

*“Hospitality or Homosexuality:
The True Story of Sodom and
Gomorrah”*

Pentecost 2

*Genesis 19 (especially 12-17, 24-26), Romans 5:1-8,
Matthew 9:35-10:8*

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From the Pulpit

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A baptismal meditation delivered by the Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, June 18, 2017, Pentecost 2, dedicated to Rezi and Shery and all the refugees in Columbus and beyond who have escaped with their lives and now face a US government who threatens to send them back to their native countries and certain death, to Luke and Kirs Ahrens on their 6th Anniversary, in memory and celebration of my parents 67th Anniversary today, and to Madellyn Elaine Collins on her baptismal day and always to the glory of God!

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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"The Bible says homosexuality is a sin and I can't go against the Bible." I am sick and tired of hearing this line from those who have fled into the bunkers of their prejudice. No survivalist could survive in a bunker with seven crumbs to sustain them. That is exactly what has happened.

What does the Bible say about the homosexuality? For all the church pronouncements, all the entrenched and embedded believers, all the crazy sermons on the subject and for all the family members and friends who have hit some of us over the head with this line and with their extra-specially heavy "Study Bible," it may surprise you, but the Bible does not have much at all to say about homosexuality. It appears the Bible really is not very interested in the topic. It is much to do about nothing!

In the original texts of Hebrew, Greek, Syrian and Aramaic, "homosexuality" is NEVER used. The word does not even appear in the Bible until 1946 in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Depending on your Bible of choice (and many conservative Christians pick the New King James Version BECAUSE "homosexuality" appears there), you

may not even see the word and its cognates. Now, even Bibles that included the word "homosexuality" for several generations of the 20th Century are abandoning it because it is NOT BIBLICAL.

There are actually seven primary passages of scripture that are most often rolled out to be fired into the arguments to prove the Bible calls homosexuality a sin. There are four in the Hebrew scriptures (Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, and Dt. 23:17-18) and three in Christian scriptures (Romans 1:18-32, I Corinthians 6:1-8 and I Timothy 1:9-10). These texts speak against same sex acts in very negative ways. Each text is related to adultery, promiscuity, violence, and/or idolatrous worship. In addition, Paul, in his New Testament writings is most concerned about pederasty - which is the First Century version of men trafficking boys for sex - buying and selling boys to take sexual advantage of them as sexual property - like sex slaves.

Not one text addresses consensual, covenanted and loving relationships between people of the same gender. Not one. Let me say it another way, the Holy Bible is interested in condemning and stopping destructive relationships between men and women, men and men and women and women. But, it is not interested in condemning loving relationships between any of these couples brought together in love.

Before studying our Hebrew Scripture reading found in Genesis 19, I need to add that these seven passages mentioned add up to about 40 verses altogether. They could comfortably fit onto $\frac{3}{4}$ page out of 1100 pages of the Bible - thus making up less than 1/10th of 1% of the holy scripture by God and given to us over 3500 years through prophets, poets, apostles, and Messiah of God's word.

Conversely, the passages of scripture which God and God's prophets, poets, apostles, and son "care about" most take thousands of passages of scripture and are presented continuously through the Bible. Do you know what the first and second most written about topics in the Bible are: #1 is how we care for the poor and #2 is how we are stewards of our resources and of the earth given to our care! **Poverty, Stewardship, and Care for the Earth.** If these compassionate concerns are good enough for God to spend thousands of passages addressing don't you think the church needs to put its energy here as well? Where is the church's confession and condemnation of God's followers for not following these passages? Anyway, here we go . . .

Genesis 18 and 19 tell us the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Beginning in Genesis 18:16-33, God sends two angels to the city of Sodom to find ten righteous people so that God might spare the city from utter destruction. When the angels arrive, Abraham's brother, Lot befriends them and brings them to his home. Later that night, Lot's house is surrounded by all the men of Sodom, old and young, who demand that Lot bring the visitors out so that they "*might know them.*" Lot pleads with the crowd on behalf of the angels and then offers them his two virgin daughters, suggesting that the crowd would do with his daughters what they please. Why is Lot offering his daughters for sex to despicable and horrid men? This is sick in so many ways. But, it is NOT about sodomy and sin... Most definitely not a good passage for any father to lift up on Father's Day).

Without actually studying the passage, a large number of Christians assume that the sin of Sodom (for which the city is later wiped out) is homosexuality. This assumption is based completely on the belief that "to know" is a euphemism for "Sexual intercourse." Although "to know" does refer to sexual intercourse in ten other Biblical passages, in an additional 933 passages "to know" has no sexual connotation whatsoever. Evidence here suggests that it means "knowledge" or "acquaintance," not sexual abuse and certainly not homosexual

rape. If this is so, then "the sin of Sodom" is not male to male intercourse. So, what is it?

The sin of Sodom in Inhospitability. I know I am right about this not because I say I am, but because I am backed up on this by the Bible. Pay attention now. The Sin of Sodom is not lost on others who reflect on scripture WITHIN the scriptures. Three Hebrew prophets, Peter and Jude, and our Savior Jesus Christ agree with me. They do not agree with Rod Parsley, Pat Robertson, Franklin Graham or any other biblically illiterate preacher who proclaims the sin of Sodom to be homosexual rape. This is so true that one trusted fundamentalist Christian scholar, Francis Schaeffer said ten years ago that because it is true, preachers need to STOP talking about the "Sin of Sodom" because it is not AT ALL about homosexuality. But, if you don't believe Francis, listen some more...

Isaiah 1:10, 3:9, Jeremiah 23:14 and Ezekiel 16:49 all say God was angry at Sodom because the people were proud and prosperous and they refused to aid the poor and needy. Whether you like it or not, God had decided to wipe out Sodom long before the city's men showed up at Lot's house. In the New Testament, Peter and Jude mention Sodom - but in general reference to what happens when people live un-Godly lives. Paul never refers to Sodom in any of his 13 letters. In

Matthew 10:15, Jesus says that if a town refuses the disciples hospitality, they should shake off the dust and move on - a reference to the inhospitality experienced in Sodom.

Genesis 18 and 19 - the story of Sodom - is really about wickedness, greed, corruption and self-centered people who refuse to aid the poor and care for the strangers in their gates. God was angry because people behaved badly not because they were gay. Is it any wonder? Nevertheless, to this day, we still refer to our civil laws as "sodomy laws" and certain acts as Sodomizing, even though these laws have nothing to do with hospitality. Our next campaign should be about changing the language of laws which mention sodomy - because this merely couples the timeless ignorance of scripture with social mores and laws that create more prejudice, violence and greater ignorance.

So, here we are on Father's Day and Madelilyn Elaine Collins' baptismal day with the true story of Sodom in grasp. It is a story of people being greedy, crude, corrupt, narcissistic, self-centered and wicked - and in so doing - failing to open their hearts, minds, doors to the poor and the refugee in their midst. Yes, it is about Inhospitality. I find it powerful that yesterday, at the Pride Parade, the Columbus gay community saw fit to address the TRUE Sin of Sodom (whether or not they did it consciously!). That's right. The Grand Marshalls

for the parade were men and women in our community who are refugees. Our own Rezi and Shery are such refugees from Iran. They escaped to save their lives from Iran because they were "outed" as lovers. Rezi has been baptized into Christian faith having grown into her decision through a lifetime of being Islamic. Yesterday, the city was standing and cheering for Rezi and Shery and others who are refugees. But, this is not the end of this story. As long as our nation deports refugees in this war of intolerance and hate as well as other refugees, we truly become Sodom all over again - inhospitable to the stranger in our midst. Will we allow our hearts and minds turn to pillars of salt (or ICE in our case) - like those who turned away angels in their time? We stand in danger of that.

To deport our neighbors (gay or straight), to turn them over to those who would do them harm (as Lot did with his own daughters in this story!), to give in to hate and leaders of a mob mentality, those who seek to destroy life and cast out the strangers in our land and in our time, is succumb to the true Sin of Sodom. The sin of Sodom, the sin of Inhospitality, should never define who we are as a nation and as a faith community. We are not Sodomites. We are people of sanctuary. In the spirit of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Peter, Jude and Jesus, let us stand for extravagant welcome. Let us stand with the "Saints of Sodom" - who resisted harming the stranger in their midst. We can and should do the same. Amen.

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