

“Love and Righteousness”
A Sermon in Honor of Rainbow Sunday

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I have an acquaintance with a son. He plays alone in his neighborhood. Why would this smart, beautiful, athletic boy with lanky legs and clever eyes play alone? I can't think of a logical reason. I can't find a scientific reason. Developmentally he is age appropriate. His behavior is quite good. He is healthy. There are children his age who live across the street and down the street. Why does he play alone?

I reduce this dilemma, which is greater than a dilemma, because it involves the heart and thoughts of a small child, to a poverty of love. There is no lack of love in his home. His mothers adore him and care for him and teach him well. No, it is the poverty of love from the adults who live across and down the street. Of course, the children of these adults are baffled. They have no idea why they don't play with their neighbor. But their parents are teaching them.

My acquaintance recently heard a daughter ask her mother, “Why does Billy have two moms?” Her mother hushed her and told her not to ask. And in this hush a young girl has learned that something is wrong. Sadly, she might never realize that what is wrong is her mother's poverty of love, that this poverty is the only thing wrong, and that it is a tragic, cruel, ignorant wrong. As a Unitarian Universalist who believes in the inherent worth and dignity of every person and justice, love, and equality in human relations, I protest.

When two adults love one another, what can be wrong? If the love is kind, equal, honest, shared, passionate, and invigorating what can be wrong with this love? Every year I am expected to stand here and marry couples. And in general, society does not care (I might care but society does not care) if they hit one another or drink too much, or even if they are unfaithful, as long as they are heterosexual. Could there be anything odder in my profession?

If we are to embrace any family value, shouldn't it be love? Violence, substance abuse, deception, these are not part of sustained, healthy, loving partnerships. Sure every couple struggles, falters, makes mistakes. I am not here to judge. But truly, when I marry couples and the groomsmen are so drunk the room smells of alcohol, yet everyone applauds, and I marry a lesbian couple and neither sets of parents attend, I must assume that there is a majority of people in this country who would rather have me marry a couple engaging in bad behavior rather than marry a loving couple who are the same gender. When did we get so small? So insecure? So unloving? Homosexuality is an expression of love. Why are we so afraid of love?

For those of the Judeo-Christian persuasion who insist that *The Bible* says homosexuality is wrong, I remind you that no one religion has legal precedence in this country. That is how I understand the establishment clause of the Constitution, and I am

not ready to forego this right. Of course, I can go back and forth and argue about scriptural interpretation (how about Jesus' opinion that the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is one of hospitality not sodomy which I have preached on), but I don't want to go there, not because I fear "losing" but because I am tired of entirely skipping the larger point.

I am convinced that in the United States (which is the only country I know well enough to speak about), we discriminate against our GLBT neighbors (Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, and Transgender) neighbors because we have chosen to embrace a limited understanding of *The Bible*. *The Bible*. *The Bible* is not a legal document and it is not part of the Constitution. And yes it may influence political decision, and that can be a great thing, but when certain interpretations lead to discrimination, to the absence of love, we have entered dangerous and in my mind immoral terrain.

To me "sin" is wrong relationship. So who is in wrong relationship, two loving women raising a son, or a neighbor who refuses to let her children play with a boy because his mothers love each other? Gee, I wouldn't want my children to be exposed to . . . love. To be gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgendered in American begins with a struggle for the right to love and be loved by yourself and others for who you are, and it ends in a struggle for righteousness, for freedom and fairness, to have your one beautiful child included in play.

This year we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the landmark Second March on Washington for GLBT members and allies. Held on October 11, 1987 and attended by half a million people, it was the first public display of the AIDS quilt, which was laid on the National Mall in Washington D.C. and woke America to the pain of homophobia and its true cruelty and lovelessness. Since then October has become "Coming Out" month, a time to celebrate our GLBT community, which as the President of Iran likes to remind us, we have so much of in the United States. The better for us, my friends. We're truly the lucky ones.

The 1987 March on Washington developed the slogan that "the personal is political." This has been a hard slogan for those who prefer "don't ask, don't tell," but it was created because of a lack of love and righteousness. I know plenty of gay people who would like to own a three bedroom condo in the suburbs, go to work during the week, pay taxes, and grill out on the weekends, but like my acquaintance they find large segments of this country cruel and unloving so they have learned that the personal is political.

This is why the Stonewall Rebellion in Greenwich Village New York is one of my favorite moments in American history. I just love that in early morning hours of June 28, 1969 a particularly oppressed group of minority and Hispanic transgender, transvestite and gay men fought the unloving and unrighteous system (in this case represented by the police) and won. They fought with rocks and purses and they still won.

You have to understand the dynamics of gay bars in New York City in the late 1960's. Many of these bars were run by the Mafia, who detested and ridiculed their clients serving substandard and expensive food and drink. Bars were raided by the police on a monthly basis. The police arrested and roughed up anyone without identification, people dressed in clothes of the opposite gender, and the employees.

When officers arrived at Stonewall Inn in the early morning hours of June 28th they began arresting people, more than usual, and pushing them into a paddy wagon and

instead of remaining passively oppressed, instead of accepting lovelessness and a lack of righteousness, those arrested began to fight back. Then a crowd gathered and they fought back too. When a tactical strike force was sent in to rescue the trapped officers the crowd still refused to disburse. Up to 2,000 people fought the police that night and the police mercilessly beat members of the crowd, particularly “gender nonconformists.” It’s not fair. It’s not fair.

I don’t like when the police get hurt. I don’t like when they are disrespected and threatened. And I don’t like it when the police do the same to unarmed civilians. Often as a society this is what we ask our police to do, the dirty work of our loveless unrighteousness, so I am glad that the drag queens and others fought back that night and the next night and gave birth to the modern GLBT movement (yes, there had been a movement before then but this was a real feisty change of events), because when faced with a lack of love and righteousness, the personal immediately becomes political. It’s self preservation.

As Reverend Greta Crosby writes

One key to a more abundant life is a sense of your own worth, an unshakable sense of your own dignity. . . Secure in the sense of our own worth, we can rejoice in the worth of others and love out of fullness, instead of inner emptiness that eats others alive.

Sometimes an unshakable sense of your own dignity means fighting back against lovelessness and unrighteousness. It’s why the black, sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee in 1968 were wearing signs that said “I am a man.” It’s why Huey Newton, founder of the Black Panthers wrote in 1970

Whatever your personal opinions and your insecurities about homosexuality and the various liberation movements among homosexuals and women (and I speak of the homosexuals and women as oppressed groups), we should try to unite with them in revolutionary fashion. I say “whatever your insecurities are” because, as we very well know sometimes our first instinct is to want to hit a homosexual in the mouth and want a woman to be quiet . . . We must gain security in ourselves and therefore have respect and feelings for all oppressed people . . . We should be careful about using those terms that might turn our friends off. The terms “faggot” and “punk” should be deleted from our vocabulary, and especially we should not attach names normally designed for homosexuals to men who are enemies of the people, such as Nixon or Mitchell. Homosexuals are not enemies of the people.¹

You can say what you want about Huey Newton, but he was clear about love and righteousness, and honest enough to name what fuels our lack of love, baseless insecurities. This quote alone reminds me of why Unitarian Universalism is such a gift. Our first principle says that we respect the inherent worth and dignity of every person. In

¹ Huey Newton, “Manifesto Issued by the Black Panthers (1970)” in *Come Out Fighting* edited by Chris Bull, 89-91.

the face of discrimination, this religious premise puts us on the side of love and righteousness.

If you are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgender, do not let someone take away your unshakable sense of dignity. It is not theirs to keep. It is yours to treasure and affirm. You are beautiful just the way you are and we live in a happier and healthier community when all love is expressed and cherished and all rights are equal. May it always be so.

