

“Radical Love” a sermon preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Sunday 10May 2015 by Kerry Enright.

The sermon is the third in a series based on Mark Achtemeier’s book *The Bible's Yes to Same-Sex Marriage: An Evangelical's Change of Heart*

First, a note about the context of God’s being.

There is a trajectory in God’s work. That trajectory is expansive. The horizon keeps being stretched, further and further. The mission of God is to take us to one frontier after another, beyond one barrier after another, to take one risky step after another, from one human framework to another. God moves outward.

The book of Act is the story of the Spirit of God, drawing people beyond their places, their compartments, their categories, their previously accepted understanding.

In the Book of Acts, the gospel comes to Jews, then to Samaritans who are half-Jews, then to a Roman Centurion, then to Gentiles ... every step is startling. It stretches beyond what had been accepted to that point.

So when it comes to human beings, it is consistent with the mission of God that God would go beyond heterosexual couples to homosexual couples, to people who are transgendered.

The trajectory is in the book of Acts – it’s there in the story of God told in the Bible.

The gospel invites us to give ourselves to each other in love; an invitation at the core of the gospel.

This is where the trajectory comes from, this self-giving, radically forgiving, co-suffering God, who just keeps on giving in love, who keeps on forgiving, who keeps on co-suffering.

In all things, it’s important to keep this trajectory in mind.

Secondly, a note about how this self-giving love of God is expressed in human relationships.

One argument against same-sex marriage is that our anatomy shows we were made to love as men and women, not men and men, or women and women.

People often refer to Genesis and restate that God created us man and woman (a straightforward thing to acknowledge), then they quote Christ referring to the passage from Genesis about marriage being between a husband and wife.

That is an argument from silence. Same-sex marriage was not thought of then, just as I said a few weeks ago that the end of slavery would never have been considered.

What is strange though, is that the context for Christ’s words shows he is putting limitations on divorce, and he then goes on to say that it is not for everyone.

Encouraged by his words, many churches have become open and accepting of divorced persons, because they have interpreted his words in light of the trajectory of the Gospel, which tells stories of grace and forgiveness.

Two weeks ago I mentioned that the Gospel concerns the whole of who we are, and that includes our bodies, our material existence. But we are not just bodies. We are people created in the image of God, for relationship with God and each other.

It is possible for people in same-sex relationships to express the same kind of love as it is for people in heterosexual relationships.

The existence of a majority pattern does not exclude a minority pattern.

This week we have been remembering people who are deaf. That our world is heavily oriented towards people who can hear, so that our communication occurs significantly through sound, does not mean that people who are deaf cannot also communicate, nor that society should not work to include people who are deaf. People do not condemn deaf people as unnatural; quite the contrary, we actively seek to honour and cherish their gifts.

We need to keep the trajectory of God's actions at the centre.

God keeps surprising people by conferring blessing on people who live outside what is regarded as conventional and majority.

- Sarah and Abraham, an infertile and elderly couple.
- Moses who appears to have a speech impediment of some kind.
- Gabriel's announcement to Mary was scandalous – an unwed bride-to-be – dark clouds of scandal and immorality – it was possible that Joseph could disown her. The Old Testament law prescribed death by stoning as the penalty for a woman's unfaithfulness to a formally betrothed husband. So here was a disgraced woman, alienated from her family in this way.
- Jesus being executed outside the walls of Jerusalem which the book of Hebrews says is the way God works in the world.
- The redemption of the world through a cross, a symbol of criminality and curse.
- The conversion of the Gentiles, people who stood outside the bounds of law and faith. And they are not required to repent of being Gentiles, to give up living as Gentiles, to become Jews. That was part of the background to some biblical writing.

God keeps following alternative, less-travelled paths. The Bible claims that each of these steps were the will of God. God brings forth blessings from situations that stand outside the bounds of traditional, majority patterns of life, including majority patterns of love and marriage.

So let's come to more specific texts often cited in opposition to same-sex marriage. In so doing, I want to take the Bible seriously.

And in so doing, we will be taking seriously what I said in the first of this series – the importance of context.

The idea of homosexuality is a distinctly modern concept unknown in the ancient world. Not one word in the Bible translates into gay or homosexual and there is no sense of sexual orientation. The idea the Bible condemns same-sex relationships is anachronistic – the whole idea is just not even considered.

I cannot cover every Old Testament passage, but let me refer to a few.

References to Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 do not refer to same-gender activity. They refer to gang rape used as a weapon against foreigners, people who are in foreign territory being threatened by local people who are being inhospitable. It refers to sexual violence, to gang rape.

Similarly, Judges 19. Local people hostile to foreigners rape and murder a visitor's concubine.

Yes these references are to male-male activity – but they are referring to violent gang rape using as a weapon against foreigners.

Leviticus. At the time Leviticus was written, there were male cult prostitutes, who played a role in the idol worship of pagan tribes surrounding the nation of Israel. The references in Leviticus were designed to prevent the Israelites from falling into very specific idolatrous activities practised by the pagan peoples who had previously occupied the land.

So when the Bible refers to male with male, people had in mind violent forms of sexual aggression, gang rape or temple prostitution.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, there is affirmation that deep devotion and love can be shared by people of the same gender. That does not mean it involves sexual activity nor does it imply their relationships were homosexual. It just means that Ruth and Naomi and David and Jonathan were deeply bound to each other in love, something that can be seen in heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

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Next week I will continue with references to the New Testament, and draw some conclusions.

So I leave you with:

- The trajectory of God's dealings with human beings as expressed in the Gospel;
- Old Testament passages often used, put in their context.