

St. John's is an ONA ("Open and Affirming") Church in the United Church of Christ. That means that we welcome into full membership and participation in the Body of Christ persons of every age, economic or marital status, gender, language, nationality, physical or mental ability, race, or sexual orientation. We welcome all to share in the life, leadership, ministry, fellowship, worship, sacraments, responsibilities and blessings of participation in our congregation and Christ's Church. We embrace diversity in our congregation and community, and as followers of Jesus Christ, we affirm the dignity and worth of every person.

On June 26, 2013, the United States Supreme Court struck down the 1996 federal law known as the Defense of Marriage Act ("DOMA") that defined marriage as only between a man and a woman. This ruling took away from the federal government the power to ban same-gender marriages, shifting the contentious struggle for human rights to the states to decide whether they will recognize gay marriages. With a companion ruling that allowed same-sex marriage to resume in California, the US Supreme Court delivered a major victory for supporters of same-sex marriage.

In Ohio, however, same-gender couples still can't be married here, nor will marriages performed in other states be recognized here. So the debate continues in our state, as Ohio religious leaders on both sides of the debate weigh in on talk shows and the media, with the loudest, meanest voices often garnering the most attention.

In the midst of all of the arguing, political wrangling, and religious voices of hate and exclusion, I found this remarkable article by author Glennon Melton, who blogs at "Momastery." May you be blessed in reading this piece that sheds more light than heat on an important justice issue for our generation.... Pastor Gini

I LOVE GAY PEOPLE AND I LOVE CHRISTIANS. I CHOOSE ALL.

By Glennon Melton

I'm not a smart man. But I know what Love Is. - Forrest Gump

Several years ago at church, Craig and I sat through a sermon condemning homosexuality. As I listened to the sermon, which was based upon two lines of scripture in the New Testament, every fiber in my body rejected the message. My palms sweated, my heart pounded, and I started to feel queasy. I left the church building that day on fire and didn't get a good night's sleep for a month.

Instead of sleeping, I spent my nights scouring scripture, researching the positions of different denominations, and praying and praying and praying some more. I wrote this to several ministers: "I am a Christian and a seeker and I'm trying desperately to reconcile God's commandment to love my neighbor without judgment and the church's stance on homosexuality. Would you discuss this with me?" Not one minister wrote back. Every morning when the sun finally came up, I'd call Sister at work. She'd answer her phone with: "We're gonna talk about the

gays again, aren't we, Sister?" Yes, Sister. Yes, we are. Clear your schedule.

Figuring out my stance on homosexuality felt like a life and death decision. When I described the intensity of my concern to other Christians, most would say, "but, why? You don't even have a gay family member." This response was very confusing to me. Isn't the whole point of Christianity that we are all family? That we should love our neighbors as ourselves? That if any of us is hungry, we are all hungry? That if any of us is oppressed, we are all oppressed? According to the Jesus I read about in the Gospels, these people who were being persecuted for their sexuality WERE my family. The children who were killing themselves because the world (and the church in particular) would not accept them WERE my children. And I thought that being a Christian required me to love them, to ache for them, to fight for them with the same urgency I would have if I were fighting for myself. The fact that I had never met them before was completely inconsequential, according to Jesus.

I have these new friends named Laura and Jaime...they're gay and married. They love each other very much. I recently looked through their photos and noticed that their wedding looked a lot like mine. Actually, their lives look a lot like mine, except that their son, Simon, is very sick with a heart condition. So I'm not sure they really care right now if Christians "accept" them or call their love for each other "sinful" or not because they are quite busy caring for each other and Simon and running between hospitals and home and having a brutiful life together. But I'm glad they slowed down enough to know me, because my life is better with them in it. I love them, and I love Simon.

The following excerpt is based on one of my favorite passages from Huckleberry Finn, and I think it sums up the decision I've made about Laura and Jaime's family.

"Whenever I think of the word "empathy," I think of a small boy named Huckleberry Finn contemplating his friend and runaway slave, Jim. Huck asks himself whether he should give Jim up or not. Huck was told in Sunday school that people who let slaves go free go to everlasting fire." But then, Huck says he imagines he and Jim in "the day and nighttime, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing." Huck remembers Jim and their friendship and warmth. He imagines Jim not as a slave but as a human being and he decided that, "alright, then, I'll go to hell." - *This I Believe*, 172

When I say things like this my Christian friends get very alarmed. They say to me: Aren't you afraid of saying and writing these things? Aren't you afraid of God?

Well, yes. But when I consider discussing all of these things over with Jesus one day, when I imagine telling Him what I thought I heard Him saying to me, when I explain how my heart understood His message, I realize that I'd be much more afraid to stand in front of Him if I didn't write these things. I know my Jesus, I love Him, and I think if he needed me to believe that homosexuality was a sin, He would have mentioned it. He didn't. When Jesus said that marriage was between a man and a woman, he was responding to a question about divorce, not sexuality.* And even the Gospels... well, even though they are gospel to me, I accept that they are also interpretations of what Jesus said and did and meant -we don't have a single written word directly from Jesus. He could have left us something - he could have left another list of

rights and wrongs when He came to Earth, but he chose not to. The only words he ever wrote were in the sand. . . words that He knew would disappear almost immediately. Why? I don't know. Maybe He wanted us to know him well enough to make our decisions about Him based on our relationship with Him. Maybe He wanted us to wrestle with Him, to work out our own faith with fear and trembling. That's what I think, anyway. I think I'm starting to recognize His still, small voice. And I'm betting everything on my belief in our relationship, on my understanding of His character and love. Aren't we all? And if I'm wrong, and I very well could be . . . I don't really think He'll send me to hell for it. I think He knows I'm doing the best I can down here. I know He knows that. I believe.

And while we're at it . . . that still, small voice suggests to me often that He'd appreciate if Christians picked up a couple more issues other than homosexuality and abortion to address. You know, maybe a couple He actually mentioned...like care for the poor and sick and lonely and hungry and imprisoned and widowed and orphaned and recently immigrated. Maybe we should all be required to pick an issue that requires US to change and not OTHERS to change. I think that'd be good.

I just think that if we are going to call ourselves pro-life, we must also agree that starvation and poverty and disease and immigration and health care for all and war and peace and the environment are also pro-life issues. And maybe in the meantime we could have a new pro-life bumper sticker made that says: "We are all Confused Hypocrites. But God Loves Us anyway, which is Good News. So out of Gratitude, We are Trying to Remember That We Belong To Each Other." I'd buy that one.

My point is that this gay ship has sailed, I think. We're gonna have to sponsor another revolution because for the gays, the times, they are a' changing already. Gay people wrote to me by the hundreds to tell me that they read the post again and again, pretending that the letter was from their own parents. Therapists requested my permission to use the letter with their gay and straight clients to teach them about unconditional love. Churches from all over the country asked to use the post in their weekly bulletins. A student at UC Berkley told me that her professor of religious studies distributed the letter to all of his students. I felt very humble about this, which is why I only wear my homemade "THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROFESSOR AT UC BERKLEY DISTRIBUTED MY POST TO ALL HIS STUDENTS" T-shirt to bed. And sometimes to the grocery store, when I'm having an insecure day.

But I also received challenging responses to my post. None were mean-spirited, none were offensive. People are better than we give them credit for.

Many people said that they agree that people are born gay, but that it is still a sin to act on it. These people suggested that homosexuals should remain celibate.

But my understanding is that celibacy is a sacred calling, not a hiding place or a consequence. Celibacy is like...it's like we all have the same capacity to love inside of us, the same amount of light to shine.....and most of use that light, that love, like a laser...it's all concentrated and focused on one partner. But the celibate hears a call to use his light, his love, more like a flood light. He knows that if he's not required to shine a laser on one person, that his light can be

dispersed to many more....maybe not burning a hole into another heart, but lighting up entire rooms. He can reach more people with his love through celibacy because it's not all focused on one person. Ghandi felt called to be a flood light instead of a laser...and heeded the call to celibacy while he was married. His wife accepted this as the way he was being called to serve his God and his people. And so celibacy...it's a sacred calling to love. And I fear that when we suggest that homosexuals save themselves by choosing celibacy, that we insult both the gays and the celibates. Celibacy is not a Plan B.

Other Monkees(Author Glennon Melton leads "[the Monkees](#)", a group of thousands of women who meet at Momastery online to support each other in big and small ways) have explained that they believe that homosexuality is a sin, but no more of a sin than pride and anger and selfishness. And since we are all sinners too, we shouldn't judge the gays. Hate the sin, love the sinner type thing. I don't know. I guess I have just always accepted the fact that we are put on this Earth to love. To Love God and love our neighbors. And those sins, pride, anger, and selfishness...those sins get in the way of loving God and loving our neighbors. So we should fight them tooth and nail. We should fight them to the death. But homosexuality...I can't see how a woman sharing her God given light with another woman interferes with her Loving Her God and Loving Her Neighbor.

Unless we come back to: because it says so in the Bible. And we have faith that our understanding of the Bible is infallible. We believe that our human minds can grasp the meaning of all scripture perfectly and so we have faith that homosexuality is a sin.

But you know what the Bible also says? The Bible says "And these three remain. Hope, Faith, and Love. And the greatest of these is love." ***

There will come a point when hope and faith cease to exist. When the next world is revealed, we will know . . . we won't need hope or faith anymore. Those two are temporary. Hope and faith exist only to help us make it though this life.

But LOVE. Love is eternal. Love never ends. The love we offer and receive in this world we'll carry with us into the next. The greatest of these is love. When in doubt, I choose love above any particular ideas offered to me about faith.

And that means that I love my gay friends, without agenda. And I love my friends who believe that homosexuality is a sin, without agenda. And I love my friends who are terrified for my soul when I write this way, without agenda.

Because listen - here's the thing. After my wrestling match with God, I wasn't really exhausted enough. I still came up swinging. For a little while, I felt angry. Angry at anyone who had a different understanding of scripture than I did. Angry at people who taught that God disapproved of homosexuality. Proudful about my position, really. And then one day God sat my butt down with the Bible again.

And he said something to me like, "Wait a minute, Lovie. Yes, I love those gays, but I love the ones picketing against them every bit as much. That's the point."

And there's the rub. There's Christianity. It's not deciding that one group shouldn't be judged and then turning around and judging the other group. That is not being a peacemaker. Peacemakers resist categorizing people. They find the light, the good, in each and every person. They don't try to change people, except by example. They know everyone has something important to teach. They are humble about their ideas and their opinions. They try to find common ground, always.

I now have friends who are gay and friends who preach against homosexuality. I have friends who are ministers and friends who are atheists. Listen, I even have a new friend who is a Dallas Cowboys fan. With God, all things are possible.

The point is - if you're hungry - you are all welcome at my table. None of you is less welcome than the other. This place is a banquet table for gays and straights and prudes and hoochies and cheerleaders and tuba players and pharisees and alpha moms and slacker moms and tax collectors and fishermen and choir girls and heathens. It's a banquet table where people who are different can come together and share a meal and maybe not change each other's minds, but possibly soften each other's hearts.

Oh, yes...we can do that. We already have.

You do not have to agree with me to love me.

So at this table, this Momastery table . . . we talk to each other in soft voices, and we smile and we say, "pass the wine, please," and we ask about each other's children. Sometimes we even pass around some pictures. We share our families with each other. And we also share some of those magical laughs when we can't speak and the tears are rolling and we're gasping for breath and our stomachs hurt like we just did a hundred crunches. And maybe in the middle of all that, we start knowing each other as people instead of categories. And we accept that we are different, and we understand that each person's choices are her own, and so we don't have to be angry with each other. We are free to love each other.

“She told me that once she forgot herself and her heart opened up like a door with a loose latch and everything fell out and she tried for days to put it all back in the proper order, but she finally gave up and left it there in a pile and loved everything equally.”- Brian Andreas

Love,
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*Mark 10, **John 8, ***1 Corinthians 13

