

READING and SERMON : PRIDE SERVICE JUNE 21 2009

Reading:

This dialogue is an excerpt from the popular television show “The West Wing.” President Josiah Bartlett has agreed to see Dr. Jenna Jacobs in the oval office. Her visit is an attempt to secure his support for the anathema of homosexuality which she widely supports in her weekly news advice columns. The following conversation ensues and President Bartlett expresses his opinion quite emphatically.

President Josiah Bartlet: (Keith Bertrand) You're Dr. Jenna Jacobs, right?

Dr. Jenna Jacobs: (Pam Anderson) Yes, Sir.

President Josiah Bartlet: Forgive me, Dr. Jacobs. Are you an M.D.?

Dr. Jenna Jacobs: A Ph.D.

President Josiah Bartlet: A Ph.D.

Dr. Jenna Jacobs: Yes, Sir.

President Josiah Bartlet: Psychology?

Dr. Jenna Jacobs: No, Sir.

President Josiah Bartlet: Theology?

Dr. Jenna Jacobs: No.

President Josiah Bartlet: Social work?

Dr. Jenna Jacobs: I have a Ph.D. in English literature.

President Josiah Bartlet: I'm asking 'cause on your show, people call in for advice and you go by the name Dr. Jacobs on your show, and I didn't know if maybe your listeners were confused by that and assumed you had advanced training in psychology, theology or health care.

Dr. Jenna Jacobs: I don't believe they are confused. No, Sir.

President Josiah Bartlet: Good. I like your show. I like how you call homosexuality an abomination ..

Dr. Jenna Jacobs: I don't say homosexuality is an abomination, Mr. President. The Bible does.

President Josiah Bartlet: Yes it does. Leviticus.

Dr. Jenna Jacobs: 18:22.

President Josiah Bartlet:

Chapter and verse. I wanted to ask you a couple of questions while I have you here. I'm interested in selling my youngest daughter into slavery as sanctioned in Exodus 21 :7. She's a Georgetown sophomore, speaks fluent Italian, always cleared the table when it was her turn. What would a good price for her be? While thinking about that, can I ask another? My Chief of Staff Leo McGarry insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly says he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself or is it okay to call the police? Here's one that's really important because we've got a lot of sports fans in this town: touching the skin of a dead pig makes one unclean. Leviticus 11 :7. If they promise to wear gloves, can the Washington Redskins still play football? Can Notre Dame? Can West Point? Does the whole town really have to be together to stone my brother John for planting different crops side by side? Can I burn my mother in a small family gathering for wearing garments made from two different threads? Think about those questions, would you? One last thing: while you may be mistaking this for your monthly meeting of the Ignorant up- tight club.

In this building, when the President stands, nobody sits.

Hatred is Not a Family Value- Syracuse

I am not exactly sure, but I believe the year was 1901. The exact date was not marked on the photo that for a while held a controversial place of infamy in the annals of my family history. I had often gone over the album, hunted through the pages with my mother and as kids will do asked her again and again to tell me the story. The yellowed black and white photograph at first glance appeared most

ordinary. Obviously it was taken at the turn of the century and was actually quite comical. I recognized my grand mother by her shock of white hair. The other six or seven women, I was told, were members of my grandmother's graduating class from Jackson, the very first group of women to hold diplomas from Tufts University. To celebrate, she and her classmates had taken a picnic to Nahant beach, still dressed in their Sunday best. As the day wore on and the temperature climbed into the 80"s. My grandmother and her classmates, threw caution to the wind, removed their shoes and heavy black stockings and were photographed dancing in the surf with their massive skirts, cumbersome layers of brocade material hitched up to their knees to keep them dry. Photographed, that is, just before a policeman arrested them all for indecent exposure!

As I looked at that picture, I shook my head in disbelief every time I heard that story. Imagine that, my grandmother, being punished, arrested for wading in the ocean! Absurd. In those days the showing of ones legs was considered obscene. I laughed uproariously when my dad used to point at our old Mason and Hamlin grand piano and remind me that in 'those days even pianos wore skirts to cover their legs!' I am sure that my Grandmother's parents spent many a sleepless night convinced that their daughter was going to boil in hell!

I also remember my mother telling me that she was forbidden to walk down the street holding my father's hand just before they were married!

Sometimes it's interesting to think about the changes that have taken place in our lifetimes; those that we even laugh at today as being insignificant and ridiculous, but which once caused as much upheaval in many a household as the lifting of my grandmothers skirt did in hers. In the 1950's 40 states in this country forbade the marriage of a

white person to a person of color. In other words, people could not marry a person of the "wrong" race. Marriages between whites and persons of color were decried as "immoral" and "unnatural". Overwhelming numbers of Americans agreed.

A Virginia Judge upheld that State's ban on interracial marriages saying, in a language presently being used against gays, He said, "Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, Malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents.

And for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix."

In 1967, the United States Supreme Court struck down the remaining interracial marriage laws across the country. Had the Supreme court not acted, we would still be living under a religious law, banning interracial marriage that violates the separation of church and state and divides our citizenry into first and second class citizens.

For centuries the literal interpretation of the Bible was the sole source of moral truth in the western world. There was a time in biblical history when violence was the only means of punishment of social infractions. One would take an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or body parts would be cut off as permanent reminders of offensive behaviors. Then of course there's the story of Solomon's child, David and Goliath, even the parting of the Red Sea, which allegedly drowned thousands.

I will not elaborate on what it meant to a witness in the ancient Roman court to be caught lying! The words testify and testament, are merely a hint to its actual meaning!

The truth cannot be found in the bible, It can be paraphrased to suit anyone's needs. The truth cannot be found in anyone religious belief. Although we may find comfort in the myriad of diverse teachings of our

respective churches, it is the gift of a deep and committed love that we all share in common.

Today, the foundation of the civilized world has been severely shaken once more, by the spouting of another so called *truth* that is intended to further divide us as a spiritual people and as a nation. This has become one more arena of societal abuse that targets those, who love others of the same sex, whose lives are shadowed by fear and hatred, who live in constant fear of being persecuted, many of whom have no church or faith that welcomes them, even though they work with us and for us, teach our children, run our cities and towns, defend us in court, preach in our pulpits and handle our finances. We are surrounded by hundreds of folks whose jobs and safety are at stake because they were born to love and care for those who share their gender. "Their choice?" you might ask? Is there anyone in this day and age who would consciously choose a life style that is destined to bring such pain and suffering, rejection and hatred? I don't think so. I know I didn't.

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The truth is that, interracial couples did not destroy marriage any more than gays or lesbians will. The truth is that ignorance, poverty, selfishness, greed, bigotry, prejudice, narrow mindedness and hatred destroy marriages. So do churches when their teachings echo injustices that would make Jesus cringe.

Christianity in so many ways has failed its people, by holding a restrictive definition of love and marriage as the only way of finding a truth of our living that is valid and meaningful for all. The truth is that the state issues marriage licenses, not the church. The truth is that any church can refuse to perform a marriage on whatever grounds they choose. Furthermore I have not encountered one homophobic family or individual whose life was disrupted, changed or harmed by the existence of a gay or lesbian marriage or partnership.

Moreover if it's cross dressing or transgender issues, that raises the hackles, then I am guilty. Women have been enjoying the comfort of pants for decades. We women in a sense are chronic cross-dressers and if a man wants to wear nylons and a skirt that is his prerogative. As a woman standing before you wearing a pantsuit, am I then as much of a cross dresser and a man who chooses to wear a skirt?

Today is Father's Day and this morning I would like to tell about two extraordinary fathers whom I had the privilege of performing their wedding in Massachusetts four years ago.

They had adopted a 3 month old black girl from Texas who suffered from alcohol fetal syndrome. They gave her the very best of medical care, she began to talk and dance and discovered that her parents truly loved her. Her two dads gave her what a good Christian family could not, a loving home. Her two Dads have good jobs and buy their own health insurance and they were searching for a new home large enough to take in a mother in law, so they can care for her as well.

They are a very well adjusted family, like so many who only wish to live their lives with the dignity and respect they deserve. And you know what, they truly love one another!

In the course of all the struggles in New York I have yet to hear one argument that focused on love. The issue is not the right to marry, the issue is really who has the right to love and respect another human being enough to ask their hand in marriage, literally ,until death do them part.

The gay and lesbian couples I have married had been together for years.

They had a commitment that came from the traditional idea, that marriage is a sacred promise for life, not a chance to dress up and put on a show, or felt that marriage was a meal ticket, a way out , or a shortcut to filing ones taxes, and certainly not a quick fix for unexpected children.

The opponents of gay marriage have a lot to learn from these couples, whose values are exactly those that their nay-sayers who seek exactly the same standards in their relationships.

Sadly, So many have left their churches in great sadness, because their genuine love for one another is not welcome nor is it seen for what it really is.

In 1969, these words were spoken by the Supreme Court judge who issued this statement upon overturning the interracial marriage law: He said, *"freedom to marry" belongs to all Americans. The Court described marriage as one of our "vital personal rights" which is "essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by a free people".* * (From the California Marriage Equality Association)

Equal Marriage in New York will happen.

We have some choices here that are serious and will not be laughed at 50 years from now. As a welcoming congregation, we offer for people everywhere who care for children, who truly love one another, a faith is larger than dogma and a creed that professes that love is not only for a chosen few . If there was one creed that every faith community needs to observe it is the phrase" Hatred is not a family value."

Just think what a peaceful world this would be, should that simple statement become the mantra we can all believe in and repeat with love and conviction.

So be it

Amen

Rev Holly Baylies© 2009