

## What the Blessing of My Same Sex Union Meant To Me

Wayne Eberly

Member, Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Calgary Alberta

As the title suggests, this essay begins with a discussion of the blessing of my same sex union and the significance of that (as I understand it). The essay continues with my reaction to a part of the discussion that is now going on.

First things first: My partner Ron is an active member of a supportive United Church. Our "Holy Union" (these are now called "Covenanting Ceremonies") took place at Knox United Church in Calgary, Alberta, early in 2001. Lutheran clergy did not officiate and, to my knowledge, none were disobedient or compromised as a result of this.

This was not called a wedding. Ron and I were not married as a result of it. Furthermore, the current name for the ceremony suggests that the theological basis (or inspiration) for this is to be found in I Samuel, and that it does not include any of the passages that are generally associated with marriage at all.

Nevertheless, this ceremony meant a great deal to me and, I think, to others who participated in it.

It was an opportunity for Ron and me to make a public statement of our love and commitment to each other.

It provided an opportunity for friends, family, church and community to celebrate our relationship with us, and to offer us help in sustaining it—for, after all, it can be a challenge to sustain any relationship between life partners, opposite sex or not—can't it?

It allowed all of us (gay or not) to agree that it is good to go through life together, with a life partner, rather than to be alone.

By the way: yes, Ron and I have sex—but (as far as I am concerned) this was not really about that. Yes, certain activities give us pleasure and give us another way to show that we love each other—but church and community were affirming **our relationship**, rather than anything we choose to do within it. It seems, to me, that discussions of same sex unions that focus on sexual acts are missing the point.

That noted (if you don't mind my asking): How would *you* feel about a church, or a discussion within one, that constantly seemed to reduce your relationship with your life partner to something that was only-and-all about sex?

Regarding the Scriptures, and the Law: Yes, of course these must be consulted and respected! Here are the two parts of the Law that I understand to be most important of all (and I think it can be argued that others might agree).

1. We are to love God above all things.
2. We are to love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

Now, I am mindful of the fact that there is more than one way to interpret scripture (not to mention tradition, and the history of the church). As someone who is gay - and also human - I will always be tempted to interpret scripture in a way that is to my own advantage. You are

absolutely right when you caution me about that and correct me when I err—because I am putting myself above God when I do this.

That noted—people like me are absolutely right, as well, when we caution you in the same way. You should expect that we will continue to do so if we find reason for it.

We will also continue to ask that recent conversations and decisions in this church concerning the ordination of women, and remarriage after divorce, be recalled and considered as part of the current process: You were asking similar questions about yourselves (instead of about us) during these.

You see, there *is* more than one way to interpret scripture. If you interpret it in one way when make decisions about yourselves, and then interpret it in another way when making decisions about me, then you introduce the risk that scripture is being used as a blunt object to drive me away or beat me down, instead of as a source of inspiration, guidance and support for us all. I think that you are violating the second Great Commandment, and treating scripture in an incredibly disrespectful way, if this happens.

A consideration of recent decisions involving your own rights will help me (and others) to be confident that scripture is being used in the way (I hope!) that we all want it to be—regardless of the decisions that are reached at the end of this.

Unfortunately, it *has* sometimes seemed like scripture is being used as a blunt object in the past. I, and others like me, have also been made to feel that we are more like "part of the problem" than we are "part of the church" on some occasions as well.

We are made to feel like we are "part of the problem" when it is suggested that the issues being considered are straightforward, or that some things ought not to be discussed at all. A description of one position as the "biblical" one (suggesting that somebody else's position is "unbiblical") is another indication that things have gone off track.

We *are* now discussing a complicated issue. Scripture is being consulted by people on *all* sides of this. *Everyone* (that I know of) is trying to reach a "biblical" position. Nevertheless, people are reaching different conclusions and making contradictory statements.

Contradictory statements about other things, including science and health issues, are coming forward as well.

Additional contradictory statements will continue to be made as this process continues.

Consequently (and keeping the second Great Commandment in mind), I'd be grateful, to all you straight Lutherans out there, if you could try to do the following when evaluating these statements: Turn things around!

That is, take whatever statement is being made about same sex relationships, or homosexuality (including scriptural, scientific, or other responses to these); try to think of an analogous statement about opposite sex relationships, or heterosexuality, and then examine your reactions to *that*. If the statement about opposite sex relationships seems unreasonable or problematic to you, then it is quite likely that the original statement about same sex relationships will seem unreasonable or problematic to me—for similar reasons.

I ask again the question I asked earlier, How would *you* feel about a church, or a discussion within one, that constantly seemed to reduce your relationship with your life partner to

something that was only—and—all about sex? This might be one of the questions that would arise, if you carried out this process when considering the suggestion that same sex unions should be opposed because of references in Scripture to certain sexual acts.

It would be nice—as time permits—if you could do a little bit of homework too.

For example, if you are concerned about the position of the American Psychiatric Association (or the American Medical Association, etc.) about homosexuality, then you might take the time to consult the American Psychiatric Association (etc.) in order to find out precisely what those positions are, and how they were reached. Go to the source! Don't take my word for it, or somebody else's word for it, instead! (Both of the above-mentioned organizations include recent statements about homosexuality on their web sites.)

All that noted - I trust, and hope, that we will all still be together as a church after this year's national convention—regardless of what happens during it. I thank the delegates for their time and efforts and wish them the best, as they prepare for the meeting in Winnipeg.

And, yes: Thank you for taking the time to read this!

Wayne Eberly  
eberly@cpsc.ucalgary.ca