

## 4 Easter, Year A: 15 May 2011

When I was in seminary my homiletics professor (that's a fancy word for preaching) instilled in us two cardinal rules along with a variety of other good advice:

the first was that there is no "I" in sermon,  
meaning that the preacher may self-reference from time to time  
but that this should be used sparingly.

The sermon must always be careful to point to the good news  
of God acting in and through history and creation  
and sometimes the preacher, telling anecdotes about herself,  
can get in the way of that, can deflect the focus as it were.

The other cardinal rule was: no politics from the pulpit,  
meaning no taking sides in the arena of party debate,  
however one might preach on the social issues themselves.

This is hard for me, because although God may not be a republican or a democrat—  
you've all seen the bumper sticker, right?—

as far as I'm concerned, Jesus would definitely vote socialist.

This morning I'm going to break both of my professor's rules.

Sometimes, as we began to recognize  
in the consciousness-raising movements of the late 1960s and '70s,  
as many of us were coming to a personal realization  
of the dynamics of any power relationships,  
sometimes "the personal is political," and the opposite is equally true:  
sometimes the political is personal.

This past Wednesday the Minnesota Senate approved a bill  
to place on the 2012 ballot an amendment to the state constitution.

If passed, this amendment will restrict the definition of marriage  
to mean as solely between a man and a woman.

Residents of the state will thus have the opportunity to vote up or down once and for all  
the perceived value of my 36 year relationship with my partner Dennis,  
despite the fact that we already enjoy second-class status under an existing state law—  
together with its 515 companion statutes—

that defines marriage in the same discriminatory way.

But here's your chance:

You, if you choose, can soon go on record to say you believe  
that Dennis and I and all gay and lesbian persons  
who would live as a couple with a loved one  
are indeed second class citizens,  
unworthy of the basic human rights to love and the pursuit of happiness  
accorded to heterosexual couples.

And by the way, intentionally or not, you've already taken a step in that direction  
in that John Howe, the senator who represents you in Goodhue County, voted for the  
bill.

*This sermon was written by The Rev. Theo Park and delivered at Christ Episcopal Church, Red Wing.  
Fr. Theo thanks all those whose material he has borrowed and apologizes to those he has overlooked.*

Some will now be asking, Why is he breaking the rules?  
Why talk about this, and from the pulpit.

Rarely in any time does an issue lay bare our secret heart.  
Rarely are we met with a challenge, not to our growth or abundance,  
our welfare or our security, but rather to our core values and purpose and meaning.  
We don't often come face to face with and get first hand testimony from the  
marginalized.  
And I'm sure that most of the time this issue doesn't seem to address a majority of you.  
There aren't a lot of our gay and lesbian folks in Red Wing,  
so it's easy to ignore or be ignorant of.  
It's not present in your personal lives, not present in your social lives,  
and even if occasionally it makes you uncomfortable,  
most of the time it's just as easy  
to put me in a box labeled "priest" and forget that I am also Theo,  
to overlook that the love of my life, to whom my heart is intextricably bound,  
is another man.  
But here it is...in the flesh...the issue is me. Take a good look.  
The personal is the political; the political is personal.  
You know someone, maybe several someones, who will be deeply affected by this bill,  
now as independent adults, or in the future as current lgtb youth.  
And you will have a chance to defeat it, if you so choose, or support it if you so choose.  
What you do is your business, but I hope that when you step up to that voting booth in  
2012,  
you will remember my face and the life I have lived among you.

This bigotry is not the way of Jesus, who makes clear that God's love is for all,  
that he is indeed the shepherd and the gate, but that not all the sheep are of one fold.  
As one of our national senators put it recently,  
how many more gay people does God have to make  
before we acknowledge that they too are made in God's image?

This discrimination is not the way of our baptismal covenant as Episcopalians,  
in which we promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons,  
to love our neighbors as ourselves,  
to respect the dignity of all persons,  
and to strive for justice for every living being.

This injustice is not the way of this diocese, which in 1999 took a risk  
and declared through our annual convention our conviction  
that all members of the church, all the baptized, are God's beloved children  
and have equal, unqualified access to all the sacraments,  
including the blessing of holy union.

There is no cause for pride in what has happened this week in our legislature.  
There will be no cause for rejoicing if the house ratifies this bill.

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There can be no cause for self-satisfaction  
in the long denial of equal rights to millions of Americans.  
But there is still cause for hope in our faith  
and in the slow movement of our society toward tolerance if not acceptance.

Someday...if not today, someday. God is working God's purpose out, which is health  
and salvation for the whole creation. Of this I am sure, whether I will see it or not.

In the meantime, there's a lot of work to do.  
If anyone wants to know where to start, please check out Out Front Minnesota,  
the statewide lobbying and advocacy network on glbt issues.  
Or speak to me when I return from vacation.

That last invitation goes for anyone offended by this sermon as well.  
The leadership of Christ Church took a risk of their own  
in inviting an out gay man to serve with you as your interim rector.  
It is a privilege that I wish never to take for granted or to abuse.  
At the same time, I do not believe you expected me to check my life at the door.  
And sometimes...well, the political is personal, and who you see is who you get.

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