

DIVERSITY,

NOT DIVISIVENESS

GOD'S DIVERSITY WAS NEVER INTENDED TO BE DIVISIVE.

"Look around at creation; and if you can, show me evidence that God favors uniformity."

~ The Rev. Bill Fleener, Sr.

**SCRIPTURE TELLS US
WE MAY DO CERTAIN THINGS,
BUT WE DO NOT DO THEM.**

Exodus 21:7 We may sell our daughters into slavery. But we do not do it.

Leviticus 25:44 We may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. But we do not do it.

**SCRIPTURE TELLS US THAT WE
MAY NOT DO CERTAIN THINGS,
BUT WE DO THEM ANYWAY.**

Exodus 35:2 We are not to work on the Sabbath, under pain of death. But we do it anyway.

Leviticus 11:6-8 We are not to touch the skin of a dead pig because it makes us unclean. But we do it anyway.

Leviticus 11:10 We are not to eat shellfish because it is detestable. But we do it anyway.

Leviticus 19:19 We may not wear garments made of two different kinds of threads. But we wear them anyway.

Leviticus 19:27 Men may not get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples and beards. But they do it anyway.

Leviticus 21:20 We may not approach God's altar if we have a defect in our sight. But we do it anyway.

And Leviticus 18:22 says that a man may not lie with another man; that it is an abomination.

But why is there so much anger and energy about this last one, and none about all the others?

Some point to the Sin of Sodom, which is widely believed to be homosexuality, but in that passage, nothing is said about how the crowd intended to abuse and rape Lot's guests. And no one questions Lot when he says:

Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please.

Even Ezekiel 16:49 makes clear that the sin of Sodom was really the city's lack of hospitality, and their unwillingness, due to their pride and haughtiness, to share their excess food and prosperous ease with those who were poor and marginalized.

So why is there so much anger and energy?

**BECAUSE THE REJECTION OF
HOMOSEXUALITY IS ROOTED
IN THE REJECTION OF WOMEN.**

**AND WHAT WAS TRUE THEN,
IS STILL (ALMOST ENTIRELY)
TRUE NOW:**

In ancient times, a woman had no voice, no vote, could not own property, and according to Mosaic law, her husband could divorce her for something as petty as disliking what she cooked for dinner.

Women were sexual objects, and little more than the mothers of their husband's children. A man could have other women, but his wife could not have other men.

In the story of the Woman Caught in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11), we have to wonder where the man was, and why he wasn't about to be stoned for the same crime?

Perhaps it's because you always knew who the mother was, but you didn't always know who the father was; and no man would ever want his inheritance going to a male child who was not his own.

And also, for a man to take on a sexually passive and receptive role was for a man to "become a woman," and that was anathema to what "being a man" was understood to be.

**BUT SCRIPTURE COMES
TO ITS OWN DEFENSE.**

The reading from Acts (8:26-40) is one of startling interconnection. We're presented with an unusual situation. Philip, with his Greek name, represents a significant departure from the rabid anti-Hellenism of the Maccabees; and even if he was Jewish, he would not have been Jewish enough for some. But it was an angel who instructed Philip to get up and go, so we know that God's presence was in this event.

And on a wilderness road, on a dry desert road, Philip meets up with an Ethiopian eunuch, a black man, a court official of the Kandake (from which we get the name Candace), Queen of the Ethiopians. He is in charge of her entire treasury, he was educated and can read, and he has purchased, an expensive scroll of the prophet Isaiah; but as a eunuch, he is also embodied in a way that defies gender binaries; that is, strictly male or strictly female (he was a third way of being). And he had come to Jerusalem to worship, so he must also have been Jewish, though as a eunuch, Leviticus 21:20 and Deuteronomy 23:1 (written hundreds of years before Isaiah) would have prohibited him from making his offering in the Temple.

The reading from Acts specifies which passage he was reading, and Philip expounds on it, highlighting the Good News about Jesus. But the Book of Isaiah, the scroll the eunuch had, contains a passage that would have held special meaning for him, and for many of us, because Ch. 56:3-5 called for the full inclusion of eunuchs (that is, of Otherness):

Do not let the eunuch say, "I am just a dry tree." For thus says the Lord, to the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me, and hold fast my covenant, I will give, within my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters, I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

Let's be clear. This is Christian scripture, affirming through its Jewish roots, through its own prophetic words, that even those who didn't adhere to stereotypical gender roles, even those who didn't fit the kind of mold some people (then or today) would impose, even those who did not reflect Levitical purity laws, were eligible to receive from God, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. That God was telling this man, through a prophet of great account, that he mattered, that he was worthy of adoption, of full inclusion, and that he too could be grafted on. No wonder the eunuch was reading Isaiah. Can you imagine the hope that these words gave him?

And the hope that they give us?

**AND IF THE REJECTION
OF HOMOSEXUALITY IS
NOT ROOTED
IN THE REJECTION
OF WOMEN,**

**THEN WHY DO "GLASS CEILINGS"
STILL EXIST IN SO MANY INDUSTRIES
AND IN SO MANY PLACES AROUND
THE WORLD; AND WHY DON'T WOMEN
AUTOMATICALLY RECEIVE EQUAL
PAY FOR EQUAL WORK?**

**AND WHY DO SO MANY MEN
STILL SEEK TO LEGALLY
CONTROL WOMEN'S BODIES?**

**LET'S REMEMBER THAT
"RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IS WHEN
YOU'RE PREVENTED FROM
EXERCISING YOUR BELIEFS; AND
NOT WHEN YOU'RE PREVENTED
FROM IMPOSING THEM."**

~ ANONYMOUS

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