

## The Search for Promise and Blessing

Pr. Jon

There are blessings from God everywhere in the Bible. From the very beginning of creation, God made it clear about everything he made: **“This is very good!”** he said. He went on to bless Abraham, Isaac, and his people, Israel. Giving his chosen people land, descendants, and countless blessings, and calling disciples to go and make his church grow, it is clear that God made a decision about his world...he means to love it, and all people. But he’s also committed to rescuing his world from the grip of sin and death. It means that as loved as we are by God, it does not mean he has accepted or loved everything that we do. If he did, there would be no need for any saving at all. No Jesus, no cross, no empty tomb. It would all be unnecessary. But as it is, if God is committed to saving us from our sins, even though all that he made was deemed “good”, it is apparent that we needed it. Sin has flawed us badly enough that God has to do something about it because we can’t.

Proponents of the changes recently made in the ELCA with regards to human sexuality, and subsequent policies to coincide with those changes, feel strongly that God supports their action. The resolutions have passed - therefore, it was what God wanted to have happen, they say. But that’s where flaws become evident. Voting members of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, meeting in Minneapolis this past week, have basically decided to go ahead and bless that which God does not. Their basis for claiming victory for truth is built on sand, not rock. It’s not that God curses the gay person or hates them, any more than we should. The issue about permitting the ordination of practicing gays in committed, so-called monogamous relationships, or blessing gay marriage, has never been about banning gays from church. It has never been about not loving these people, and denying them their civil rights. Those who feel rejection believe otherwise, but they are wrong. It’s about setting policies and ordinances, not according to God’s Word, but societal norms, cultural pressures, and personal feelings. It’s about the insistence that proponents of gay marriages and ordinations say about having a “bound conscience”, meaning that they cannot think of themselves NOT having the exact same privileges and freedoms that heterosexual individuals enjoy. Their conscience is “bound” to their feelings, they say, quoting Martin Luther’s famous “Here I stand” speech at the Diet of Worms. But it is, unfortunately, a complete misquoting of Luther.

Luther said his conscience is bound to God’s Word, not feelings or the culture. And that Word is very clear about homosexual behavior: **It is not held in any promise or blessing from God!** The homosexual person is loved and blessed, but not their behavior choices. There is no biblical promise for a gay couple who wants to be married, while there is for a man and a woman (cf. Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:3-6). They themselves are not cursed, mind you, but there’s no blessing for their course of action. So if we bless that which God clearly does not, we do so defiantly not faithfully.

I am deeply troubled and regret the decisions made at the Assembly regarding this issue. It hasn’t helped us in our trying to resolve things peacefully. It stops the discussion entirely, because now gay behavior is deemed OK. This puts us all in a dilemma for which a good outcome is not yet evident. But we need to remain calm and cool-headed for the time being. Pray for wisdom and strength. Pray for those who believe in their heart of hearts they are being faithful. Pray for grace to abound and love to prevail. Have love, first of all, for God and his Word, and for others with whom we disagree, but not first and foremost culture’s norms. Seeking blessing anywhere other than in God’s Word is risky business. ELCA voting members have decided to take the risk, and having done so once again make it clear that God’s commitment to rescue us from the grip of sin and death is needed now more than ever.