

Pride Sunday At LifeJourney

On Sunday, we hosted the Indy Pride worship celebration. The sermon in early service focused on the story of Sodom; the sermon in the late service focused on the time Jesus met a Gay man.

1. Before digging deeper into both, first a warm up question: What was the first LGBT Pride celebration you ever attended? What was that experience like?
2. Regardless of your sexual orientation or gender identity, when you were growing up, you were probably exposed to negative religious teachings about LGBT people. How did those teachings affect you?
3. The Sodom story is one of the most common Scriptures used against gay people, which is ironic since the story, understood in context, actually points in the opposite direction. Travel in the ancient world was perilous. To survive, travelers were dependent on strangers along the way to provide them with water, food, lodging, and protection. Scholars tell us that, in the ancient world, kindness to travelers became a sacred obligation. But traveling strangers could also be dangerous – bandits or spies or enemies. So there was always the temptation to be suspicious of, and harsh toward, traveling strangers. The Sodom story is divided into two parts – the positive example, and the negative example. Let’s look first at the positive example. As the angels traveled toward Sodom, they encountered Abraham. Read Genesis 18:1-8.
 - a. Think of a time when you felt very vulnerable and your wellbeing was dependent on the kindness of strangers. What happened? How did you feel?
 - b. Imagine you were Abraham, living in isolation in the desert, when one day you look up and see three complete strangers coming your way. What would you be thinking? How might you have responded?
 - c. Traveling through the desert region, the angels were vulnerable. Access to water was especially critical. How do you think the angels felt when Abraham insisted on helping them?
 - d. Read Hebrews 13:2. Why is kindness to strangers such a high spiritual value?
4. Now let’s read the negative example: Genesis 19:1-13.
 - a. Some suggest that sexual desire motivated all the men and boys of Sodom “to the last man” to demand that the two strangers be brought out to them. Do you think that’s a plausible theory? Why or why not?
 - b. Given what we know about human nature, and about ancient history, what is a more plausible explanation why all the men and boys of Sodom demanded access to the two strangers?

- c. What's the real lesson we're supposed to learn from the Sodom story? What's an example of how we might apply that lesson in our culture today?
5. In Matthew 8, Jesus encounters a Roman centurion who pleads with Jesus to heal his "servant." The Greek word translated "servant" is "pais." Jeff shared the history of that term, including the fact that "pais" was the most common term of endearment that a man in Greco-Roman culture would use when referring to another man he loved. Jeff shared examples from poems in and around the time of Jesus. For some of us this is old news, but for others it may be new. How did you feel when you first heard that the word used in Matthew 8 to refer to the sick man was the same word commonly used to refer to a same-sex partner?
6. The word "pais" could be used in several different ways. It could mean "son." It could mean "servant." And it could mean same-sex boyfriend or partner. It could also mean someone who is both your servant and your boyfriend/partner, which was not uncommon at the time. All available evidence seems to indicate that the centurion used the term to mean his servant who was his boyfriend/partner. Specifically, Jeff pointed out that:
- In Luke 7, Luke uses a word for the sick man ("doulos") that was only used for servants, not sons.
 - But when Luke uses "doulos" he adds an adjective "entimos," which means "special" or "honored" servant – thereby signaling that the sick man was no ordinary servant.
 - In both Matthew and Luke, the centurion makes a clear verbal distinction between the sick man and his other servants, using the word "doulos" for his ordinary servants, and reserving the word "pais" for the sick man – again signaling that the sick man was in a category by himself in the centurion's household.
 - The circumstantial evidence is also relevant: It seems psychologically unlikely that a centurion would cross all kinds of cultural barriers to seek healing for an ordinary servant, but quite likely he would be motivated to do so for his lover.
- a. Do you have any questions about this analysis? What do you make of it?
- b. How do you imagine the centurion felt when he approached Jesus to ask for help? How do you imagine the people around Jesus felt when they heard the request?
- c. When the centurion heard Jesus reply in vs. 7, how do you imagine he felt?
- d. What does verse 10 mean?
- e. What does verse 11 mean?
- f. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident are you that that Jesus welcomes and celebrates LGBT people? Explain why you picked the number you did?