

SERMON. June 28, 2026

Good morning; so glad to be here to see familiar faces, and new faces and feel the energy of this community. So I appreciate Pastor Kris asking me to be here while he is at General Assembly. He has a significant leadership role there so please keep him and the GA in prayer as we gather together. Please pray with me: Holy Spirit as we gather together please grace us with wisdom, courage and love to know your call to us and to follow...Amen

## SERMON

### Deja vu all over again

About the sermon title; I've always wanted to use that Yogi Berra phrase! And today it seemed appropriate. In the last 20-30 years rights for glbtquia+ folks have made headway, but looking at what is happening in our country now, we cannot be complacent. Those rights can be overturned with the flourish of pen or a Supreme Court decision. In fact, the ACLU is now tracking 530 anti glbtquia+ bills across US state legislatures. So, yes, in the rather inelegant phrase of Yogi Berra, "déjà vu" all over again.

I thought I would offer a wee bit of Southminster's history. For those of you who have been at Southminster through the process of becoming a *More Light* congregation, this may be a trip down memory lane...for those of you who were not here, it can put some decisions and actions into context. And ultimately the question for all of us: how do we move into the future honoring the values and commitments made in the past?

When Jim Petersen was pastor here, motivated by hearing the experiences of a gay minister who felt he had to be closeted, Jim led the congregation on a process of discernment: how should Southminster consider gay and lesbian persons for ordination as ministers, elders and deacons. Jim led the whole congregation in a process of prayer and study: studying the bible, Presbyterian history and polity. In 1993, the Southminster Session, made the decision that one's sexual orientation should not be a hinderance to service as deacons or elders. While this action was in conflict with the Book of Order, it expressed the deeply held values and conscience of the Session and of the majority of the congregation. In 1995 the Session of voted to join the *More Light Network*... a network of Presbyterian churches throughout the US, committed to full inclusion of people of all orientations. Southminster was the first congregation in the Presbytery to do so. Years later, Southminster initiated the overture which eventually went to General Assembly and led to a change in the book of order: in June of **2014**, the **221st General Assembly** made national headlines when the GA voted to formally redefine marriage in the church's constitution to include same-sex couples.

While the *More Light* designation was a statement impacting life within the church...it also provided guidance for ways in we, as a congregation, and as individuals, conduct ourselves outside the church walls. In the secular culture at that time, conflict centered about employment, housing and especially marriage rights for gay, lesbian and bisexual citizens. Later concerns broadened to include transgender rights, in terms of medical care and options, and concerns of non-binary individuals. Southminster was involved in advocating for rights in a number of those issues, notably same-sex marriage, perhaps the most divisive issue in Oregon at that time. As you may remember the history of same sex marriage in the Oregon is a complicated and convoluted journey. There was a 6 - week window when licenses were issued, and with the knowledge of the Session, I officiated at a number of marriages. But the backlash came with [Oregon Ballot Measure 36](#), saying a marriage could be only one man and one woman. Southminster partnered with groups like Basic Rights Oregon and Community of Welcoming Congregations to continue to work for marriage rights. Very long story short, since May 19, 2014 same sex marriage was legalized in Oregon...and then it was legalized nationwide in **June of 2015**, following the landmark Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges*. In a 5-4 decision, the Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees same-sex couples the fundamental right to marry, requiring all 50 states to perform and recognize same-sex marriages.

But marriage was not, and is not, the only area of inequity for glbtqia+ folks. Legal protection for gay and lesbian, transgender and non-binary individuals in the United States is a hodgepodge of rights, depending on the state you live in. While transgender employees are federally protected from workplace discrimination, there is no comprehensive federal non-discrimination law covering housing or public spaces. Additionally, many states restrict gender-affirming healthcare and identity documents.

Transgender individuals are currently barred from enlisting in the U.S. military, following a series of executive orders and policies issued by the Trump administration. Access to healthcare for trans and non-binary people is a particular concern, especially for young people,

Over half of U.S. states have passed laws or enacted executive orders that restrict or ban gender-affirming care for minors, even if the parents also want it for their children. (This eliminates not only the rights of young people but also of their parents)

Oregon was the first state in the U.S. to legally recognize non-binary identities and continues to offer robust legal protections for gender-expansive individuals. However that is not true on the federal level. For example, New U.S. passports are currently restricted to "M" or "F" markers reflecting an applicant's biological sex assigned at birth, following an executive order and a November, 2025, U.S. Supreme Court ruling.

This might all sound very abstract and legalese. We are a church, after all, not a legal aid society. But as church, we are committed to love your neighbor as yourself; to enabling all

people to see the beauty and divine within them. Denying basic rights solely on orientation and gender identity erodes the humanity of people; saying, “you are not acceptable as you are and you don’t deserve the rights others have.” When we allow the humanness of anyone to be diminished, it diminishes all, for all are one body spiritually.

There are real world consequences:

----For example: the passport issue...many of you have traveled internationally, and you know that one thing you want to avoid is any issue that could cause problems as you enter or leave another country. So think of what could happen when your passport identity no longer corresponds to the identity you are living.

---Think about what happens if you are transitioning and your insurance will no longer cover the medicine or surgical care that you need.

---Imagine that your child cannot receive the gender affirming care that is needed. Depression and suicide rates are disproportionately higher for non-binary, transgender, and gay and lesbian youth than other youth. Not because of who they are but because of society’s or family’s **response** to who they are.

I remember some of the saddest statements I have heard from young people. A few years ago as part of the Washington County Human Rights Council, we held listening sessions with a gay and lesbian group at one of the Beaverton high schools. We listened as students described their fear; their pain at being targets of bullying or being misunderstood or dismissed by other students or occasionally teachers. But the most chilling response was when I asked students where they felt most afraid and unsafe. And almost all said, “at home”. The place that should be the most nurturing and safe place for young people: home was where they felt frightened. Many said that if their parents even thought their child might be gay or lesbian or trans, they would be thrown out or abused...or sent to some kind of program designed to make them ‘Not gay’.

I am afraid that institutionalized religion bears a huge responsibility here...for having taught over decades that the Bible condemns any orientation other than straight. I know there are congregations like Southminster where these youth feel safe, but we need to advocate for young people who don’t have such a place.

Little things can sometimes be big things: In fact, one of the students said that they had been feeling very despondent and hopeless when they drove past Southminster and saw the rainbow banner with *All Are Welcome*. This was some years ago, so it was the banner Judy Tedrick designed...that made this student feel that maybe they were not a horrible person ...and if they could hang on until they could leave home they would be Ok. There was another student who said she lied to her family about where she was on Sunday

mornings because if they thought she was coming here, to a church that supported gays and lesbians, she would be locked in her room. (I think that's the only time I've heard of a young person lying so that she could **go** to church rather than lying to **get out of** going to church). I also remember a young adult person who came to one of our *Bible and homosexuality* classes some years ago. She sat in the car for half an hour before she walked into the church because she had been told this was a place of Satan and if she came to this class she would be putting herself in a place of damnation.

These are situations that religions have had direct responsibility for causing. So we also can have responsibility for changing. Small things like that banner can make a big difference to a young person who is in a difficult position; using pronouns that a non-binary person request can make a big difference.

Research has shown that transgender and nonbinary youth who were able to change their name and/or gender marker on legal documents, and or who had access to spaces that affirmed their sexual orientation and gender identity reported lower suicide attempts. Respecting a person's pronouns is one way to provide that sense of acceptance and safety. I know that using pronouns can be difficult for some of us older folks; we had grammar rules drilled into our heads about agreement of singular and plural nouns and pronouns. But we can try to remember if it means showing support and to young people.

People sometimes question: So...what would Jesus say about same sex marriage or rights for glbtquia+ people? That was not a scientific or social construct back in Jesus' time. But when we look at his teaching in general...and the way he lived, it always goes back to a very basic concept: love God with all your heart and soul...and your neighbor as yourself.

Another criticism I hear at times I hear at times: Advocation for rights for GLBTQIA+ FOLKS is just trendy or "woke". No.. it is following tradition: following that commandment of Jesus to love your neighbor.

Southminster can be proud of its history in terms of inclusion of all orientations. We should definitely celebrate with the Beaverton Community on this pride weekend. AND we can't be complacent. We know how quickly rights can be taken away. (Think of Roe v Wade). We know that there are many places, even in Oregon, where people don't feel safe or respected or loved; where glbtquia+ folks are bullied. "Deja vu all over again". Yes, IT IS frightening and outrageous...and we do grow weary of the struggle. But let's try not to feel too sorry for ourselves: we may want to think that history moves in a linear direction toward justice. Not so. There have always been times of Enlightenment and times of regression; of Dark Ages.

Yes, IT IS very frustrating. And there are fears and limitations that hold us back from activism. Some of us who get to a certain age, feel we don't have the physical strength or

emotional energy to keep on...especially going to rallies and protests. Straight, cisgender people may get worried about what to do and what to say ...not wanting to offend people. GLBTQIA+ people may feel it's difficult to trust those even those who claim to be allies. Fair enough. But we need to all overcome those worries and fears and work together to promote inclusion for all. There are small actions we can all do: try to learn to use the pronouns people request; in conversations if you hear glbtq people being denigrated, speak up in support.... Support groups like basic rights Oregon financially; advocate for safe spaces for glbtqia+ youth. Make sure the church keeps flying that *all are welcome rainbow banner* ...because you never know when some young, or older person, despondent and close suicide will see it and find hope.

As a faith community we are called to carry the promise of hope and love within us... even more importantly in the dark times than the times of progress. Most of all, we carry within our communities the assurance that, as Isaiah says, “we are precious in God’s sight and honored and loved”. This is why we continue to work for justice and equality. So never let anyone convince you or anyone else, that that you are anything less than beautiful...less than whole...and never forget that your loving is a miracle. May it be so.

Close with song: “How Could Anyone”. (Libby Rodrick)



