

***The Love You Leave Behind***  
**Reverend Kent Hemmen Saleska**  
**Unitarian Universalist Church of Minnetonka**  
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**Reading from *What is Marriage For?***  
**By E.J. Graff**

Much that is written about marriage is quite clearly by, about, and for men...[but] the history of marriage looks slightly different from a female point of view. For one thing, it soon becomes clear that many of the nineteenth-century changes that led to today's marriage battles are changes in the status of women: whether sex must lead instantly to babies, or whether contraception should be legal; whether married women should be free to own property, or to have custody of their children, or to hold jobs. And once men and women are equal, choosing their jobs (both within and outside the marriage) as earner, nurturer, cook, or household handyperson based on their desires and talents and circumstances rather than on sex, then what bars two men or two women from marrying?

...The philosophy of marriage that's based on equality, freedom, and the integrity of the individual conscience is under siege...The man who bombed an Atlanta abortion clinic also bombed an Atlanta lesbian bar. Feminism and same-sex marriage...are directly linked – and the latter is a more widely acceptable target for attack. It's hard for most people to argue directly against the idea of female equality: too many girls have now grown up playing soccer and would laugh at any hint that they can't be doctors, pilots, biologists, mothers, CEOs. Instead, many of those who oppose female equality aim their harsher language at lesbians and gay men – and same-sex marriage – calling us unnatural, just as our great-grandmothers were called unnatural for wanting to own property or use contraception.

***The Love You Leave Behind***  
**Sermon delivered by Reverend Kent Hemmen Saleska**

This past Thursday, April 17, I attended my first OutFront Minnesota Lobby Day at the state capitol in St. Paul. The only times previously that I had been to the state capitol were attending the food orgy, Taste of Minnesota, and once when I took a group of grade school kids on a tour there when I worked in a nonprofit organization. OutFront is a national organization that works for Bi-sexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transgender justice issues, and they have local organizations in many states across the country.

The annual lobby day was very well organized. Even though we call ourselves a government “of the people, by the people, and for the people,” it hit me, one of “the people,” right between the eyes just how un-savvy I am about politics and political maneuvering. I've been trained in theology and spiritual care and systems theory and group dynamics, but I have never before in my life talked to a representative about any issue or any bill. Having just moved to Hopkins, I didn't even know whom my senator or my representative was. I also had no clue how to get their attention, or where to visit them, or what things I was supposed to say and how to say it in a way they could hear it.

So I was very relieved when I registered with OutFront Minnesota to make an appointment to talk to my representatives, that their depth of organization included a four-page pamphlet of information that included a letter or welcome written by 14 representatives and 14 senators, a schedule of events, a map, a list of “points to keep in mind with lawmakers,” and a list of talking points about “three bills being considered that would enhance the lives of GLBT people.” In addition, for each visit with a senator or representative they arranged volunteer lobby coaches who briefed us on the issues, and then walked with us into the capitol building to be with us as we spoke with our representatives.

I was fortunate in my experience with my representative. I was not alone – I was with three other people from my district – and when our lobby coach sent a note into the chamber (the house was in session), our representative came out a few minutes later, and before we had a chance to say much he assured us that he was very supportive of BGLT issues, and indeed, his voting record indicated he had been. So we didn’t have to do much convincing. He did say though, that while the bill to provide local county and city governments the option of providing domestic partner benefits would probably pass both the house and the senate, the real hurdle would be the likelihood of Governor Pawlenty’s veto.

Lobbying was a new, and surprisingly painless process. I went into the experience feeling in a lot of ways that this was something I “should” do, or “needed” to do, but frankly, I was intimidated because it was all new and I did not know what to do. I came away from the experience feeling very happy, and a little more rooted and experienced in the process of democracy. I came away from the experience feeling empowered, which is a feeling I don’t often have when I encounter politics.

The other thing that helped me feel connected and empowered was the moment during the noon rally when all the clergy present stood in solidarity on the capitol steps, expressing their support for the BGLT community and issues of BGLT justice. At least three other Unitarian Universalist ministers were there, and people from Catholic, Episcopal, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim backgrounds were in attendance as well. I even introduced myself to Anita Hill, the Episcopal priest who endured an Episcopal ecclesiastical court case a few years ago over whether or not out homosexual priests could be ordained or could continue to serve their congregations after they came out of the closet.

Last year, apparently, a big issue at the annual lobby day was around a proposed so-called “Defense of Marriage Act,” which was eventually defeated. Our lobby coach told me that this year, though the issues were important, none of them were quite as urgent as the issues at last year’s rally.

Overall, it was a very good day. It was a positive experience. And it was great to have two other people from the congregation (at least, two others that I saw), Bob Dachelet and Jessica Harris, be at the rally and provide their support and energy as well. Some renewed energy is gathering in parts of this congregation around BGLT issues and actions. And in fact, Bob Dachelet is one person you can talk to about that if you feel that energy, too.

I am proud that this congregation is a “Welcoming Congregation,” and proud of the fact that we fly a rainbow flag outside on our church sign for all the world to see. For those of you who are new to Unitarian Universalism, a “Welcoming Congregation” is a designation and a recognition from the Unitarian Universalist Association that a congregation has gone through a detailed amount of work – raising awareness and taking action – on a variety of issues regarding people who are Bi-sexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender.

During the most recent UU 101 class I facilitated though, one person asked me a question after I handed out a card with our seven principles. She said, “If the first principle of the Unitarian Universalist Association is ‘The inherent worth and dignity of each person,’ then why do you need a special program to welcome people who are bisexual, gay, lesbian and transgender?”

Her question stopped me for a moment, and gave me pause. I thought it was a pretty good question. A deep question. And the truth is, it’s a question we could ask about a lot of different aspects of our congregational life.

My answer to that question was that we are religious people, people of faith, and like all people of faith we have high ideals and aspirations. But also like all people of faith, like all people in general, in our human behaviors we often fall short of our aspirations. This does not mean we shouldn’t have aspirations, but it does mean we need to continually monitor ourselves, and continually check our behaviors against what we say are our values.

Ideally, yes, we would read that first principle, “the inherent worth and dignity of all people” and we would automatically transform our behavior. But life is messy. Our lives are messy. Emotions get in the way. Intellect gets in the way. Pride gets in the way. Fear gets in the way. Things don’t go the way we want them to. People get sick. We lose our jobs. Our partner does something that gets us angry – and we lash back with unkind words. We may feel overwhelmed at times about the world’s problems – war, poverty, homelessness, racism, sexism, homophobia, global warming – and even our own personal problems, and we retreat into our smaller worlds, our families or even ourselves, attempting to shut out all those things we feel we can’t control, and just focus on our own lives.

But this is the crucial importance of communities of faith. A community of faith draws us out of our isolation and into a realm where we can work together, where we can lift up our collective aspirations and call each other to account for our behavior. Being in a community of faith can be compared in some ways to a marriage or a union. Love doesn’t just strike once and then it’s with us for the rest of our lives – living a life in love with another person involves waking up each day and actively making a choice, over and over again, to commit to this partner and the life you created together. Similarly, life in a community of faith is not just a matter of joining to say you’ve joined. It involves waking up each day, arriving at church each week and actively making a choice, over and over again, to commit to this communal partner and the life we create together.

Along with the renewed energy in this congregation around BGLT issues and actions, some suggestions have been made about action I could do. But my feeling is that if this congregation does indeed have renewed energy around BGLT issues and actions, then we need to talk together about what we can do together. Issues and actions are not solely about what I do alone, they are about what we do together. For any action we take to have effect, it will need the energy and ownership of the entire congregation.

This congregation has already done a lot, and it shows in the award we received earlier from the UU Service Committee. But if we want to do more together, we can do many things. One suggestion I have is to put a 20-foot high banner on the outside of the church declaring, “Civil Unions are a Civil Right,” as some other Unitarian Universalist churches have done. Another suggestion is to build up a larger presence from this congregation at the annual lobby day at the capitol. But beyond that, deeper and longer lasting action will occur when we do it in collaboration with others. Too often in our UU congregations we tend to do our social justice work as individuals or small groups, and then we get burned out, angry and frustrated and

disillusioned because no one listened to us, and we feel that things – at least, things as we see it – never change.

So if we are going to take action and make a difference, we need to find a few issues that we can all support with our actions. And it's not only about what we do here, it's about this congregation joining with other congregations, joining with Interfaith Outreach down the block, joining with nonprofit groups, or building relationships with city hall in order to create just and fair laws.

Over the past 10 years, I've noticed a shift in the way truly effective social action is made. It used to be that social action involved a lot of people who were angry, a lot of people protesting with their fists in the air. While this may have a place in the work we do, I believe that a lot more effective change comes over time through building relationships. I've heard of churches partnering with congregants, neighborhood youth and adults, police and the city as they creating a community garden. At the recent Prairie Star District conference, I heard about congregations who first built relationships with each other, and then with city hall and then with a huge company that wanted to build a new plant and offer minimum wage jobs. But through the collaborative relationship, the congregations were able to change the company's direction so that they ended up doubling the pay and offering benefits.

I wonder what we can do here? Does the city of Wayzata have unjust laws regarding bisexual, gay, lesbian or transgender people? Imagine if we built relationships with the people at city hall around issues of justice as we are doing now about building a new church on new land. Imagine if we built relationships with our state representatives around the issue of same-sex marriage.

And we have help in this, too. It's not just us "doing church" alone, and it's not just us "doing social action" alone. Meg Riley, Director of the Advocacy and Witness team at the Unitarian Universalist Association, also just happens to live in Minneapolis. When I talked with her last week at the annual district conference, she said she'd be happy to send out consultants to meet with us. The UUA website says, "The Advocacy and Witness team is comprised of...staff whose primary responsibility is to take Unitarian Universalist values out into the wider world. We work to insert Unitarian Universalist perspectives into public debates on the matters of the day through our media advocacy, through working in partnerships with other religious and secular organizations who share our viewpoints, and through empowering local congregations to do the same."

E.J. Graff writes that, "Feminism and same-sex marriage...are directly linked – and the latter is a more widely acceptable target for attack. It's hard for most people to argue directly against the idea of female equality: too many girls have now grown up playing soccer and would laugh at any hint that they can't be doctors, pilots, biologists, mothers, CEOs. Instead, many of those who oppose female equality aim their harsher language at lesbians and gay men – and same-sex marriage – calling *us* unnatural, just as our great-grandmothers were called unnatural for wanting to own property or use contraception."

Almost any issue of justice is an issue of power. At the lobby day last Thursday, one speaker got up and as part of his welcome said, "It's nice to see so many of you out there: people of color and people of power..."

Issues of feminism, issues of race, issues of same-sex marriage, all have to do with power – who has it and what they do with it. As people, here in this congregation, who are primarily white and well-off, we have an enormous amount of power compared to the rest of society. I'm not saying this as a source of shame, I'm saying this as a fact. And the fact that we have lots of

power provides us with a unique opportunity to partner with others who are not in such positions of power. It's not a matter of "us" knowing what's good for "them," it's a matter of taking the time to engage in dialogue, to build a relationship, to learn what is most important to all of us, and then working together to make that happen.

Years ago I heard a beautiful song that was written by Fred Small, but I heard it sung by a gay men's a cappella group called "The Flirtations." The song, in a very gentle way, reminds us that what we do here is not about who we say we are, it's about what we do, and about the love we leave behind when we're gone.

(I ended the sermon by singing this song *a capella*).

### **Everything Possible**

By Fred Small

We have cleared off the table, the leftovers saved  
 Washed the dishes and put them away  
 I have told you a story and tucked you in tight  
 At the end of your knockabout day  
 As the moon sets its sails to carry you to sleep  
 Over the midnight sea  
 I will sing you a song no one sang to me  
 May it keep you good company

*(Also sung as the last verse):*

You can be anybody that you want to be  
 You can love whomever you will  
 You can travel any country where your heart leads  
 And know I will love you still  
 You can live by yourself, you can gather friends around  
 You can choose one special one  
 And the only measure of your words and your deeds  
 Will be the love you leave behind when you're gone

Some girls grow up strong and bold  
 Some boys are quiet and kind  
 Some race on ahead, some follow behind  
 Some grow in their own space and time  
 Some women love women, and some men love men  
 Some raise children, some never do  
 You can dream all the day never reaching the end  
 Of everything possible for you.

(Bridge) Don't be rattled by names, by taunts or games,  
 But seek out spirits true  
 If you give your friends the best part of yourself  
 They will give the same back to you.