

Sermon: Misunderstood Scripture #2: Clobber Verses 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 August 11, 2019
Rev. Steve Clifton Rideau Park United Church, Ottawa ON



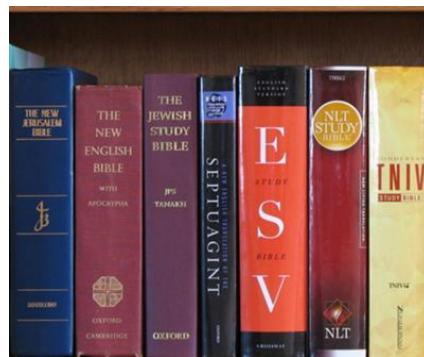
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UNITED ENSEMBLE

In the spring of this year we voted overwhelmingly as a congregation to become an Affirming Ministry. We voted to work together to (from our new Vision statement) "offer care and support to all, including those of diverse ages, abilities, gender identities and sexual orientations, races ethnicities, religions, and economic backgrounds. All are invited to participate fully, with mutual respect, in the life and work of the church."

This was a very good thing that we did together. Becoming Affirming is a very good thing...

A few weeks after our decision we had a visitor in our church, here for an outside event and she did not think that our being an Affirming church was a good thing. She railed against. She confronted a church member. She berated Debby in her office. She went after Paul while he was cutting the grass outside. She stood in my office door and called me all kinds of names. I had to google a few of her phrases after she left so I could discover what they meant. Not good.

This guest in our building didn't like a lot of things about us. Chair yoga for seniors. Female pastors. Healing Pathway prayer. All those things made us more than suspect in her mind. And being Affirming... welcoming and including LGBTQ people... that made her very angry.



Starting last week, I am using four Sundays in summer to look at Scripture passages that are often misunderstood. Last week we looked at the verse in 1 Corinthians 14 that demands that women should be silent in church ...In case you missed it the conclusion is...women present, you are free to talk and sing...

This week I am looking at one of the 6 verses in Scripture that are sometimes called the “Clobber verses” These are 6 verses, from the more than 31000 verses in Scripture, which are used sometimes to “clobber” the LGBTQ community. And as our experience with an angry visitor in the spring shows, this is an area of discussion that can generate very deep and intense feelings, including anger...

One of the sources of this emotional intensity may be a concern for Scripture. There are no doubt other things at work that account for strong emotions that this topic elicits. But I know that sometimes people feel a deep need to protect the Word of God.



An historical example... In the US in the mid-19th Century the Baptist Church split, North and South over the issue of slavery. In the North, the abolition movement was growing in the Church. In the slave holding South there was resistance to abolition. In the writings of the time much of the articulated concern in the South was about the authority of Scripture. Some in the South saw Scripture as giving consent to slavery. And so to abolish slavery was to diminish or discredit the Word of God.

Faced with a choice between lifting up Scripture as they understood it, or setting people free from bondage, some chose to uphold the book and not the people.



In February our Moderator, Richard Bott was here at Rideau Park speaking to a sanctuary full of young people. And he spoke about what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. He said that following a teacher as a disciple was not about just memorizing the words of the teacher. It was about following the teacher around everywhere they went.

So be a disciple you watch the Teacher when they got up in the morning, while they made breakfast, share their morning commute...follow them through the workday, to the staff room, on lunch duty, while they marked exams. Go home with them in the evening...

With Jesus what do we see when we follow him.

We see Jesus:

- Speaking with a Samaritan woman. A Samaritan – one who should be his enemy. People from Galilee would often go the long way around Samaria on a trip to Jerusalem, adding days of travel just to avoid Samaritans. And she was an unaccompanied woman that a man should not approach – Jesus crosses lines strongly drawn in his society in order to connect to her and show her God's compassion.
- Calling a tax collector –an occupation reviled and hated in Jesus time– they were seen as traitors to the people of God – but Jesus invited Matthew into the inner circle, called this social pariah to follow him.
- Jesus Healed on the Sabbath when the religious rules forbade it and in spite of the anger of the Pharisees.
- He crossed well established lines to heal lepers, who lived as outcasts on the outskirts of town.
- Many times in the Gospels Jesus shared table fellowship with those that the religious leaders of the day would have him shun.

As we follow Jesus our teacher we can hear his words. We hear what he says about LGBT people – Nothing. Nothing at all.

But following our Teacher we observe his radical inclusive compassion. We see Jesus extending the grace of God for all to see- so widely that people react, sometimes in anger. That's what we observe as we follow Jesus.



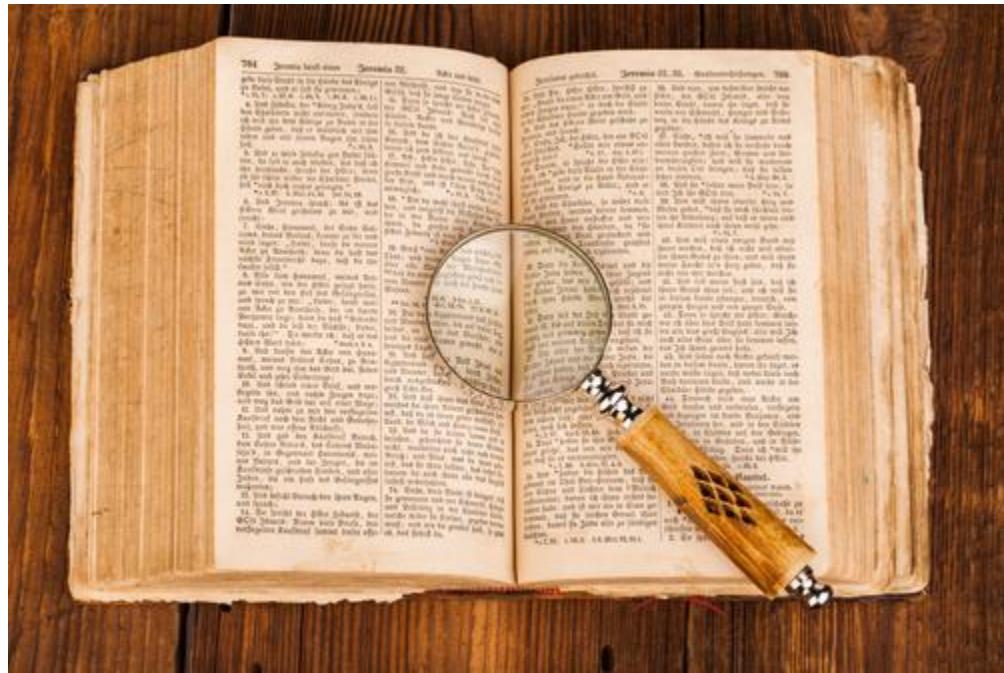
Last week I introduced Robert Estienne, a French scholar and printer who lived in Paris in the 16th Century. In 1568 he printed a French translation of the New Testament. And he included a new innovation. He broke the text down into numbered verses.

And in doing his work, Estienne did not take care to consider the verse marking carefully. He did this work while riding on horseback, travelling from Paris to Lyon.



When we open our Bibles we will see a text divided into chapter and verse. But this is a recent innovation; for most of Christian history the text flowed on undivided.

The creation of numbered verses is helpful. It is also problematic as it tempts the reader see Scripture as a collection of discrete statements having meaning and application on their own, in isolation from the larger work, apart from the greater narrative. Having verses in the text make it seem that each phrase carries a weight that was never intended.



So that text for today... a single verse.

I Corinthians⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men^[a] nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Sorry to be graphic on a summer Sunday...but it's the Bible. Men who have relations with men will not inherit the kingdom of God. That's the NIV version of the text.

Go back to the text in its original form. The word used here that is roughly translated in the NIV as "men who have sex with men" is the Greek word "malakoi." This literally means, "soft."

In ancient times, the insult of "soft" was hurled at men for a variety of infractions, like wearing perfume or luxurious clothing, not wanting to work, or loving women too much. Yes – being a womanizer could get a man labeled "soft."

Over time, "soft" became "effeminate" which in time was translated into English as, "men who have sex with men" or in the NRSV read today soft became "sodomite".

And that translation of the word *molokoi*, understanding it to mean "homosexual" appears in the English text of the New Testament for the first time in 1946 when Revised Standard Version of the Bible was published. I will repeat that and say again... that word homosexual or the phrase "men who have sex with men" appeared in an English translation of the Bible for the first time in 1946.

As evidence of earlier English translations I present the venerable King James Version of verse 9: "*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind*" will inherit the kingdom of God.



Of all the clobber verses, this one, I Corinthians 16:9 is probably the most grossly mistranslated and misunderstood. How we got from "soft" which has a vague meaning to the very concrete "men who have sex with men" just shows how much damage can be done by a text that is mistranslated and taken from context. And we have only been misreading this text based on a poor translation for a half century or so.... For 2 millennia this verse clobbered no one.

There are 6 clobber verses in the Bible. I just have time for one today. There is much online and in print that works to unclobber all 6 verses and I can point you to some resources if you are so inclined...



But against the 6 verses, I would set 31,000 verses of Scripture, many of which we do not emphasize anywhere as much as we do these 6.

And the 31000 verses includes 16 calls to love one another which we cannot emphasize enough.

And then there is what Jesus called the greatest commandment “to love God and neighbor”...and neighbor means everyone, even those we find it hard love...

And then there is the radically inclusive love that we see in our teacher Jesus, who drew the circle of God’s love very very wide.



It is a good thing to be an Affirming Congregation. To be Affirming is faithful. It means that we take seriously the example of Christ, that we are striving to be like Jesus, that we want to embody the radical grace and love than Jesus lived among us. Being Affirming a very good and very faithful thing to do.

Amen