

#Jesus'LoveWins

A sermon based on John 15:9-13

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You can bet the entire nation was biting their nails...watching...waiting. Wondering what the verdict would be. Oh, I'm sure there were those who had an inkling it wasn't going to be very good. It wasn't very long because their worst nightmare came true.

The court finally made its ruling. The victors came sprinting out of the courthouse as the formerly tense crowd erupted into tears and cheers of elation and celebration. And wouldn't you know, but society won again. Christians went on the defensive. And many feared it was the end of morality as we know it.

You know what I'm talking about, don't you? Well, of course, I'm talking about January 15, 1927, when, in the aftermath of the Scopes Monkey trial, the Supreme Court of Tennessee ruled the Butler law, which explicitly banned evolution in schools, that it was unconstitutional.

Or, maybe I'm talking about January 22, 1973, when, in the case of Roe vs. Wade, the US Supreme Court affirmed a woman's right to privacy when it came to a decision to have an abortion.

But what you're thinking about is another ruling, still fresh, a little more than a month ago. I'm sure it's still fresh in your minds. Breaking news, seeing men and women kissing their same-sex partner, just overjoyed that justice had finally been served. Equality was here to stay as same-sex couples were now legally able to marry each other nationwide.

It was a "victory...an extraordinary achievement" for humanity, or so President Obama remarked as he was the first to congratulate the "victors" with the tweet #LoveWins. And Christians around the country hung their heads in anger...in disappointment...in defeat.

Christians, I get it. You're frustrated, and rightly so. Sin has won once again. Living as God's child, as a sojourner here but a citizen of heaven, as a light in the world and to the world, just became a little harder...I just read an article a few days ago that unashamedly pointed out the eight colleges/universities in Minnesota who discriminate against the LGBTQ community. Guess who was included? That's right, our very own teacher/pastor training college in New Ulm, Martin Luther College. Talk about another impediment to the work of the gospel.

But before you go off and rage over the fact that the President and his lackeys had the audacity to flood the White House in rainbow colored lights...before you de-friend everyone on Facebook who applauded this earth-shattering decision...before you condemn the government (especially the Supreme Court) for their idiocy...before you pretty much recuse yourself from having to do anything with this world which has seemingly reached new depths of deterioration...or maybe now that you've already done that (since, unfortunately, I'm a little behind the eight ball in piping in on this), let's have a real, honest conversation about this.

Let's talk about how you, believer, can and will respond to this decision and to the growing LGBTQ community and its defenders because, while out there, you're hearing #LoveWins, God's Word is here to tell us today that no matter what happens out there, the only truth that matters is this:

#Jesus'LoveWins. Let's listen to that Word, **"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."**

Are you really that surprised over the decision the Supreme Court made a little over a month ago to end all bans on same-sex marriages nationwide? Haven't we been slowly building up to this? Movie stars, musicians, professional sports players unabashedly coming out as homosexual, and being lauded for it. Numerous lawsuits filed against companies who are trying to take a stand and refuse service to LGBTQ's, and those filing the lawsuits are being lauded for it. Bruce Jenner comes out as transgender Kaitlyn Jenner, and he's lauded for it.

We live in a largely postmodern world. We live among a people who, being led astray by their sinful natures, think...believe (and falsely): 1) they are the masters of their own lives; 2) there is no such thing as absolute right and wrong; and therefore, 3) they choose what's right and wrong for them and no one can judge them or tell them otherwise. The only "proper" response is to love and tolerate.

We know better. We have a book where our God tells us what is absolutely right and wrong. We have Scripture, where Jesus tells us what true love really is, **"Remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love...My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."**

It's not "look inside you" or "listen to your heart" or "whatever you feel is right is right." You've seen mindsets like that littered throughout this same-sex marriage fight. But those attitudes do not dictate how a believer lives his/her life. No, Jesus does, and this is what true love looks like...us obeying Jesus' commands. All of them. All the time.

So, as children of God, how do we, in love, deal with this...with those who support or who are caught up in the sin of same-sex marriage or same-sex attraction? Or maybe the better question to think about right now is, how have we dealt with it so far?

Well, let's see if any of the following responses fit you:

1. Sinful hating. "I wish God would just do away with everyone who is committing this heinous sin of homosexuality. They're scum. Et cetera...et cetera."

Famed Christian preach Rick Warren once said, **"Our culture has accepted...huge lies. The first is that if you disagree with someone's lifestyle, you must fear or hate them..."**

"If you don't agree with someone's lifestyle, you must fear or hate them." Maybe there's a reason why homosexuals think many Christians hate them. Have you done anything to dispel that mentality or do you feed into it?

2. Maybe your response has been to take to Facebook, Twitter, your circle of friends, basically anyone who will listen to you, and let them know, rather vocally, just how vehemently opposed you are to the Supreme Court's ruling and to the "big" sin of homosexuality in general. I don't have a problem with that, but my question then is where are you when it comes to the smaller sins, like needless swearing, reputation-damaging gossip, disrespecting our God-given government and its

representatives? Are you waving your big sword then? Or, do you gloss over those sins that aren't "that big" of a deal?

3. Or maybe your response has been to give no response, to sit on the sidelines. "That way I won't offend my friends who may disagree with my views on homosexuality and same-sex marriage." But are you ok with giving the impression you're ok with it?

4. I'll tell you what mine was. I hated that because this issue was coming to the forefront, now I have to be prepared to give an answer and I'm not. Is that you? Is that why you were so upset at the Supreme Court's ruling? Because you thought that the government would continue to uphold morality as God's Word lays it out, and once again, it's disappointed you? Or even more than that, because now you have to be more prepared to answer the Bible's growing critics?

I think you can tell none of those responses are right. None of them is appropriate. None of them is loving.

So, what's the solution? Obviously, none of us have handled this situation perfectly. We're guilty of sinful thoughts, sinful words, sinful actions (or even all three) against those who either are LGBTQ or who are LGBTQ supporters. Do we lie down and let them stomp all over us because we've been so unfair and unloving to them? Do we wave the white flag (that is, give up on sharing Law and Gospel with them) because we know that we can't win, that no matter what we do, #LoveWins? When any of that, all of that happens, love doesn't sin. Satan does.

Believers, there is only one solution. I shared it with you earlier. Now hear it again from Jesus' lips. **"Remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love. My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends."**

You know what kind of people did Jesus hung out with? The sick, prostitutes, tax collectors, Samaritans, heathens. They were his "friends." So are you and I. So are the people out there who are either supporting or struggling with homosexuality.

A pretty lowly, unworthy group of people, but you know what Jesus did for us, for every single one of us? He laid down his life for us. The book of Ephesians says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy..." Jesus didn't just lay down his life for you and me and every person. He laid down his perfect life on the cross to save us, to take away every sin, from lies and gossip to homosexuality and same-sex marriage. No sin was too great for Jesus to forgive through his life, death, and resurrection. That's not just the "greater" love. That's the greatest, perfect love.

Now, children of God, how can we love as Jesus has loved? In other words, when it comes to those who are involved in the sin of homosexuality, either supporting it or struggling with it, how do we, in love, deal with it?

First, remember your motivation. Jesus loved me, he died on the cross for me, even though I differed greatly with him. And if I realize that this is what liberated me, such grace now empowers me to also love others, even die for others, who differ with me. That includes homosexuals.

Of course, we could say they need to continue to hear Law and Gospel. There's no doubt they do because God's Word is THE only thing that move any sinner to true repentance and to completely trust in Jesus' full and free forgiveness.

But, besides that, what can we do because the truth is, whether we are ready or not, gay marriage is here. So now what?

Let's get practical.

Over our vacation, we met up with a dear friend whom we went to school with who told us that three or four of her former boyfriends (a couple of whom we went to school with) told her that they are now gay or are struggling with homosexual feelings and desires. My best friend from high school - I was the best man in his wedding; he stood up in mine) - is now divorced and leading a bi-sexual lifestyle. I know there have been those practicing homosexuality or, again, struggling with homosexual thoughts and feelings who have walked through these doors, who have sat in these pews. Those are just my personal experiences. It is becoming too common today for you not to, in some shape or form, have some form of contact with someone who is struggling with that sin.

We need to find a way to make people with gay desires feel valued and loved even while discouraging living the lifestyle. We must find a way to welcome people even when not sanctioning parts of their lifestyle. Gay people need to be in church. Gay people need Jesus....just as much as you and I do.

Making them feel valued and loved starts with being prepared to answer. Just saying homosexuality is wrong because "the Bible says so" is not going to fly anymore. "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" is outdated and gives the impression you don't actually know what God's Word has to say about homosexuality.

The other side is becoming better-versed in what Scripture says and are distorting it to fit their attack. They're going to come back at you with, "Well, Jesus never actually talked about homosexuality..." "Leviticus said it's wrong, but then so is eating bacon, having tattoos." "What Paul wrote in Romans only applied to the culture at that time, where homosexuals weren't loving but violent."

Know what God's Word really says. Yes, Jesus may not have ever physically talked about homosexuality (at least what was recorded in Scripture). But his audience was primarily Jews who knew that God's Old Testament Law condemned homosexuality. Jesus also did hold marriage up as being between a man and a woman. We never see him celebrating a same-sex relationship. And, if all of God's Word is, well, God's Word, then what Paul wrote about the "unnatural" relationship between people of the same sex in Romans 1:21-27 and about "homosexual offenders" not inheriting heaven in 1 Corinthians 6:9, all that is as good as coming from the mouth of Jesus.

But just a side – understand this, if they aren't starting off on the same foundation that we are, that the Bible is the true, inerrant, infallible Word of God, applicable for all people of all time, odds are you aren't going to have a fair argument because it will turn into them degrading your God, your God's Word, and your faith in your God. You might not get anywhere.

Now, in regards to the Supreme Court's recent decision on same-sex marriage, will this mean difficult implications for us in the future? Most likely, yes. Does this have any implications for the message we preach and teach and share as lights of the world? Not at all.

And, as one more piece of practical advice, we as Christians should stop expecting that our government will be the teacher of national morality (at least what's right and moral in God's eyes). The only possible source of a code of conduct that is universally true for all human beings on earth is the Bible. Our nation's laws are based not on the Bible but on what the people say they want. That's the downside risk. But there's an upside—the darker and bleaker that our world gets, the better and more desirable our Christian communities will appear. Where God's Word and Spirit are disappearing, Satan moves in. In Satan's wake are always pain, conflict, hatred, selfishness, and cruelty.

We Christians do our world no good when we appear to single out homosexuality as worse than other sins. All sinners need to acknowledge their accountability to God, compare their lives to his standards, repent of their failings, claim the forgiveness that Jesus bought, and then fill themselves with Word and Spirit to make the changes they need to make. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 6, "And that is what some of you were" People can change their lifestyles. In love, Jesus has done that for us. In love, he can do it for others, even homosexuals.

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You probably wouldn't hesitate to give your life for someone you really care about. That's love. But living your life for someone else is just as much love. There's a world of people out there who need you to live your life for them. There are souls out there, heading down the wrong path, confused, being tricked by Satan, who need Jesus' love...who need you to love them and care about them enough to tell them the truth.

One pastor reflected on this situation, **"Luther once said that "Nothing in Scripture can be understood apart from the cross." The Holy Spirit led the apostle Paul to write "I resolved to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified." If the opinions we share and speak, whatever they may be, do not find their center and purpose in the cross of Jesus they will be worthless words. "Love" doesn't win. Traditional Marriage doesn't win. Jesus Christ crucified for the world wins. Always and forever."**

It's true. Let the President, the LGBTQ community, the world, Satan say "Love wins." We know better. We know the truth. Jesus lived, died, and rose. Jesus laid down his life for us. Only Jesus' love wins. That's the good news we will share. Amen.