

The Anglican Church of Canada and the blessing of same sex unions.

A Statement from The Reverend Canon Christopher King during General Synod 2007

There is one chief imperative for the Christian Church. This is stated by Jesus in the 'great commission' of Matthew 28:19-20 "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" There are three actions in this commission, 'making disciples', 'baptising' and 'teaching'. Each of these anticipates the transformation of communities of believers into the likeness of Christ and away from the character of the world around them. In the New Testament we see the disciples in action and we read of Paul's dealings with infant Christian churches that are deviating from the 'commands' of God, becoming more like 'disciples' of the culture around them.

I see the Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church of the United States of America heading in the same direction, away from the distinctiveness of Christ and towards an accommodation with the ways of the world. A specific example is the proposed and completed blessings of committed and faithful same sex unions. This is an action that takes the church in an opposite direction from the one Jesus is leading us along.

The Holy Scriptures read intelligently and straightforwardly reveal a God who expresses an interest in and a description for holy human sexuality. Heterosexual activity, within marriage, is spoken of as a gift of God, a grace bestowed on most people and a grace to be recognised by the community. Nowhere in Holy Scripture is homoerotic behaviour spoken of positively; it is always labelled as sin.¹ Those who argue that our 21st Century context changes the straightforward meaning of biblical texts that speak of homoerotic behaviour are too dismissive of both historic and contemporary resources. They argue that the bible could not have spoken positively of committed same sex unions because such unions, between two consenting adults, were unknown. Robert Gagnon in his book, 'The Bible and Homosexual Practice'², reveals that such partnerships were known from the most ancient times. The meaning of the biblical texts is not limited to either homosexual activity with young boys or to homosexual rape. The bible's denial of the holiness of any homoerotic behaviour includes such violent actions but is not limited to them. Gagnon is part of the vast majority of Christian theologians and biblical scholars worldwide, although the minority who disagree are the most strident, the most publicity conscious and most frequently quoted in the news media.

Sex is one of the most powerful human desires and has always been a source of temptation to humanity. King David's adultery with Bathsheba is one of several examples of how strong this temptation can be.³ The Scriptures recognise that any human sexual desire can be unholy; this may be the heterosexual desire for someone other than one's spouse, or the desire for a person of the same sex. Powerful and deep as those desires are, the bible offers the hope that they can be mastered by the grace of God who expects us to enlist his help in our quest for holiness. The bible envisages a holy community that provides the prayer, support and friendship that enable people to control unholy desires. Scripture also recognises that temptation can overcome us and prescribes confession, forgiveness and reconciliation as the actions that must follow.⁴ This is the inclusivity

¹ Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Romans 1, verses 26-27. 1 Corinthians 6 verses 9 & 10. 1 Timothy 1; 9&10

² Abingdon Press, 2001

³ 2 Samuel chapter 11

⁴ Romans 6 verses 1-11

of Christianity, access to forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation within the holy love of God among the community of God's people.

When a church offers a 'blessing' for unholy sexual activity it deceives people, misrepresents God and excludes people from the opportunity to receive the grace of forgiveness and reconciliation with the God who loves them. Such a church is heading into the probability of God's judgment and is in dire need of those who are willing to continue speaking the word of God within it.

Throughout the Scriptures God does two things with groups of his people who disregard his commands and choose the local culture's ways. First, God sends messengers to call the people back to God. In the Old Testament these messengers appear as prophets. In the New Testament these messengers are people such as Peter, John and Paul, who write to churches to call them away from the ways of the world and back to God. Secondly, God acts in judgment in 'real-time'. In the Old Testament this judgment appears as military defeats, plague and exile. The New Testament is too young for us to see much of God's judgment, although in the letters to the seven churches at the beginning of the Book of Revelation we can see that God anticipates 'real-time' judgment as well as the final judgment.⁵

What do those biblical persons who speak the word of God do when God's judgment is imminent or present? They remain with the people they have failed to convince. In the bible we find that this is in response to God's call to them, to persevere in calling the people to repentance even during and after God's judgment. Prophets go into exile with the people, Paul envisages a third visit to recalcitrant Corinthian Christians and the LORD does not command the faithful within those seven churches⁶ to depart from the persistently wayward. Instead, the command to teach, baptise and make disciples remains the default and only role for the holy followers of Christ in the world and in the church. Fragmenting the church does not help. I am convinced that amputation is God's work alone and that proclamation is ours always.⁷

I believe that God has called Little Trinity Church and every Christian to this commission. We must continue to be active in the debate that is currently engulfing the Anglican Church of Canada and Diocese of Toronto. We must continue our attempts to persuade people to trust the will of God revealed in God's Holy Scriptures. We must continue to act within the Anglican Church to resist further changes that take the church away from God's will and towards judgment. Whilst always aware that nothing is impossible for God, I am not optimistic that this debate will be won for the Lord in the short term. However I am in no doubt that, even through a time of judgment, God will be faithful to all his people and bring them through to newness.

I offer my prayerful support to those men and women, clergy and lay, in North America, who continue loyally to teach and abide by the Scriptures; especially those who struggle with same-sex attraction. I am thankful that the vast majority of Anglican bishops and Primates around the world are standing up for the historic and orthodox faith and practice of the church. I ask all Christians to pray for the Anglican Church with hope in our Lord Jesus Christ and I urge patience while we await God's action.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 3 verses 10-15

⁶ Revelation chapters 2 and 3

⁷ On occasions God does 'amputate', for example when Martin Luther was excommunicated.