

Marriage Equality

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I am a United Methodist clergy and I stand before you today in support of same-sex marriage. I do this in opposition to the stance of my church, The United Methodist Church, which has continued to affirm that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Most recently, my church has also declared its support of "laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman." I have opposed such discriminatory and oppressive stance of my church and will continue to do so. As a person of faith of Asian descent, I stand in opposition to the oppressive Asian cultural values and in solidarity with my lesbian and gay Asian American sisters and brothers to fight for marriage equality.

One of the arguments against same sex marriage that most readily come from Christian religious circles is that homosexuality is incompatible with biblical and Christian teachings. I need to say very clearly that Christian opposition to homosexuality is based often on selective biblical interpretation that takes the few verses of scripture that may or may not refer to sexual intercourse between people same gender out of its socio-cultural and historical contexts. Moreover, such a stance often refuses to acknowledge that our modern understanding of sexuality is world's apart from the understanding of sexuality in ancient times. Christians need to remember too that Jesus never mentioned anything about homosexuality at all in the gospels. On the

other hand, Jesus himself explicitly prohibits divorce and remarriage in the New Testament (in Matthew 5:31-32, 19:3-9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). For Jesus, remarrying a divorced person constitutes adultery, a serious sin which the entire Bible has much to say about. Yet, divorce and remarriage is very much accepted not only in our modern society, but also by Christians in many mainline churches. Such a position by Christians who opposed homosexuality is hypocritical.

When we turn to the issue of marriage, let us be clear that marriage became a sacrament in the church only in the early 13th century. Prior to that time, the church had played no role in marriage. Marriage has always been a social and civil matter. Even in our modern time, in many places worldwide, marriage is a civil right. The role of the church is merely to bless the union. In the United States, the two ceremonies are conflated into one. Nonetheless, we need to remember that it is the civil ceremony that ultimately grants the social benefits on the married couple.

When we talk about marriage today, we are talking about a monogamous union of two individuals who are equals and who have entered into the union as a symbol of their love for one another. We are talking about a relationship and a contract of mutuality. Such an understanding of marriage is unknown in biblical times. The claim that same sex marriage is wrong because it contradicts biblical and Christian teaching ignores how marriage was understood in ancient times. Why is it that certain features of marriage in ancient biblical times are no longer acceptable today? I am speaking about polygamy, or more correctly, polygyny, concubinage, levirate marriage, and spousal abuse. Are we not engaging in selective biblical interpretation again when we insists

that marriage according to the Bible and Christian teaching can only be between a man and a woman while ignoring all other features of marriage in the Bible? Why do we frown on the practices of polygamy, concubinage, levirate marriage, and spousal abuse, which were so much a part of the marriage institution in ancient biblical times? We do this because we have moved away from a patriarchal structure of society, acknowledging and admitting that our treatment of women, and the Bible's treatment of women, has been wrong. You know, the church has been wrong on many issues of justice and civil rights. When we make such an admission, we are saying that God is still revealing God's mystery and God's love in our midst so that we can become better human beings. Similarly, religious people need to begin to acknowledge and admit that our views of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender have been wrong and to begin to treat all people as equal in the sight of God and equally loved by God. In so doing, we will stand in support and fight for the day when marriage equality is granted to everyone.