

Pastoral News

My friends, I hope and pray that this note finds you healthy and filled with joy... even in this wilderness we find ourselves this day...

As you may have noticed, over the past couple of months our church (the larger UMC) and of course Fowler UMC have found themselves in the dry and unforgiving wilderness... tempted to... (You may fill in your own answer here). We find ourselves divided by our interpretation of what the bible may say or not say about homosexuality.

And so we have had a painful reminder of just how differently we read the bible...how differently we use the word love...how differently we use the words welcome, included, and accepted...and what in the end we find is the most important thing God wants us to do or be, or know.

I have made no secret about how I feel about this...after all, before coming to Fowler UMC I was the pastor at Longview UMC which is a Reconciling and Affirming Church. Over the past couple of years, I have pushed no agenda to move our church in one direction or another, I have simply watched and listened to what the needs of the church may have been and tried to help the church find God's will and plan. I have tried to love and care for you (not always perfectly), talked theology, visited (not as often as I should though), shared meals and choruses, and laid to rest wives and husbands, friends and children. I have cried, dreamed, and hoped with many of you over

What's In This Month's Issue:

- Caritas Challenge
- Prayers Needed
- Birthdays and Anniversaries
- United Women of Faith

September Calendar

4th, 11th, 18th, 25th

Worship @ 10

1st Men's Lunch

@ Golden Corral @ Noon

5th? Men's Golf @ 10 Deer Park

6th, 13th, 20th, & 27th

Tops @ 9

Prayer Group @ 10

Koinonia @ 11

Bible Study @ 1

7th Garland Business Meeting
@ 8:30

8th & 22nd

Crafting Group 9 till noon

11th

Goodbye Abraham

22nd

Flashes Articles Due

this short time we have shared together (thank you Covid 19). Though in the back of my mind I have always known that at some point we will face this division head-on. As some of our family members have decided that they can no longer be part of our family here at Fowler UMC, I believe that don't ask don't tell is no longer a reasonable way of existing and we need as a church, together to turn the corner. We have to have real conversations about what we believe and what we are willing to do or not do for those beliefs.

Over the next few months, I will share with you some articles that I have found to be helpful to those of us struggling to decide exactly...what does the bible say about homosexuality?

I know that for some of us this is a hard subject to deal with, but we need to. Please know that I am open and willing to discuss any of your fears, thoughts, and hopes on the matter. So here we go...with a very soft and gentle approach on...

Here is the article.

...What Does The Bible Say About Homosexuality?

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Introduction

For the last two decades, Pew Research Center has reported that one of the most enduring ethical issues across Christian traditions is sexual diversity. For many Christians, one of the most frequently first-asked questions on this topic is, "What does the Bible say about attraction to someone of the same sex?"

Although it is unlikely that the biblical authors had any notion of sexual orientation (for example, the term homosexual wasn't even coined until the late 19th century) for many people of faith, the Bible is looked to for timeless guidance on what it means to honor God with our lives; and this most certainly includes our sexuality.

Before we can jump into how it is that Christians can maintain the authority of the Bible and also affirm sexual diversity, it might be helpful if we started with a brief but clear overview of some of the assumptions informing many Christian approaches to understanding the Bible.

What is the Bible?

For Christians to whom the Bible is God's very written word, it is widely understood that God produced its contents through inspired human authors to tell the story of God's creation, how sin entered the world and the redemption that is found through Jesus Christ and his salvation.

In this light, the Bible is often seen as the primary source that helps us figure out how the people of God should live. It is important to point out though that being God's word doesn't mean we come to understand what is right or wrong through reading

isolated passages. Rather, most Christians make these difficult determinations by studying what the whole of Scripture says regarding a specific topic, exploring the linguistic, historical, and cultural context within which the words were written, and then putting these discoveries in conversation with what we know to be true of the character of God more broadly. While the book of Hebrews affirms that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever,” our ability to understand and apply the Bible’s teachings changes and deepens as we grow in our faith and learn more about the world.

What is Biblical Interpretation?

Whenever any person opens the Bible, they begin a process of interpretation. Individuals attracted to others of the same sex are regularly told they are ‘elevating’ their experience over Scripture when they come to affirming conclusions about their relationships and identities. They are often told this is a direct rejection of the Bible’s authority in their lives. But, the question is begged, is this a fair and accurate assessment? Are there such things as neutral interpretations? Is there one true or correct way to interpret the Bible, and if so, who determines that?

The study of biblical interpretation is called hermeneutics and helps us to address these kinds of questions. Hermeneutics is what we do when we take a text and ask not just “what does this say,” but “what does this mean?” In asking, “What does the Bible say about homosexuality” (or more appropriately stated, “what does the Bible say about attraction to someone of the same sex,”) our task is to explore what the relevant biblical passages on the topic meant in their original context and what they mean for us today. More specifically, we are seeking to determine if the biblical writers were condemning specific practices related to sexuality in the ancient world, or were they indeed condemning all same-sex relationships of any kind for the rest of time?

Troubling the Waters of Exclusionary Interpretations

For many evangelicals and other conservative Christians, the answer to this question is ‘yes’. Their interpretation is that same-sex relationships are not able to reflect God’s creative intent. Their reasoning includes, but is not limited to, 1) what they were always taught was an “unbiased” interpretation of the relevant passages and 2) a core belief that sex differentiation is an indispensable part of Christian marriage. The latter is of tremendous importance because according to the New Testament, marriage is a primary symbol of the love between Christ and his beloved “bride,” the church. To them, same-sex couples (and single people for that matter) are uniquely excluded from participation in this symbol on the basis of a failure to perform

one or more dimensions of an often vague category referred to as ‘gender complementarity.’

While gender complementarity is indeed rooted in passages from Genesis 1 and 2, it is worth noting that these stories say God began by creating human beings of the male and female sex (defined as the complex result of combinations between chromosomes, gonads, genes, and genitals) but there is nothing that indicates in Scripture that God only created this binary. This account says little to nothing about gender, (the social and cultural norms and practices corresponding to what is considered masculine and feminine.) Two dimensions of the text that become important in considering the biblical affirmation of intersex, transgender, non-binary, and other gender-diverse people, are discussed at more length here. To further complicate the argument against same-sex relationships, Scripture doesn’t suggest that respecting biblical authority means Christians should reject experience as a teacher. In fact, what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount about good trees bearing good fruit and bad trees bearing bad fruit (Matthew 7:17-18) indicates experience should inform how we learn God’s truth. This was what allowed the first Christians to decide to include gentiles who were not keeping the Old Testament law in the early church (Acts 15:1-19). It also was the basis for the Christian arguments that put an end to slavery and supported movements for women’s equality throughout church history as well.

The call to reform Christian teaching in these instances didn’t suggest that human experience should be held over Scripture. What they did suggest was that the obvious exclusion, injustice and destructive outcomes of widely held beliefs should take Christians back to the text to consider a different perspective, one which might better reflect the heart of God. While some Christians say that the Bible presents a variety of hard teachings as well as promising suffering for followers of Jesus (Matthew 16:24), it never endorses oppression. In order for suffering to be Christ-like, it must be redemptive. Redemptive suffering does not uphold oppressive forces but always expresses resistance against them. For all of these reasons and more, Christians have a moral imperative to reconsider their interpretation of what the Bible says about LGBTQ+ identities.

So Then What Are Those Passages Talking About?

While the six passages that address same-sex eroticism in the ancient world are negative about the practices they mention, there is no evidence that these in any way speak to same-sex relationships of love and mutuality. On the contrary, the amount of cultural, historical, and linguistic data surrounding how sexuality in the

cultures of the biblical authors operated demonstrates that what was being condemned in the Bible is very different than the committed same-sex partnerships we know and see today. The stories of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) and the Levite's concubine (Judges 19) are about sexual violence and the Ancient Near East's stigma toward violating male honor. The injunction that "man must not lie with man" (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13) coheres with the context of a society anxious about their health, continuing family lineages, and retaining the distinctiveness of Israel as a nation. Each time the New Testament addresses the topic in a list of vices (1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10), the argument being made is more than likely about the sexual exploitation of young men by older men, a practice called pederasty, and what we read in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans is a part of a broader indictment against idolatry and excessive, self-centered lust that is driven by a desire to "consume" rather than to love and to serve as outlined for Christian partnership elsewhere in the Bible. While it is likely that Jews and Christians in the 1st century had little to no awareness of a category like sexual orientation, this doesn't mean that the biblical authors were wrong. What it does mean, at a minimum, is that continued opposition toward same-sex relationships and LGBTQ+ identities must be based on something other than these biblical texts, which brings us back to a theology of Christian marriage or partnership.

If neither sex differentiation nor gender complementarity is the basis for Christian partnership, then what is?

While the work to undo the decades-long, dominant, and exclusionary interpretations of these passages is important, its emphasis on and against the affirming dimensions of Christian theology for LGBTQ+ people has stifled the exploration of a deeper meaning of sexuality for everyone. From Genesis 2 to Matthew 19, to Ephesians 5, what these passages make explicit (and is echoed throughout the rest of Scripture) is something mentioned earlier: marriage is sacred for Christians because it can represent the enduring love between Christ and the Church. Christian partnership creates an opportunity to live out God's love. While some kind of difference seems to be important in embodying this metaphor, understanding that all our differences can lead to empathy, compassion, good listening, sacrifice, and what it means to "love our neighbor as ourselves," there is scant evidence that it is our biology or our views of gender that are the required difference. Anyone who has ever been in an intimate relationship of any kind can testify to the range of differences (and resulting conflicts) that are an inherent part of any two personalities attempting to integrate their lives. And remember, those who are not married but are not LGBTQ+, like single people or people whose spouses have passed, are embraced as Christians. The larger point here is that God's design

for Christian partnership is about reflecting the truest and sweetest love that anyone could know; that is the self-giving, ever-enduring, liberating love between God and creation made possible for us through Christ. A tall order, but nevertheless something countless LGBTQ+ individuals and couples has been living into and continue to live into today.

Conclusion

All things considered, it is important to remember that throughout church history, new information about people and the world has frequently led Christians to reconsider their beliefs. This need not be a reason to distrust Scripture, but rather should serve as an invitation to wrestle with the contexts of the biblical writers and our own lived experiences. As it stands today, there are millions of faithful Christians around the world who have come to recognize the work of God in and through the relationships of LGBTQ+ people ([click here to see a list of denominational positions on LGBTQ+ people within Christianity](#)). As New Testament Scholar Daniel Kirk has pointed out, Christians today would do well by the tradition of the apostles and our current witness in the world to recognize that theological abstractions aside, God has already clearly embraced LGBTQ+ people into full communion, and it is now the church's responsibility to simply honor that reality and rejoice (Luke 15).

Maybe it was the Spirit that guided us to this place...peace my friends...

Pastor René

Great Job with the August Challenge! We collected over 100 bottles of syrup! For the month of September it is Soup. Caritas wants any kind of soup but does request no low sodium. I know we can do just as good with this months challenge.

Caritas Challenge For September



**This month is soup.
They have asked for
any kind but no low
sodium please.**





“Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16 -17 MSG

1st- Jesi Berg Maetin

Marla Cannata

2nd - Gabriel Kennedy-Gibbens

Dick & Veona Mabbott

6th Carolyn Tobeck

Olinda Martin

8th Tyler Bryan

20th Sam Cannata

21st Suzi Barton

23rd Nathan Kennedy-Gibbens

24th Veona Mabbott

29th Dotie Godley

Wishing our friends and family

a “happy. . .”,

a “merry. . .”,

a “best wishes . . .”,

and a “blessings”

for their special day.

Prayer Requests

Hand of God to Touch

Our Church

Pastor René, new nanny

Meghan- navigating life

Friend - Trust and support

Health and Healing

Nicholas

Jill Berg

Lance & Janet Abernathy

Sharon Stovall

Prayers of Gratitude

For Dick and Abraham, helping René

Continued Prayers.

Donna recovering from knee surgery



United
Women
in Faith

Come Join us at Fowler United Methodist, 3928 N Howard, this September 1, 2022 for our Program at 1pm. We will hear from the 'Spokane Veterans Forum'.



Spokane Veterans Forum
"No Veteran Stands Alone"

MEET THE SPOKANE VETERANS FORUM

The Spokane Veterans Forum (SVF) is a 501(C)(3), non-profit organization that provides mentoring, educational, therapeutic, and life enhancing services to military veterans referred from regional Veterans Enhanced Therapeutic Courts (VET Court). The SVF was established in 2010. The SVF trains volunteer mentors and matches mentors with defendants. Reports are regularly made to the VET Court probation officers regarding individual progress and compliance for the court ordered treatment reviews. At the formal SVF monthly meetings, the veterans share a meal together and attend educational or therapeutic programs. A celebration ceremony is also held to acknowledge graduates of the program. Through successful participation in the SVF program and their individual respective treatment services, nearly all participating defendant veterans will have their offense dismissed or substantially reduced-all done with other veterans at their side. The SVF Program prepares veteran defendants to take their place as upstanding citizens in society and saves the community the cost of incarcerations

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Do you like to craft?
Come join us on September
8th & 22nd for our Crafting day.
Let's talk and craft together.



Knit, crochet, cross stitch, quilt



Come join us!
We meet
every other
Thursday
from 9am to
noon!