

Foreword

On February 5, 2012 the people of Christ Church, Waterloo began a three-Sunday journey toward a congregational vote on May 6 on questions around our congregation's ministry and welcome to gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered (GLBT) persons. The questions themselves proceed from the national convention in July 2011 of our Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. At that convention, our congregation, conference, and synod delegates received the ELCIC Statement on Human Sexuality (see Main Menu) and passed into policy motions affirming full inclusion of GLBT Christians relating to the order of ministry and the blessing of same-gender relationships. As a result, ELCIC congregations are now in a position of responding to the national policy with what has been called the "local option". Our parish council is concerned that we take some time in considering our local option; that we engage in a process that will help us understand how and why questions around sexuality and sexual orientation are important for our common life as Christians; and that our vote on May 6 will be informed by study and reflection. This sermon continues the caring conversation begun on February 5, Epiphany 5 (The Gift of Time Apart).

On April 22, our focus will be on our questions. For our process to be a true "conversation" however, we invite written questions throughout the three-month period: your questions will sharpen and fine-tune our discussion. Please submit your questions using the question box on the Sanctuary table at the church, or send them by email to Pastor James using the link from the Contacts menu on our website.

On May 6 (4. The Gift of Choice), members of Christ Church will cast their votes by secret ballot at a congregational meeting held immediately following the service.

THE GIFT OF THE GOSPEL

Caring Conversation 2

Lent 2 – Cycle B: Mark 8:31-38

On this second Caring Conversation Sunday, we shall break into groups of about twenty to consider a number of scriptural passages which relate to our attitudes on homosexuality. On your behalf, I want to thank those who will lead our study and discussion.

In thinking about who might lead these groups, I asked people in our parish who take a scholarly approach to reading the Bible. Because we are, by definition, an evangelical church, that is, our theology and teaching are based on Holy Scripture, the question of how we read the Bible is important. In other words, when we read a passage from the Bible it is always important that we know what we're reading – its context, when it was written, to whom it was written, who said it or wrote it, why it was written, what kind of literature it is, and what English translation best represents the original use of words in either the Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament or the Greek, the original language of the New Testament. If we think about how concerned Martin Luther was about Christians understanding Holy Scripture, even to the end of translating the whole Bible into German, we can see how we follow in the tradition he began when we use all the tools at our disposal to help us understand better what we are reading. By the way, our church library has a wealth of material available to assist us in reading the Bible with understanding; and our Adult Education Committee often leads us in Bible studies aimed at improving our appreciation and understanding of Holy Scripture.

Not surprisingly, a number of the questions we received in our Caring Conversation Question Box asked about what the Bible says concerning homosexuality. Two of the most specific passages are part of our Bible study this morning. But we are also looking at other passages that help us see these passages in their larger context of the Christian message. For Lutherans, the proclamation of the gospel in the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is primary. And Christ's proclamation is the lens through which we read and understand the whole testimony of Scripture. This kind of reading allows us to see the presence of law and gospel in the Bible; how God's message to people is both law and gospel; and how as those who follow Jesus Christ we receive God's law and the gospel of Jesus Christ as guideposts for our discipleship. John nails it for his readers when he says in the introduction to his gospel, "The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." And we see clearly, especially in the first three gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – how law and gospel inform

one another and speak to one another. All of the painful conversations Jesus has with the Scribes and the Pharisees are conversations about the interplay of law and gospel. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and all the teaching Jesus does in Matthew's gospel are given in response to a kind of Judaism in Jesus' day and in Matthew's day, that had become legalistic to the exclusion of the good news of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness.

The cross of discipleship Jesus calls us to take up in this morning's Gospel is precisely this – the struggle to live the Christian life in a world that is legalistic. The cost of discipleship is high, but it is Jesus' call to us nevertheless. And the good news of his cross, our cross, is that it is not only the way of suffering; it is also the way of resurrection and new life.

And so, we embrace this leg of our Caring Conversation journey, recognizing that we are not alone in our struggle with difficult questions: that the power of God is present with us in the proclamation of Jesus Christ and in the grace of the Holy Spirit given to the church for its birth and its continual dying and rising over a span of the past 2000 years.