

Opening Prayer

Good Morning, and welcome here to Kasson/Pleasant Corners UMC. If this is your first time here or your first time here in a while, a special welcome to you. We are thankful you have chosen to come and worship with us today. This morning's sermon is likely the most difficult one I will ever preach outside of a funeral. This is probably the most contentious topic I will ever preach about, and it will likely be the most serious you ever see me. Know that as we dive into these passages from God's word, that no matter where you stand on this topic (as no doubt all of you hold a stance) that I love you. I am well aware that each of us has something at stake in this topic. Loved ones, family and friends who are gay, lesbian, or transgender who we deeply love are affected. The sanctity of scripture, and how we identify sin and righteousness and truth, that is also affected. This message this morning cannot possibly answer every single question, or concern, or heartfelt aching that you have, so please know that I would love to talk with each and every one of you more about this in detail. Do not hesitate to talk to me outside of service, and know that no matter how you feel about me, I will never treat you any differently. With that being said, I also love you all too much to not speak on topics that are hard.

When we put out the questionnaire during the month of August, I knew that this would be one of the top questions, and I was well aware that we would be looking at this. There are many opinions on all things related to homosexuality, transgender, bisexual, etc. lifestyles. In our modern sphere this has become a political issue, both in the higher levels of churches and obviously in our governance. However, the Bible is not politics. God does not hold a political office, support a political party, or support an individual church contrary to what this world

would have you think. It isn't even about our individual culture... as the Lord is greater than our individual cultures. The Lord rules independent of us, and He doesn't need our approval. The questions surrounding homosexuality and transgender and bisexual and queer, etc. lifestyles as they are related to the Lord then can also not be about politics. This is not about polls, this isn't about personal opinions, this isn't about anything other than the truth that God has revealed to us through His word and how we interpret it. I want you to keep that in mind as well today, that this isn't about Pastor Jake's thoughts or opinions or feelings... it is simply about reading God's word at face value and trying to understand how He wants us to act. Saying all this, when we let scripture speak for itself, it is clear that a lifestyle that includes sex outside of monogamous marriage between a man and woman is sinful. It is against God's moral law. Let's look at this in detail to understand that this isn't your minister trying to read this into the text, but rather it is the Bible itself speaking.

Chapter eighteen of Leviticus is where we started our reading for today, and this entire chapter is about laws on immoral relationships. Chapter twenty of Leviticus also is concerned with immorality, but it is also focused with human sacrifices and steering clear of the customs of the land. When this book of Leviticus was written the Israelites were coming into the promised land from out of Egypt. Before entering the Lord gave them, through Moses, various laws and covenants that would keep them morally pure. These are laws and practices that are indefinite in time, absolute, and were not fulfilled by Christ's sacrifice upon the cross. We would look at the Ten Commandments as laws such as these, things that we still are called to abide by today even though we are not Israelites in Canaan before the time of Jesus. The Lord also gave them at the same time and in the same way

commandments and laws that would keep them separate from the nations around them. These are laws and commandments that are fulfilled by Christ's sacrifice upon the cross, things that previously kept Israel separate were no longer needed for separations following Jesus's resurrection. We as Christians today would put the dietary laws, the sacrificial laws (goats, doves, etc.), and circumcision into this category. These are things that were extremely important for the Israelites in their day, but Christ has fulfilled them. He hasn't abolished them, but He has fulfilled them. Every Christian, whether they realize it or not, makes these distinctions on various laws and they have done so ever since the time of Jesus. But the question is... where does homosexuality (and the various other types of non-heterosexual behavior) fall into this? Is homosexuality something that is now acceptable, or is it something that is morally wrong still?

In the book of Leviticus, in the two places where it is purposefully mentioned, the commands against it are placed directly next to acts that are unquestionably immoral even today. In Leviticus 18:21, the verse preceding the first verse in scripture specifically outlining homosexuality as a sin, the Israelites are told "You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the Lord." It is a clear command to not worship any God other than the Lord, with special emphasis on the false god Molech who people would sacrifice their children to, is still a relevant command today. The verse immediately following our first verse on homosexuality reads "Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion." This is a clear command that bestiality is a sin. Right in the middle of these two commands, which are very clear and understood, is the command "You shall not lie with a

male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.” Beloved Congregation, know that these are the words that are printed... these aren’t mine. If you were to read Leviticus 20:13, the second reading we had on homosexuality, you would see that that verse is wedged in between two commands against incest. It should be noted, that in reading these verses that I do not advocate for violence in any way shape or form against those who are practicing homosexuals. It should be noted that no one who actually follows Christ is going to desire to hurt someone else based upon their sin... that is infinitely more reprehensible. (No boy will be boys rhetoric, no hate speech, no kicking one out of the family, or kicking them out of the workplace, etc.) However, even just by reading the scripture here, no doubt there is an odiousness to these verses compared to the world. If we are honest, though, Leviticus is a difficult book written thousands of years ago to a people who were in a different place in God’s plan. How do we know that God’s mind on this subject hasn’t changed, or that the times dictate something different? The answer, Beloved Congregation, is consistency in scripture. The Bible, as God’s revealed word to us as a whole, should be used. This keeps us from picking and choosing our version of things. Jumping ahead to the book of Romans, we see that Paul holds the same view on this as Leviticus.

Romans 1:25-28 reads “For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever, Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did

not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper.” Beloved Congregation, Paul writes that homosexual acts are in direct conflict with God’s word. If this were on any other subject, drunkenness, covetousness, anger, lust, etc. then we would have an easy time speaking on this. Why do we treat this sin as different? Romans 1:25-32, 1st Corinthians 6:9-11, and 1st Timothy 1:8-11 all place homosexuality in direct connection to immorality and sin. These are the words of scripture, not mine. These are what the church has taught for the last two thousand years, both before and after Christ’s death and resurrection. To a tee the universal church, the great church fathers, and the scriptures themselves have been consistent on this perspective. Only within the last fifty years or so have we seen what is called a “revisionist” perspective emerge regarding homosexuality, as well as various other actions that before were considered immoral but are not considered commonplace. A revisionist, in our day and age, will say things like “Paul was probably a frustrated homosexual who didn’t have any outlet” and “David and Jonathon in 1st Samuel 18 have a homosexual relationship.” Both of these thoughts have little basis in scripture, or in historical tradition. If you were to read all of Paul’s words, you would probably not think of him as a latent homosexual... especially when you see how he pours out his soul in many of these letters, sharing with others how deeply sinful he thought he was. Similarly, if you read the stories of David and Jonathon you would certainly see a great friendship, but you never read anything about them sleeping together. There is consistency in scripture in regards to this topic, much more consistency than most other things that we often think about in regards to immoral sin.

A perfect example of this consistency would be comparing homosexuality with eating unclean animals. Over and over again in the Old Testament, it is very clear that the Jews were to not eat anything that was pronounced “unclean.” This includes pork, shellfish, certain birds, etc. If we were to just have the Old Testament then it would be clear to us that eating these things are forbidden. However, if we include the New Testament, and if we look at all of scripture as a unit (the whole Bible) we will see that after Jesus’s death and resurrection there is a profound break. A couple months ago we looked at Peter receiving a vision from the Lord regarding unclean animals, and how he was to “take and eat, do not declare unclean what the Lord has declared clean.” That is further backed up by the vote at the Jerusalem council, which is found in Acts, and it is asserted over and over again in Paul’s writings (Ephesians and Galatians anyone?) as well as in Peter’s and John’s. There is a profound change in dietary laws, but there is no such change (or even a hint of a change) for homosexuality. The problem, and the reason why so many God fearing Christians have different views on this, is that we want to read our biases into scripture. (Note that this is true of conservative Christians as well!) The topic of homosexuality and the various other parts of the gender movement are political in our day and age. We love our homosexual friends and family, and we don’t want to hurt them. People who are conservative on this issue often misunderstand why anyone would accept that homosexuality is compatible with scripture. Beloved, it isn’t that these people are foolish or selfish... they simply love their family/friends, and earnestly desire to not hurt them. Society has come to accept homosexuality as fine, as good, as moral... so why shouldn’t we it is argued? The problem is, who defines morality? Is it us, or is it God?

In Matthew 5:13-20 we read an important piece of scripture related to Christ's view of the Law. By the Law He is referencing the Torah that was given to the Hebrews. We already talked a touch about the fulfillment of a particular law (ex: dietary laws) versus the establishment of a moral law (ex: no sleeping with your neighbor's wife.) We have also talked about the easiest way for us to determine this, by looking at Biblical consistency. However, there is something in our reading from Matthew that we should take very seriously, and it is Jesus's views on scripture. In verses seventeen and eighteen He states "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished." We read that, we get that, but it is the follow up to that verse that should give us pause today on not only this issue, but every issue that we like to overlook in scripture. Verse nineteen states "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Beloved, we will all have to give an account to our Creator about our actions and our teachings. Jesus took very seriously what was written in scripture, and we should follow His lead. This is an extremely hard topic, but out of reverence for the Lord we must take an honest look at this. If you come to a different conclusion than I do, know that you are still loved and cherished within your church. Nothing is going to change after today here, and no one is going to be treated any differently, but we do need to be honest in how we approach the Lord's word. Jesus was not revisionist with the scriptures, He didn't play by His culture's rules, and He held the Bible as authoritative. (So did Paul by the way, as 2nd Tim. 3:16-17 states.) With that being said, many of you may be wondering

what our actions then should look like with these verses in mind. Beloved Congregation, I want to make this EXTREMELY clear... just because you may or may not agree with someone's lifestyle, you are still to love that person. Period.

In Galatians 5:18-25 we read about how we as Christians are supposed to act in this world. We are supposed to be moral and loving. If we are honest, many people claiming to be Christ-loving have acted horrifically towards those in the homosexual community. Regardless of the lifestyle that another is living, regardless about how we feel regarding sin, it is never ok to sin towards that person. Some of the things mentioned in Galatians 5:18-25 are disputes, dissensions, factions, enmities, strife, outbursts of anger and the like. These are awful, sinful ways to act towards anyone... especially someone who is gay, trans, etc. If we really love these people, then we are not going to ever seek violence, or hurt, or anguish for them. We do not have to agree with their lifestyle to show them love, anymore than one who disagrees with an alcoholic's lifestyle can love them. (Another example would be in loving another Christians even though you disagree with their theology... love knows no bounds in these regards.) You may think this is common sense, but many people outside of the church and within it have experienced not just disagreement, but outright violence at the hands of people who claimed to love Jesus. Don't forget that Jesus ate with tax collectors and prostitutes and sinners, even though He didn't approve of their lifestyle. No matter where you fall on this issue, I think we can all be in agreement that we are all better off by extending grace to each other even if we disagree. Don't ever forget that people whom you disagree with are loved by the Lord too. Beloved, with all of these thoughts in mind, I would like to close with a simple truth regarding our Lord.

Hebrews 13:8 states “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” I recognize that this difficult topic holds pain in various forms for many. Holding a Biblical view of this is not popular or easy, just as holding that this is a compatible lifestyle is not easy. Christians have always argued, quarreled, and been foolish. It is in our nature as humans to act sinfully towards the Lord and each other. However, if we can close on a note of hope and agreement, it is that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Thank the Lord He does not change, that His love does not change, that His truth does not change, and that we can hold our hope in Him no matter what disagreements may come our way. If we can agree on anything this morning as we leave it should be this: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son in to the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” To me scripture is clear that homosexuality is a sin. However, I encourage you to do your homework beyond just taking my (or anyone else’s) word for what God thinks. Read scripture and see for yourself. No matter what though, no matter what conclusion you come to, know that Jesus came to save you and me. Our ultimate prayer should be that all would trust in Him. Beloved Congregation, I love you and pray for you often, may we go in peace.

Closing Prayer