

The Bible Made Me Do It
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United Church of Broomfield
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John 8:3-11 NRSVue

³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and, making her stand before all of them, ⁴ they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵ Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” ⁶ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹ She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

This sermon is called, the Bible made me do it but you may not know why until the end.

Today is ONA Sunday meaning open and affirming. This is an open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ. It's nice to say, and it's a cute phrase, but what does it mean? It means that this church has taken on the duty and responsibility and promises that it will live up to what it says. This church makes a covenant with anyone who will come interact with us. That we will honor our pledge to welcome anyone and everyone without exception. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here. How many churches have signs that we drive by that says everybody is welcome! How many signs say God loves everybody! How many signs on churches have cute little billboards that do a play on words or have Bible verses that make you feel warm, fuzzy, and invited, but when you walk in, perhaps it's a different feel.

How many churches that have everyone is welcome language would ordain a gay person?

How many would have a lesbian as a senior pastor? How many would perform a wedding for two

people of the same gender? Just exactly how far does the everyone is welcome lingo go? I think of Jesus and how he handled the situation in which the Pharisees brought a woman to him who they caught cheating on her husband. Jesus did not lead with her sin; Jesus led with his humanity. How often do we forget to see the person and only see who they are, what they do or did, what they believe, what they look like, or who they love? How often do we see a person and forget that everyone is created in the image of God, is a child of God, and is loved in a way that our finite minds cannot even begin to fathom? Oh, what would life be like if we could see each other the way God sees us. What if our sins were written on our forehead for the whole world to see? Would we still judge each other the way we do, or would our humility allow us to offer some humanity?

In this passage that we just read and heard, the woman was caught in adultery. She violated the Mosaic law as found in Lev 18:20. Guess what happens only two verses later? It says do not lie with a man as a man lies with a woman. So, Jesus is talking to an adulterous woman, and Leviticus 18:20 says her actions were a sin. Leviticus 20:10 also says this was a sin, but does Jesus uphold mosaic law and say "stone her!"? No, Jesus said let you who is without sin, cast the first stone.

Far too often, we look at homosexuality as the sin du jour. In the 1600s, it was witchcraft, then slavery, and now it is non-heterosexuality. What supposed sin will we look for next when being against non-heterosexuals falls out of being vogue. Perhaps we should focus on not being the Pharisees who hold on to dogmatic principles that we ourselves have placed in the scriptures when we should be more like Jesus, offering grace, mercy, and compassion.

I remind myself that when God agrees and disagrees with everything I agree and disagree with, I have made God in my image, not the other way around. Rev. Benjamin Cramer said something

similar. He said that when we become convinced that we are the only authority on truth, that anyone who oppose us is evil, and that things will only get better if we are in charge of all positions of power that is when we know we are no longer worshipping God, we are worshipping ourselves.

We should not pretend to be Jesus; by that, I mean where we feel it is our place to be the one with the right to judge. Or let us be less like the stones, which are far too able to do great harm, even when that harm is not justified. Perhaps, we should be more like the dirt. Humble, lowly, and easily changed and shaped by the finger of Christ. Being open and affirming tells people that we will show the love that Jesus has so freely given us. We will show others the mercy and compassion that Jesus has shown us. We will show others that you more than the label that has been used to harm you.

Our open and affirming stance is a promise that we will abide by John 3:16, which says that it does not matter who you are or where you are on life's journey if you believe in Jesus, you will have life everlasting. Everything else pales in comparison. Salvation is the key from Christ's life. All the extras that we add on to that verse are just locks, keeping people away from opening the door to Jesus. On this open and affirming Sunday, may we always remember that just as we are created in the image of God, so is our neighbor.

When we let go of the idea that we must wage war against "lifestyles" we may not understand, then we can let go of the view that those around us are either fellow combatants or enemies. When we see the world as a place of darkness, hurt and harm, much of which has come from the hands of those who claim to be speaking for Christ, then we can see the world as a place where our flicker of light in the dark world can be fanned by the winds of hope. It can be fueled by the love we have for

humanity so that it can grow to an inferno that not even the oceans could extinguish. But only if we care enough to put in the work.

It's one thing to come to church and say that we are an open and affirming congregation and that we accept everyone without exception, it is quite another to live that. To practice what we preach in our daily lives means to hold true to what we believe and take action when we see injustice, intolerance, bigotry, homophobia, or anything else that separates people from knowing the love of God. May we be a church whose individual flickers combine to be a light that no bushel could hide. And when we fully and completely accept those who are non-heterosexual into the fold and flock of God and graft them into the tree, they too can have the flicker that has been extinguished by those who have sought to hurt them and harm them with the Bible reignited. How great is the light when all you've known is darkness?

Think of when you have walked outside your house in the middle of the day, and the sun hits you, and your eyes have to adjust. It's so bright it hurts. It almost gives you a headache, so you put your hand above your eyes just to give yourself some reprieve. Now, imagine that the darkness from which you just came out of was part of the core of who you are, and the light that you're walking into is the brightness of God's people willing and wanting to throw their arms around you, welcoming you, loving you, encouraging you, supporting you. I, for one, know what that feels like to come from that place of darkness. I pray that you don't.

I am reminded that God calls everybody on this open and affirming Sunday. God loves everybody. God welcomes everybody. Jesus broke bread with those he knew would betray, abandon, and deny him, yet he did it anyway. How dare we keep anybody from coming to the table Christ has

prepared before us. How dare we tell anyone that they are not worthy of God's love, that they are not welcome in God's house, and that they are not to be present at the table. The Lord said all are welcome, and to ensure that the tab could never get too high for us to pay lest anyone should not come and sit, he paid the bill in blood. How dare we tarnish that?

On this open and affirming Sunday, may we not rest on our laurels knowing that we have promised that we will love each other and all those in our community and across the world the way that we love ourselves. That we will, to the best of our ability, love those as God loves us. Let us press on knowing that no matter how open and affirming we are it's not about our words, it's about our actions.

Exodus 20 verse 7 says we must not take the Lord's name in vain. I think we get that wrong. For me, at least, and your opinions may differ, but it is not me just saying the Lord's name that makes it taken in vain. It is the using of the Lord's Word to hurt people, even in love, that is taking the Lord's name in vain. Haven't we all heard the saying hate the sin love the sinner? Has that phrase ever done anything positive? Or is it almost exclusively used when we do something that makes someone else feel shame over who or what they are? Perhaps we say that so we don't feel bad about what we said or did to them. I do it in love, or I do this because I don't want to see you in hell....The intention does not matter, the outcome does. After all, isn't there a saying that goes the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Even when we're doing things that we believe with our whole heart are done for the right reasons doesn't mean it is. When we use God as a weapon to harm and hurt someone and try to make someone into something they are not, something that God did not create them to be, we are

using the Lord's name in vain. When we put ourselves in the place of Christ and judge others, we are using the Lord's name in vain. When we put ourselves in the position of the Pharisees and use Scripture to harm someone, we are using the Lord's name in vain. When we are the stones, ready to fly and cause death and destruction, we are using the Lord's name in vain. When we claim to be Christians but do not love our neighbor like ourselves, we are using the Lord's name in vain. When we claim see injustice but do nothing, we are using the Lord's name in vain.

I'm going to close with one more thought. The Pharisees asked Jesus what the greatest commandment in all of scripture is, and Jesus looked at them and said love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. And the second is like it love your neighbor as you love yourself, for these are the greatest commandments which all the law and all the prophets hang.

Did you catch that? All the laws hang on love. Some Christians may think that beating the heads of non-heterosexuals with the Bible is an act of love, but does God? If Jesus' commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves, then how can we do that to our neighbor if we wouldn't want that for ourselves? And if we're not doing that to ourselves, then we're not loving them. And if we are not loving them, we are breaking the greatest commandment, given to us directly from our Savior. Let us remember that we are an open and affirming congregation because we love our fellow humankind without exception and without an asterisk.

So, I bring you to this sermon's title: The Bible made me do it. I know the answer to these questions for this congregation, but I want to pose them to you anyways for these are important questions not just for open and affirming Sunday, but for every day. Did the Bible make you into someone who easily loves their neighbor? Did it change you to make you more like Christ? Does it

make you want to live and love like God loves us? Does it make you choose love over labels? I know we all could say yes to all four, but we all know someone who lets the words on the pages of the Bible make them into a person who reads the Scriptures like the Pharisees did. Someone who only sees law and not love. Who sees condemnation, not Christ. Who says well the Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it and in doing so, they can't see the Spirit stirring showing something that can't be found on a page but only felt in our souls. What will you let the Bible make you into? Who will you let the Bible make you into? What did the Bible make you do? Amen.