

Responding to Anti-Trans Hate: WWJD?

1. Warm-up question: What was your favorite experience at this year's Pride Festival?
2. This past Sunday was the second installment in our sermon series called "The Bible and Justice: What Love Looks Like in Public." Our focus was on justice for transgender and non-binary people. Read Matthew 25:31-40, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Note the key phrase in verse 35: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Wikipedia defines "stranger" as "a person who's unknown to another person or group. Because of this unknown status, a stranger may be perceived as a threat." Tell us about a time in your life when you were perceived as a stranger. How did that feel?
 - b. Why are we humans instinctively afraid of strangers? Can you think of a time when you were afraid of a stranger?
 - c. In verse 40, Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least regarded of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me." In other words, what we do to vulnerable people around us – including strangers – Jesus takes personal. Why? Why is Jesus so passionate about how we treat strangers?
3. American culture has discovered a new "stranger" to target – transgender and non-binary people. The targeting is taking place with a vengeance driven by fear of the unknown. Ironically, many on the religious right – people who claim the name of Jesus – are leading the charge and, in the process, targeting Jesus himself.
 - a. Margaret Wheatley once said, "You can't hate someone whose story you know." That's why it's so important that we welcome strangers, sit down with them, and take the time to hear their story. Who was the first transgender person you ever came to know. How did getting to know them affect your thinking? What insights did you gain from that experience?
 - b. What does it mean to be transgender? How would you define it?
 - c. Why do you think so much hate is being directed at transgender people right now? Why now? And what is it about transgender people that stirs so much fear?
 - d. Numerous states, including Indiana, are considering and/or passing legislation targeting transgender people. The options include: (a) bills compelling transgender people to use restrooms contrary to their gender identity, (b) bills prohibiting gender affirming care for trans youth, (c) bills banning books that speak to the transgender life experience, (d) bills prohibiting teachers from

sharing information about the transgender experience, (e) bills requiring teachers to tell parents if their child asks to be called by a different name, (f) bills affecting transgender participation in sports, and (g) bills prohibiting drag shows. All of these bills are hurtful, but if you had to pick the worst among them, which do you feel is the most terrible and why?

4. To help us get better informed and equip us to be better advocates, three of our congregants directly affected by anti-trans hate shared their thoughts and insights. Amy Townsend told us what's been going on in her heart and mind amidst the surge of anti-trans hate. She also gave some examples of how that hate is affecting people she knows and encouraged us to do more as individuals and as a church. What thought or insight from Amy most resonated with you?
5. Keji Alboota (first name pronounced K-G) is a new congregant who recently came to the U.S. from Nigeria. She shared about coming out as a trans woman, about anti-trans hate in Nigeria, and how she feels about the surge of hate now arising in the U.S. What thought or insight from Keji most resonated with you?
6. David Luers and his wife Kristi have been part of our church for a little over a year now. David shared how anti-trans hate has affected him as the father of a 17-year-old transgender daughter and as a teacher of trans students at Southport High School. What thought or insight from David most resonated with you?
7. Jeff closed with a story about how, during World War II, many Danish people chose to wear yellow Stars of David as a way of standing in solidarity with Danish Jews who were being targeted by the Nazis. Our scripture passage today teaches us that, as followers of Jesus, we have an obligation to stand in solidarity with those who are considered strangers or otherwise vulnerable. We should do this both individually and collectively as a church. As individuals, what are some ideas for how we can better stand with transgender people?
8. In the last Indiana legislative session, our church alerted us to anti-trans bills under consideration and urged us to contact our legislators to voice our opposition. But Jeff said he felt that wasn't enough – that collectively as a church we should have done more. He promised that we're going to come up with a collective strategy for how to push back more powerfully against anti-trans legislation in the 2024 legislative session. Do you agree that our collective response in 2023 was inadequate? Do you agree that we should do much more in the 2024 legislative session? Are there specific ideas we should encourage our church leaders to consider for how our church can better respond? (If you have ideas, please have someone in your Oasis write them down and email them to PastorJeff@LifeJourney.church.)

Matthew 25:31-40

31 Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least regarded of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.'"