

Love & Marriage Equality
By the Rev. Rob Boulter
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Scripture - Romans 13:8-14

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Sermon

I'm going to preach today about love and marriage. Marriage has been on my mind a lot lately. I'm at that age where many of my nieces and nephews are getting married - it is a season of celebrations. It is a joy to witness the joining together of this new generation of couples.

There aren't many things we ALL agree on in our church, but I'd hope that we can agree that God is love. And, I hope we can agree that God expresses love for us in many different ways, some we understand, and some we don't. We probably agree that marriage is a commitment flowing out of love. We probably agree that the commitment two people make in marriage is a sacred covenant, and it is one the church and society should honor and do everything we can to uphold and support. And perhaps we agree that when the church blesses a commitment between two people who love each other, then we are affirming that love, a gift from God, is the fundamental element of a good marriage.

In our reading today from Paul's letter to the Romans he writes that the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. All of God's commandments are summed up in the act of loving. God's law is fulfilled through love. St. Paul describes an ideal - an ideal society where the laws of the land are grounded in love and honor. When it comes to marriage I believe we are finally beginning to live into that ideal.

I'm going to be away next weekend to officiate at the wedding of my niece and her fiancé. This is going to be a big family celebration with an interesting twist - it is a marriage between two women. This is a new thing for our family. This has become a new thing for many families. And this occasion is something I want to raise up and celebrate.

I remember when my niece came out of the closet, let her family and friends know that she was a lesbian. It was a tough adjustment for some in my family. I remember tense conversations about how the grandparents might react. I know that people in my family have moved through a progression of feelings - from surprise to confusion then eventually to tolerance and now, mostly, acceptance.

That's typical for us as we adjust to a new way of thinking about something. We move from confusion or even shock as we consider a new idea. That often leads to tolerance – thinking I'm not sure I agree with this but I think I am open to trying to understand. And then acceptance. Acceptance is an important stage because there is a big difference between tolerating a viewpoint that is different than mine and accepting a view point that is different. I think acceptance is the loving response. It takes time for people to adjust to a new idea. It helps when you can personalize it rather than think about it in the abstract. It is one thing to say that I support equal rights for gay people. It is another thing to say that I support the right of my niece and her partner to legally marry.

I want to celebrate the accomplishments that have been made but I also have to tell you that we still have a long way to go. Same sex couples that wish to marry still have a number of hoops to jump through to make it happen. My niece lives in Massachusetts so, fortunately, when she and her fiancé started talking about getting married they actually knew that they could. But that is not the case for far too many same sex couples.

When my niece called me to tell me the news of her engagement she said they'd like me to officiate at their wedding but they didn't know if I could. To tell the truth, I didn't know if I could either. It's a complicated thing to officiate at a same sex marriage in a different diocese. Well... it turns out that I am very lucky. I am lucky to be in the Diocese of Washington since Bishop Chane allows clergy to officiate in same sex marriage ceremonies. And I'm very lucky that the Bishop of Massachusetts shares the same view. But should these things be left to luck? I don't think so. Should the desire to be married be determined by church and state boundaries? I don't think so.

It hasn't all been bad though. In the course of jumping through all the same sex marriage hoops we have had a few laughs. I've discovered that there are many marriage traditions that need to be revised or ignored altogether. Consider the tradition of the couple marrying in the bride's hometown. This can be tricky when there are two brides or two grooms. When there are two brides who gets to process down the aisle? If they both do – who goes first? Just think about the language we use when talking about a couple – husband and wife. I got a kick out of the language on the marriage license in Massachusetts. My niece and her fiancé are known as "Party A" and "Party B" I'm known as the "Solemnizer."

I know we are working our way through a long and complicated transition. And I want to celebrate what has been accomplished. My niece and her fiancé are going to be married next week – and they are just one couple that is benefiting from many, many difficult years of fighting for gay and lesbian equality. But we have a way to go to achieve parity with how heterosexual couples are treated – especially in the church. You may not be aware of this, but I am not allowed to use the Marriage Rite that is in the Book of Common Prayer when I marry a same sex couple. This is because General Convention has not approved a revision to the rite to adjust gender language, or approved a new rite for this purpose. I pray that we will not have a separate rite for same sex marriage. I believe that marriage is marriage. Period.

You remember I began my sermon by quoting St. Paul. He writes "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." I feel like we are not doing all we should to live into God's law to love when it comes to marriage. The way the vast majority of state governments are behaving toward same sex couples is not loving - nor is it just. And our church is not doing much better. The current

situation is hurtful and demeaning for too many people. The challenge we all face is to not be complacent and to do everything we can to help achieve equal treatment for all.

Marriage in its simplest and most pure sense is the joining together of two people who love each other. I believe these couples help bring about the ideal society that Paul talks about. We all do this in our loving relationships - because those who know love in their lives are much more likely to share love in the greater world. I think that's what we're talking about. It's all about love. AMEN.