

I changed my mind. To be more precise, my mind was changed. My mind was changed regarding the ordination of self-affirmed, practicing gays and lesbians. For most of my ministry, I voted against it, but recently, I voted for it.

Since this was in the paper yesterday, you deserve to know why my mind changed and how Scriptures like today’s lesson from John about the shepherd and the sheep changed it.

The shepherd knows the sheep. He knows what we can do. He knows what we can’t do. And he never asks us to do anything that he does not give us the grace to do. He never asks us to do anything that will harm or destroy us.

Previously, I thought gays and lesbians should be celibate. They should renounce their sexuality in order to be ordained, but I have come to understand how harmful that expectation is.

It would be like God asking me to run a 4 minute mile. I could train with the best coach. I could have an armed guard make sure I eat what I should rather than what I want. I could have all of that, and I still could not run a 4 minute mile.

The shepherd knows that. He came that we might have life, abundant life, but demanding the impossible from us will harm us; the tragic number of suicides among gay and lesbian youth is testimony to the damage done by this kind of expectation. Many will say that if they could change their sexuality, they would, but they can’t. So they are bullied at school. So they are harassed, and for some it becomes too much and they end their lives.

When I say that gays and lesbians have to renounce their sexuality, I give and comfort to the bullies and the haters. I don’t mean to, and I know that those who disagree with me do not mean to hate, but the outcome is the same.

Meanwhile, Jesus tells us *John 10:9-10 (NRSV)*<sup>9</sup> *I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.*<sup>10</sup> *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*<sup>1</sup>

It would be more comfortable for me to stick with my previous position. Yesterday at Denise William’s graduation, a lesbian couple sat in front of me. Their presence stirred up all sorts of “stuff” in me and I wondered about that. It was easier and more natural for me to sit in judgment of them than it was to recognize fellow sheep of the shepherd’s flock; sheep he loves just as much as he loves me.

Our church’s previous standard treated homosexuality as a sin. Any unrepented of sin was grounds to deny ordination. Fellow ministers of the Word and Sacrament, elders, deacons, if that is the standard, we are all toast! The more I read this most dangerous book in the world, the Bible, and the more I get to know Jesus and myself, the more I see my own sins, some of which I do not want to repent of, and the more I become aware that there is more sin in me than I am currently able to address.

Hopefully, one day by God’s grace, I’ll be able to do that. In the meantime, I will keep reading the Bible and trusting in the eternal bond of love that exists between the shepherd and the sheep. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.