

A COMMENT ON CHRISTIAN AND AMERICAN VALUES

In the tenth chapter of the book of Acts there is a story of Peter having a vision in which he is told that the dietary laws he had lived under as part of his religion were no longer required. He was given authority to make a change in the way things were understood. It's been asked by what authority we can change the way marriage has traditionally been understood.

This passage of scripture is an excellent example of why we are here. It actually overlaps the two reasons that motivate me to work for marriage equality.

First of all, the point of the story of Peter's vision was not that he was going to be able to have bacon for breakfast. It was really about who could belong to his new community. Was it to be just for Jews like him, or could Gentiles be welcomed in? This was the first big conflict for Christianity, and we have struggled with it ever since—to whom can we open the door? The point of this story was that we can open the door to anyone. Anyone who chooses to be among us must be brought into the community.

So, as a Christian, I recognize the question about our gay and lesbian friends to be this same question. Are we at all right to exclude them? We have learned over the years that we are to open our doors to people of all ages, cultures, races, and genders, and now we are realizing that it means people of all gender identifications and sexual orientations. We are not to exclude

people if they want to be included. Welcoming people to our churches does not mean that they are invited in as long as they sit in the back. It means giving them the same freedom and responsibility as the other members of our church.

And this is where there is a clear overlap with American values. We have opened the doors of this nation to every kind of person. We have come to understand that we cannot look at any group as second-class citizens. We have had many second-class groups, but we eventually reject the idea that some of us are more American than others, or that some should have rights that others do not.

This is where my faith and my patriotism overlap. I support this bill because as a Christian I cannot exclude people because of the group they belong to. As an American I cannot exclude people because the group they belong to. In both the church I love and the nation I love there are to be no distinctions between the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, nor, I see now, between the gay and the straight.

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