

**Response to the  
Same Sex Marriage Ruling by the Supreme Court**

By Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

June 28, 2015

I grew up making fun of homosexuals and lesbians. I called them names—bad names—to their faces and behind their backs.

I passed on rumors about them. How did I know if they were true? Didn't matter.

I sneered, jeered and laughed at them.

And I did it without a hint of guilt or shame.

I feel that shame now...45 and 50 years later.

I have looked back on my behavior and wished for two things. **I wish I could undo the things I said and did.**

**I wish I could apologize to those I embarrassed and hurt.**

But I can't. Most, if not all of them, are dead.

They died young. When I was taking my kids to Little League baseball games, they were struggling to survive. Most didn't make it.

**Why my change of heart?**

After I became a preacher, people started talking to me about the most sensitive and delicate parts of their lives...their sexual attractions. They told me things they probably told no one else, or at least a select few. I will carry those confidential conversations to my grave.

These were good people...intelligent, industrious, ambitious, hard-working and productive. They were doctors, lawyers, teachers, military officers, neighbors, friends...

Their conversations began sounding similar. Every one of them was telling me common things.

**I did not choose to be this way.** Anyone would be a fool to choose this lifestyle. I tried to appear normal by dating the opposite sex. I am lonely and miserable and live in fear of losing my family, my friends or my job. I live a life of secrecy and pretense.

I have buried some of these people.

You don't have to walk away from many cemeteries to start making changes in the way you think, live, believe and behave.

This was the time I coined the phrase, "When you put a name, a face and a story with an issue or decision, it changes everything." At least it does for me.

Perhaps this is why Jesus walked the dusty Palestinian roads listening to people's stories and responding with empathy and grace. Other religious leaders did not usually do this, and they didn't like the fact he did.

Many of Jesus' peers became angry with him because he was kind and good to the wrong people. It was one of the reasons they killed him.

**What did I change after I began listening to people's tragic and heartbreaking stories?**

**For starters, I confessed my youthful sins.** I begged for mercy. I am convinced God was far more upset with me than the people I taunted.

**I made a commitment to God and these past friends that I would never become a Bible bully and beat people over the head with hurtful clichés.**

**I vowed to read and learn more about how sexual preference is determined.** I haven't even scratched the surface, but I know it is far more complex, complicated and confusing than I thought.

**I dug into the scriptures to see what they had to say.** When I did, I discovered the most unusual thing. Jesus never mentioned anything about homosexuals and lesbians. Nothing.

He mentioned marriage once in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:31-32), but that was a reference to divorce. He was protecting women from men who could easily divorce them and leave them vulnerable.

We must navigate this river without Jesus' specific input.

So years ago, I set out to discover what Jesus did talk about. **What was important to him?** What was he passionate about? What was his agenda?

Here is what I discovered.

Jesus offered an alternative vision for the world, one which valued love over hate, serving over being served, sacrifice over self-indulgence, truth over deception, justice over injustice, inclusion over exclusion, generosity over greed, humility over arrogance, forgiveness over revenge, healing over hurting and peace over war.

Jesus, like God, was passionate about confronting evil, righting wrong, lifting up the lowly, finding the forgotten, liberating the oppressed, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, comforting the grieving, loving the unlovely, encouraging people to achieve their potential, forgiving people who made mistakes, giving people a second chance, teaching people how to live peaceably with one another and inspiring people to build bridges of goodwill, understanding and reconciliation instead of walls of suspicion and hate.

On the day I made this discovery, I made a commitment to respond anew to Jesus' invitation to 'follow him'. I meant it literally this time. I would become passionate about the same things he did. This has been the focus of my ministry since.

**What does all this mean in light of the Supreme Court's ruling last week?** I'm not sure. I am just beginning to process it.

For me it means being candid and honest with you. This is my journey and my experience. I don't know where it will lead.

I am not asking you to be like me. You can't; you have not walked in my shoes, heard what I have heard and studied what I have.

You may have strong convictions about this issue which lead you in an entirely different direction from where I am now. That's fine.

I don't subscribe to the theory that says for me to be right everybody else has to be wrong. Like a prism, there are many ways to look at any issue.

This is why civil discussion is crucial. We need to hear one another's perspective.

So, follow your passions and convictions. Find your voice. It needs to be heard, too. I need to hear it. You have a lot you can teach me.

Just hang in there and struggle along with me like the disciples did with Jesus. Let's all grow together in ways that make our faith and church stronger.