



**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School**

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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**Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost**

**August 9, 2015**

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**“Now What? Responding to the  
Supreme Court Decision”**

*(Ephesians 4:17-5:2)*

Rev. David K. Groth

**COLLECT:** Gracious Father, Your blessed Son came down from heaven to be the true bread that gives life to the world. Grant that Christ, the bread of life, may live in us and we in Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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The decision is in. By a vote of 5 to 4 (a one person majority), the U.S. Supreme Court has legalized same sex marriage. Should we care? Some would say we don't need to. "What can it possibly matter to you" one advocate asked, "if two men or two women who love each other call their relationship a marriage?" We are learning it matters a great deal.

It matters to Christian adoption agencies, such as Catholic Charities, which have been forced out of the adoption business in several states because it declines to place children for adoption in same sex couples. They know children thrive best with a mother and a father.

It matters to Christian bakers and photographers who face stiff fines and legal fees and are being put out of business because they were not comfortable using their skills to celebrate and promote gay marriage.

It matters to a Lutheran High School being sued because it is not accepting of the open, unrepentant affection between two gay students in the hallways. Similarly Christian universities are being sued on a number of fronts, for example for not allowing same-sex couples to live in married student housing. It may impact their accreditation, their tax exempt status, and government funding.

It matters to Brendan Eich who was forced to resign last year as CEO of the company he co-founded after it became public that, years ago, he donated \$1,000 to Proposition 8, the California initiative to ban same-sex marriage.

It matters to a psychologist in Mississippi who refused to counsel a lesbian couple and lost her case. And to

a Methodist church camp which declined to allow their facilities to be used for the wedding ceremony of a same sex couple lost its case. And to a doctor who refused to provide In Vitro Fertilization services to a lesbian woman and is being sued. It matters to the pastors of Houston, Texas, whose mayor subpoenaed all communications they made regarding homosexuality and gender identity, (sermons, emails, even text messages to their spouses). Clearly, as a government official, she was trying to intimidate them and silence their objections. Ultimately she was forced to withdraw the subpoena, but it's indicative of where we are heading.

So let's be clear: there is nothing live and let live about the way this movement has operated the past few years, and to pretend otherwise requires willful blindness. Churches will be targeted. Will they lose their tax exempt status for refusing to allow their buildings to be used for a same sex event? Will pastors be fined, even imprisoned, for refusing to preside?

So what do we do now? How do we respond? My greatest fear is articulated in a poem by William Yeats: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity" (From "The Second Coming", 1919).

So what do we do? How do we respond? First off, the Supreme Court decision changes nothing about our Christian faith, right? Our faith is determined by God's Holy Word, not by nine men and women in black robes. The Supreme Court has been wrong before. In the Dred Scott decision, African Americans were counted as less than human. In Roe v. Wade, the rights of the littlest children were ignored, leading to the abortions of 57 million. The Supreme Court, like any human institution, is prone to error, has erred, and will error again. As Christians, we recognize there is a higher, heavenly court to whom we are subject, and before whom we will be judged. We also believe and confess that God's Word does not change. "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

So we cannot celebrate what God's Word clearly forbids. Moses warns against homosexual behavior (Lev. 20:13), as does Paul (Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). Jesus is silent on the issue, but that doesn't mean he affirmed it. Jesus never mentions incest either. Moreover first century Jewish culture roundly condemned same-sex behavior. If Jesus had affirmed it, we would surely see evidence of it in the Gospels. He never hesitated correcting his culture on other issues (such as Sabbath laws becoming oppressive). Conversely, the Pharisees never hesitated to attack him publicly for the corrections he did make. We could go on and on. Suffice it to say we cannot be silent about that which God's Word is so clear.

Some might be tempted to dismiss all governing authorities, but Romans 13 says we are subject to the governing authorities. We still owe the government respect and honor, and we still have to pay taxes. But we recognize at the same time our greatest allegiance is to God and His Word, and that in matters of conscience, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

One temptation is to withdraw from the culture. Seek the company of like-minded people, but no longer engage with the culture. Just do our own thing and keep our heads low. Trouble is we are called to be the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden, neither does anyone light a lamp only to put it under a bushel. (Mt. 5:16).

"You are the salt of the earth" Jesus said. Being the salt of the earth cannot be fulfilled in this building. Being the salt of the earth happens outside this building, in conversation with friends and co-workers, at public hearings, doing works of service.

Another temptation is to focus all our efforts on the political process. Get the right people into the right positions. But our calling is not so much to change politicians or to change the laws, but to change hearts. It is God's Holy Word and Spirit that does that. Our job is not to Christianize our society but to teach and preach and practice what the Bible says about marriage and sex. Be ready with

the Word “in season and out, to reprove, rebuke, exhort, but with complete patience and careful instruction,” Paul writes (2 Tim. 4:2).

Another temptation is to feel morally superior and smug. But if anything, now is the time for God’s people to repent. As a people, we have not given marriage the respect and dignity it deserves. Infidelity and unfaithfulness, separation and divorce are far too common among us. We have chipped away at marriage in all kinds of ways. We condone and sometimes even celebrate when people decide to live together outside of marriage. God intended the institution of marriage to be a blessing not just for husbands and wives, but also for children and society. But we, each one of us, has made marriage to be something much less than what God intended it to be. So we need to repent and focus anew on our own marriages and show the world what marriages are supposed to look like.

Another temptation is to be angry at gay people, and to let that anger morph into hatred and disgust and course humor. But our text says “Be angry, but do not sin.” And in Ephesians, Paul calls us “to speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15), without sacrificing truth or love. Our text says, “Get rid of all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander” (v. 31). These things will not help us to be the light of the world. These things belong to the darkness and not the light. To the Christians in Colosse, Paul wrote, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ . . . Pray that I may proclaim it clearly” Paul says. “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Col. 4:5-6).

The Bible prevents us from affirming same-sex marriage, but also calls us to have mercy and compassion on sinners even as Jesus had mercy and compassion on us. He loves and died for all people. Therefore, we must reach out to all people, also to those who struggle with gay temptations

and behaviors. And we must strive to be a place of healing and forgiveness, restoration and mercy. As Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Lk. 5:31-32).

Another temptation is to capitulate. To throw in the towel and say, “We’ve lost” and to cower before this and other movements and developments that alarm us. But it would be foolhardy to be overcome by fear. God’s Word promises, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 Jn. 4:4). And God’s Word promises that before Christ returns there will be increasing turmoil and distress and persecution for the church. Expect it, but do not despair. Jesus said, “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads” (Lk. 21:28). It’s the posture of victory, not of defeat. The battle has already been won. Christ has died. Christ has risen. And Christ will come again.

In fact, there’s good reason to be optimistic. Many of the greatest advances for the Christian church have come during times when Christians seem most beleaguered . . . from the early Roman Empire to China today. The Christian church flourishes anew when the distinctions between faith and culture become most stark and clear.

And keep in mind the long term view of things. A Catholic bishop (Cardinal Eugene George) not long before his death wrote, “I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square. His successor will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the church has done so often in human history.”

Make no mistake, the battle has been won. “It is finished.” You are baptized. You belong to Jesus. The devil has been defeated. The Victor reigns, and somehow, in ways we cannot know, God’s will is being done. Now is not the time to give up, recede, or disengage. Now is not the time to feel smug or superior, nor give ourselves over to anger and bitterness. Now is not the time to lose ourselves in fear or despair.

Now is the time to stay true to God's Word, to speak that Truth in love, in spite of the ridicule, in spite of the consequences, to be the light of the world God has called us to be. Now is the time to show the world what good marriages look like. Now is the time to let our conversations be full of grace and seasoned with salt. And now is the time to remember the church will yet stand, and not even the gates of hell shall prevail against it (Mt. 16:18). "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39). Amen.

