to Ministry and Service.

1. Whereas the 1988 General Conference commissioned a Committee on the Study of Homosexuality; and

2. Whereas this motion implements the Report of the Committee on the Study of Homosexuality made to the 1992 General Conference; and

3. Whereas we acknowledge that God calls whom God will for God is God, and we are not; and

4. Whereas Jesus identified his disciples by the New Commandment to love one another as he has loved us, and by no other criteria (John 13:34-35); and

5. The Ordination Process: Whereas the ordination process within the United Methodist Church requires that all persons called to ministry comply with the following steps: (1) self-examination, (2) recommendation of local church Pastor Parish Relations Committee, (3) approval of local church Charge Conference, (4) recommendation of District Committee on Ordained Ministry, (5) recommendation of Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, (6) approval by Annual Conference of probationary status, (7) recommendation of Board of Ordained Ministry for ordination as an elder, and (8) election by Annual Conference for ordination as an elder (Book of Discipline, Sections 401-459),

THEREFORE WE, THE MEMBERS OF HAMILTON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH move that the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church petition the 1996 General Conference of the United Methodist Church to delete the sentence inserted in 1984 to Section 402.2 that categorically denied ordination, appointment and service.
to all self-avowed, practicing homosexuals regardless of their "gifts and graces" and the authentication of their call through the ordination process, and to replace it with the following sentence to Section 402.2 (with additional language indicated by underlining) to read:

We affirm the right of all persons who are called, recommended, and approved according to the ordination process provided in the Book Discipline to be ordained and appointed to service in the United Methodist Church subject to the discipline of the Church.

As adopted by the Administrative Board of the Hamilton United Methodist Church duly held on Sunday, March 19, 1995.

The number on Administrative Board: 11 plus 4 at large.

The number of voting members present was: 11.

The number who voted in favor was: 11.

The number who voted against was: 0.

The number who abstained from voting was: 0.

Certified on: 3-19-1995

by: Robert Kirk, Rev. Robert Kirk, Pastor;

by: Nancy Cave, Nancy Cave, Chair, Admin Bd;

by: Marjorie Rankin, Marjorie Rankin, Secretary.
Motion to Annual Conference for Petition to 1996 General Conference to Amend Section 402.2 of the Book of Discipline to Affirm "Faithfulness in All Relationships."

1. Whereas clergy and those appointed to service are called to be faithful in marriage and all relationships; and

2. Whereas "faithfulness in all relationships" imposes a broader, more Christ-like standard of conduct than "fidelity" and "celibacy" because it is directed at both form (fidelity) and the quality of love and responsibility expressed within relationships,

THEREFORE WE, THE MEMBERS OF HAMILTON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH move that the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church petition the 1996 General Conference of the United Methodist Church to replace the language "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness" so that that sentence in Section 402.2 is amended (with additional language indicated by underlining) to read:

"While such persons are set apart by the Church for the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order and subject to all the frailties of the human condition and pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards represented by the practice of faithfulness in all relationships. . ."

As adopted by the Administrative Board of the Hamilton United Methodist Church duly held on Sunday, March 19, 1995.

The number on Administrative Board: 11 plus 4 at large.
The number of voting members present was: 11.
The number who voted in favor was: 11.
The number who voted against was: 0.
The number who abstained from voting was: 0.

Certified on: 3/19/1995
by: Rev. Robert Kirk, Pastor;
by: Nancy Cave, Chair, Admin Bd;

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Letter to Conservatives and Liberals

To my conservative and liberal brothers and sisters,

In a July 18, 2015 letter to the editor in a Marshall Michigan newspaper, the Ad-visor Chronicle, the writer writes,

“This is not a letter of hate or an attack letter... I am calling out all ministers in every church... where do you stand? Homosexuality is against Biblical teachings all the way through.”

and concludes with the following question:

“Will you accept gay marriage in your church or will you remain true to the teachings of the Bible?”

Unfortunately, The United Methodist Discipline has been too much like this Letter to the Editor.

That is why this is not a liberal-conservative issue.

For more than 30 years by a majority vote, however small the margin, the Discipline has stated we “consider [homosexual] practice incompatible with Christian teaching” (par 161). Therefore, the Discipline goes on to state “self-avowed practicing homosexual are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church” (Par 304.3), but again without identifying any practices or teachings to which it refers. How hypocritical can we be when the Discipline fails to identify homosexual practices
and heterosexual practices that are compatible with Christian teachings from those are incompatible with Christian teaching!

However, The 2012 United Methodist Discipline in its present form is actually more hypocritical than the above Letter to the Editor. This is because the Discipline states that it "affirms that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God" (Par 161); states "we commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons;" and it "implores all families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends" (Par 161), but then the same Discipline persecutes homosexual persons because (1) it states sexual relations are recognized "only within the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage" (Par 161F) (2); it prohibits congregations from using church buildings for holy unions and same-sex weddings ceremonies (Par 341.6); and it prohibits pastors from performing holy unions and same-sex marriages (Par 341.6).

This hypocrisy in the Discipline runs deep. It states "We seek for every individual opportunities and freedom to love and to be loved, to seek and receive justice, and to practice ethical self-determination" (Par 161(E); "Certain basic human rights are due all persons. We are committed to support those rights and liberties for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation" (Par 162(J). "We see a clear issue of simple justice in protecting the rightful claims where people have
shared material resources, . . . and other such lawful claims typically attendant to contractual relationships that involve shared contributions, responsibilities, and liabilities, and equal protection before the law,” (Par 162(J).

However, this identification of rights in the Discipline was not intended to apply within the church, and not to church members who sought to solemnize their contractual relationship with holy union or wedding vows in their church celebrated by their congregation, or performed by a United Methodist Minister.

So, if this were the only measure, and for many people, this is the only measure as measured by the vote of the General Conferences, it would appear that the United Methodist Church has abandoned its God.

This is why these issues now before the 2016 General Conference are not conservative-liberal issues. They are fundamental issue of “Freedom in Christ” as Paul wrote in Galatians 2:04, 5:03, 5:13. They go to the heart of the “the Gospel of Christ” that Paul preached to the Galatians (Galatians 1:6-11, 2:2-14). They go to the full expression of salvation in the “Evangelical Proclamation of Salvation by Faith through Grace” available to all without distinction that Paul articulated in Romans 1:16; 2:29-29; 3:22-24.

This is why Paul wrote to the Galatians and to us to be careful in theological
back- biting lest we devour each other (Galatians 5:15) because except for the
new Preamble to the Social Principles in the 2012 Discipline, this is what United
Methodists have been doing, and United Methodist delegates have been doing
General Conference after General Conference on these issues.

These issues are also fundamental issues that transcends conservative-liberal
theology because, contrary the writer of the Letter to the Editor, “inclusiveness” is
an emerging dominant theme that runs the course of the Bible. The everlasting
covenant God made with Abraham to be exceedingly fruitful and ancestor of
many nations (Genesis 17:1-8) was not limited to heterosexual people. The
liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 6:2-15:21) was not
limited to heterosexual people. The Ten Commandments were not issued only for
heterosexual people when Moses reported, God said: “I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, you shall
have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in
the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that
is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them;
for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of
the parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing
steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my
commandment.” We see this “inclusiveness” in the account of the special feeling that Jonathan had for David. It is a theme in Isaiah and other Prophets, in the Psalms, and Wisdom Literature, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 written for the benefit of all, not limited to heterosexual persons.

This book gives witness to the fact that “inclusiveness” without regard to sexual orientation has always been a dominant theme in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Isaiah 56:3-5, Galatians 3:28-29, Romans 2:7, and 1 Corinthians 7:17, including the revelation of God’s “inclusiveness” to Jesus in Mark 7:24-30 and Matthew 15:21-27), in the teachings of Jesus, and extended to “all gentiles” by the Council of Jerusalem, then summed up in John 3:16-17.

The Good News is that God Has Not Yet Abandoned Us.

The Holy Spirit is stirring in our midst, in our time. For those who look closely, it can be seen in Judicial Council and College of Bishop decisions, from one General Conference to the next one, even in the midst of Church Trials. We see this stirring in the Preamble to the Social Principle in the 2012 Discipline and new commitment to each other (see Preface above). We see this stirring outside the United Methodist Church in the pictures and accounts and beaming faces of LGBTQ people, some married in fact for many years, and now for the first time under civil law with the benefits and protections of civil law.
We see this movement of the Holy Spirit in the official actions of other mainline denominations: The American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Presbybeterian Church, the Episcopalian Church, the United Church of Christ.

Some of us have experienced this movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We have had serious life-threatening illnesses, life-giving operations, pace makers, stints, cardiac by-passes, and other surgeries. We know we owe our lives to first responders, to fire fighters, paramedics, ambulance attendants, emergency room personnel, nurses, lab technicians, doctors. And we know among them have been members of the LGBTQ, some more evident, some less so, some in the military.

So, the question is? If any of these persons who gave new life to us wanted to take marriage vows that would give their life more meaning, who among us would deny them the ability to take their marriage vows and celebrate their marriage vows in a United Methodist Church Building, before a United Methodist pastor? For we have witnessed the stirring of the Holy Spirit in our midst. So, for all the above reasons, we must amend the Discipline.

We can draw great strength, if we choose, from the Bible in Galatians in which for the “sake of Gospel,” Paul upbraided Peter. (Galatians 2:11-13). How could Paul be so audacious we ask? It is because Paul understood the “Gospel of Christ” on an intimate, personal level from the crucifixion of Jesus, the
early persecution of the church by Paul, the testimony and stoning of Stephen with Paul standing by, and from his own conversion. And it was Peter who approved Paul’s missionary work to the uncircumcised Gentiles, but was now acting one way when he was alone with the uncircumcised Gentiles, and another way when Peter separated himself from the uncircumcised Galatians to be with the circumcised because, according to Paul, Peter still feared the Circumcision Party.  

Then, in *Galatians*, Paul addresses the Galatians. They were first fruits of his missionary work for whom Paul had great affection, and to whom Paul preached the Gospel of Christ and Christ crucified. So, Paul asks them and us directly: "All I want to learn from you is this: ‘Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so much for nothing?’" (*Galatians* 3:2-4).

In real life time, Paul waits for their answers, and ours. Then Paul begins to teach and preach, first with references to transgression, including theirs, ours, and, the Circumcision Party. Paul encourages the *Galatians* and us, that if anyone is

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1 Perhaps Paul was too harsh on Peter. After all, when the Four Hamilton Amendments passed by a 60-40 margin on a hand vote at the 1995 Northern California -Nevada Annual Conference, a pastor approached this writer and said, "I really supported the amendments, but if I raised by hand, my congregation would not allow me to continue as their pastor." Perhaps that priority was proper then, but now is a new time to pastor, clergy, lay, one to another.
is detected in a transgression, then let those who have received the Spirit restore that one in gentleness (Galatians 6:1)

“So then,” Paul writes, “whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those in the family of faith.” (Galatians 6:10).

But Paul is also clear, when he warns the Galatians and us about members of the Circumcision Party [and to this we add Heterosexual Party] because their only interest is that everyone become like them so that they may not themselves be persecuted for the cross of Christ, and so that they may exercise power over others, while they do not obey the law of themselves (Galatians 6:11-12).

“For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything” (See Galatians 6:12-16), which is to say: “Whenever we have an opportunity as we approach and at General Conference 2016, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those in family of faith. By this, all means all and all those in the family of faith means all heterosexual and all non-heterosexual members so that all non-heterosexual members of the United Methodist Church have and may enjoy all the benefits and privileges and responsibilities of heterosexual members of The United Methodist Church.

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It appears that “Law,” used here by Paul refers to Galatians 5:14, which says,” The whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
We may also draw strength from all the canonized epistles.

Their opinions on various topics are as diverse as those among the liberals and conservatives within The United Methodist Church and among liberal and conservative delegates to General Conference 2016, but they are in agreement on two fundamental points: (1) to proclaim Jesus as Lord, and (2) to proclaim the royal law of love. *Romans* 13:8 (“For he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law”); *Galatians* 5:14 “For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment: to “love your neighbor as yourself;” *James* 2:8 (“If you really fulfill the royal law of love, according to the scripture, ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself’”) *Peter* 4:8 (“Above all hold unfailing your love for one another”): *1 John* 4:8 (“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”)

This royal law of love for neighbors as one self means that we do not impose burdens on others that we, ourselves, would not want to bear. It means that we worship God as we are made in the image of God, and not a God made in our own image. For and it is God who calls people into ministry, not we. It means if the Blessing of Marriage Vows spoken in the Presence of the Holy Spirit has borne fruit for some, then let it bear fruit for others. If the Blessing of Marriage Vows in the Presence of the Holy Spirit is Good News for some, then let it be Good News
for all. It means whenever we have opportunity, we work for the good of all, and all means all.

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The "Here I Stand" Test

The "Here I Stand" Test can be helpful to all United Methodists, because it can provide for clarity and is relatively simple, although it is provided here mostly for delegates to General Conference 2016. It goes like this:

1. Draw a line down the middle of a sheet of paper.

2. On one side, **regardless of any advocacy by this writer**, list all your known biblical teaching, scriptures, and teachings of Jesus that support the continuation **without change** the provisions of the 2012 *Discipline* regarding no ordination, no marriage and no service or limited service of homosexual and LGBTQ people as members of The United Methodist Church.

3. On the side, **regardless of any advocacy by this writer**, list all biblical teaching, scriptures, and teachings of Jesus that support a **change** in the provisions of the 2012 *Discipline* to provide for ordination, marriage and full service and participation of homosexual and LGBTQ people as members of The United Methodist Church.

4. Review your lists, sign "**Here I stand.**" to the one that most applies to you and vote accordingly.

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*The "Here I Stand" test was developed in response to a book entitled *The Sins and Evils of Integration* by Louis E. Dailey (New York: The Carlton Press, 1962). It listed numerous scriptures. It was exhaustive. It was seemingly persuasive until subjected to the"Here I Stand Test" as outlined here.*
So, it remains this writer’s abiding prayer that all delegates to General Conference 2016 under the Guidance of the Holy Spirit will delete language in the 2012 *Discipline* that has caused much harm, especially to non-heterosexual members of the LGBTQ community in our family of faith, and will replace this language with a clear vision that is “inclusive” of all people so that all people, especially non-heterosexual (LGBTQ) people who have wrongfully suffered persecution, may be ordained, and married, and invited to full service and participation in The United Methodist Church the same as heterosexual members.

This is this writer’s prayer because:

Whenever United Methodism has a clear sense of mission, God has used our Church to save persons, heal relationships, transform social structures, and spread scriptural holiness, thereby changing the world. In order to be truly alive, we embrace Jesus’ mandate to love God and to love our neighbors and to make disciples of all peoples.

*(2012 Discipline, Par 121)*

Respectfully yours,

*Frederick Christian Roesti*
STATEMENT OF WITNESS: I will witness to and advocate for the Christ for whom there is no East or West, no North or South but one great Fellowship of Love, for whom there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. The same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:12-14).

For everything we know as a worshiping community and from the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst tells us there are many devoted, dedicated spirit-filled Christians in our midst who are homosexual and lesbian faithfully doing the work of the church as obedient disciples of Jesus. If this be so and none can deny it, --for these disciples of Jesus are too much with us, some quiet, some outspoken, some in committed Christ-centered Holy Unions and Marriages, both within and without the United Methodist Church, --then it is time we stop persecuting these members of our church and the clergy who would pastor to them and to all of us.

It is the cross that defines who we are, and the power of the resurrection that defines what we might yet become. I am not a one issue candidate but I advocate for removal of Discipline amendments that have become tools of persecution. For we are a great Fellowship of Love, that affirms the ethical teachings of Jesus regarding Love, Joy, Responsibility, Faithfulness, Fulfillment, Sacrifice, Commitment, Nonexploitation and Forgiveness as United Methodist guiding principles for behavior in all human relations, including the most intimate sexual relations between all people, in both heterosexual and nonheterosexual relations alike, --except that we are yet blind, and have yet to see.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION
Descent: Swiss-German-American.
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