

Thoughts on the UMC General Conference in St. Louis (2/23-26/2019)

Although I am not a United Methodist, I am not disinterested in what is going on. My maternal grandmother was a “shoutin’ Methodist,” who prayed for me while I was in my mother’s womb. My mother fell from a chair while hanging curtains when she was five months pregnant with me. Her fall almost killed my mother and me. When my grandmother heard of my mother’s fall, she caught a bus and rushed to my mother’s side. She laid hands on my mother’s tummy and prayed. She prayed that not only would I and my mother live, but that Christ would save me and call me into the gospel ministry. Her prayer was answered, for which I am eternally grateful to God and to her. Unfortunately, she did not live to see her prayer answered. She passed away two months before I was born.

My interest continues through two wonderful neighbors, Richard and Frances Jones, who are faithful members of First UMC-Shreveport. Their care and friendship have enriched our lives. Plus, I know and consider as a friend Dr. Pat Day, Senior Minister of FUMC-Shreveport. He is a dear brother in Christ, and I have the highest respect and esteem for him. I applaud his stand for biblical truth. He is an official voting delegate to the UMC General Conference (worldwide) held in St. Louis (February 23-26, 2019). I cannot imagine the pressure and stress he is under, even as I write. I, and the church I pastor, prayed for him and all the delegates in our worship services last Sunday.

While there are many things I could say scripturally about the issue that convened this General Conference (the LGBTQ+ agenda), I will confine myself to one theme that seemed to percolate throughout the General Conference. Last night, I watched as a group of LGBTQ+ protesters marched around the convention center chanting — “Hate divides, but love provides.” Some seemed to be intimidated, others bothered, and some angered, but I do not think anyone was ambivalent to the chanting protestors. I have thought much on the chant and would like to offer some observations.

One, the chant is misguided, at the least, and hateful at best. According to the protestors, it seems that we are to hate nothing and love everything, and love will bring unity. This is a logical fallacy. It models the post-Christian attitude of today, one of tolerance. Instead of quietly and graciously reasoning with their opponents from the Holy Bible, the protestors sought to intimidate and bully with the slur of hatred. The chant’s basic claim is that if one does not accept the LGBTQ+ agenda, you are a hater, or hateful. People, especially Christians in the UMC, are called upon and expected to love and tolerate everything and hate nothing. Humble Christians, who have tasted the sweet love of God, can be easily intimidated when accused of hatred. This bullying chant is fallacious and simply not true! Allow me to illustrate.

As an orthodox and evangelical Christian that believes the Holy Bible to be the inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God, and as an ordained minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ for forty-four+ years, I have seen unspeakable things and ministered to more people than I can number, whose lives have been devastated by unimaginable, wicked atrocities. I have dealt with murderers, rapists, thieves of every sort, pedophiles, spouse abusers, and sadly, with victims of said sins and abuse. A myriad of people’s faces flash through my mind of this mixed group: a convicted murderer that killed his parents and six other members of his family; a rapist that

broke into his neighbor's house at 1:30 AM and sadistically raped the lady of the house; a young lady (in premarital counseling) that had been sexually molested by her grandfather for many years; a lesbian that had been repeatedly tied up and sexually abused by her two cousins and brother for over a five-year period; a middle-aged man that broke down and told about his grandmother sexually abusing him as a young boy and forcing him to do unmentionable things to her; a homosexual dying of AIDS that told about being lured into a house at the age of 14, seduced and molested by a "mother" (i.e., codeword for someone actively engaged in recruiting people into the homosexual lifestyle), which led to his homosexual life and distorted view of love; a young man gleefully laughing about having sex with an animal; a young wife that had been so abused by her mother that she was frigid in her marriage; and the list could go on. Did I genuinely love these people, whether perpetrator or victim? Without question, yes! I can remember occasions where I sat and cried with a number of these; so intensely did I feel their pain and hurt. And, did I hate the sins and atrocities perpetrated on the victims? Absolutely! There were times in listening to both perpetrator and victim I felt so angry and unclean that I wanted to get up and shower. What am I saying? You can love and hate simultaneously without it being contradictory. You can love and genuinely care about a person and yet hate the sin or crime committed. To say you hate something, and by so doing, are charged with not loving someone is misleading. Personally, it seemed to me that the LGBTQ+ protestors hated those that disagreed with their agenda as evidenced by their tactics of bullying and intimidation. It seemed they were tolerant of everyone and everything except those that disagreed with them, which reveals the intolerance of the so-called tolerant.

Two, the LGBTQ+ protestors flew into the face of Holy Scripture. If the UMC, or any other church or denomination, is to remain a true church of Jesus Christ, it must remain true to Holy Scripture. If the authoritative and infallible Scriptures are jettisoned, there is nothing to guide you but subjective pragmatism, cultural relativism, and personal feelings that fluctuate with changing social mores. Each person becomes the judge and arbiter of what is right and wrong. The sweet Psalmist of Israel, David, commands: "O you who love the LORD, hate evil!" (Psalm 97:10a - *ESV*). God warned the prophet, Isaiah, that there is a *woe* (read in Hebrew a *judgment*) on "those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Isaiah 5:20 - *ESV*).

Furthermore, the Holy Scriptures instruct us that any type of sex outside of a biblically ordained marriage of one man and one woman is sin and wrong (see Leviticus 18:22, 20:13-21; Mark 10:6-9; Romans 1:26-28; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; Jude 7-8, et al). In 2011, after the Supreme Court of the United State legalized Same-Sex Marriage, then, President Barak Obama tweeted: "Now a person can marry anyone he/she chooses." I respectfully replied: No, Mr. President, you are wrong! A person cannot marry his/her grandmother or grandfather, mother or father, sister or brother, aunt or uncle, etc." Mr. Obama, the US Supreme Court, and the LGBTQ+ movement are allowing what God forbids and demonizing those loving and faithful followers of Jesus Christ that will not allow what God forbids. This flies into the face of Holy Scripture. Someone has said: "If today we allow what God forbids, tomorrow we will forbid what God allows" (source unknown). How true!

Three, the LGBTQ+ protestors' chant is contradictory to our Lord Jesus Christ himself! Yes, Jesus lovingly reached out to the untouchables of His Day: the despised prostitutes, the hated tax collectors, the feared lepers, the social outcasts, etc. He was and *is* the most loving Person ever to walk on our beautiful Earth. Conversely, He was also the most controversial Person. The Rev. Dr. John R.W. Stott, the internationally known Anglican scholar and expositor, and then rector of All Souls Church in London, wrote a book entitled *Christ the Controversialist* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL: 1972). In it, Dr. Stott addressed Jesus' conversations that touched on questions of morality, worship, authority, and social responsibility. He pointed out that this most loving Redeemer also brought great division, and still does. Jesus said: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother...And a person's enemies will be those of his own household" (Matthew 10:34-36 - *ESV*). This compassionate Messiah knew that His teachings would bring sharp division, and those that were loyal to Him (and His Word) would suffer hatred and ostracization. They would be hated, thought of as hate-mongers, and some would even be killed. That is what is happening today.

While many examples could be drawn from the four Gospels, one passage in the Epistles keenly stands out. In Hebrews 1:9: "You [Jesus] have loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Gk. *anomia* - *lawlessness*); therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness..." What does this verse teach us? Jesus both loved and hated equally! He loved righteousness (i.e., everything that accords with God's Word) and hated wickedness (i.e., everything contrary to God's Word). Many have said that they want to be like Jesus. I have responded that if you want to be like Jesus, you must learn to love like He loved and hate like He hated.

This is so out of step with our present post-Christian, Millennial age. The only attribute of God that is usually proclaimed is that of love. But the first and greatest attribute of God is His holiness! His holiness does not diminish His love but enhances it. If God is *not* absolutely holy, His love would be tainted and impure. Those of the Wesleyan-Methodist tradition, of all people, should remember this. Before John and Charles Wesley ever proclaimed the love of Christ, the cross and resurrection of Christ, the blessed forgiveness of sins, and joy and peace with God, they declared the holiness of God and dealt with human sin. Read the robust sermons and study the beautiful hymns of John and Charles Wesley. What those of our present age, especially those of the LGBTQ+ movement, have forgotten and want Christians and Churches everywhere to do is set aside God's holiness, obedience to Christ's Word, and focus exclusively on love. This is so unlike Jesus our precious Savior!

My heart goes out to my precious sisters and brothers in the UMC during these difficult days. I pray for the UMC worldwide, FUMC-Shreveport, and Dr. Pat Day. May the Spirit of God grant you unity. Not the false kind that temporarily comes from laying aside the clear unmistakable teachings of Holy Scripture, but the true unity of humble, loving obedience to Christ and the whole counsel of His Word, which produces lasting unity both on earth and in heaven!

Respectfully submitted,

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