

Dean Kanishka Raffel – Speech General Synod 2017

22.8 Scottish Episcopal Church

Across the Anglican communion churches are trying to work out how best to love people of diverse sexual orientation. This is important because all people are made in God's image; and God hates nothing that he has made. It is important because all people are to be valued honoured and loved not only because they are created in God's image but because of Christ's costly redeeming love for them. It is important because Christians have often failed to love same sex attracted people, making it difficult or impossible for them to hear and experience the welcome and power of Jesus in their lives. And it is important because same sex attracted people are our friends, our family members, our colleagues, members of our churches, and we might assume, members of this Synod.

Given that right up to today same sex attracted people can be subject to ridicule or treated with cruelty and in some places are regarded as criminals; and that the church has often failed to respond to them with compassion and support, some have thought that the best way to love our LGBT friends and family is to bring their relationships within the frame of marriage. Some gay people desire to have their relationships recognised in that way. Although it has not yet been comprehensively tested, it may be that this is the option preferred by our culture at large, and by some within our church. This is what the Scottish Episcopal Church did by vote of their Synod in June of this year. Unlike the American and Canadian churches who have nevertheless taken steps towards such a change, the Scottish Episcopal Church amended their Canon on Marriage to remove the definition that marriage is between a man and woman and added a new section that allows clergy to solemnise marriage between same sex couples. The Scottish Primus said "they are not just married, they are married in the sight of God".

This motion however expresses the view that this is a well intentioned but tragic misstep. It fails to love gay people by misunderstanding marriage. It fails to honour the Lord by rejecting his word. It fails to preserve the unity of the church which is founded on that word.

The statement of the Primus announcing the decision of the church refers to their own internal process of study, discussion and prayer. He also acknowledges that the decision

was painful for the 32% of clergy and 20% of laity who did not support it, and that the new reality of the church is a journey of reconciliation between those who welcomed the change and those who experience the decision as a form of exclusion, to use his word. However, this motion is not about the processes of the SEC. The Primus' statement acknowledges that the SEC is part of the Anglican Communion and that the Communion will have to make its own decision about whether it can embrace this change.

Hence this motion. Section 6 of the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia describes this church as being in communion with the Church of England in England and churches in communion with that church, so long as communion is consistent with the Fundamental Declarations. Section 3 of the Fundamental Declarations say that this church will ever obey the commands of Christ, teach his doctrine, administer his sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, follow and uphold His discipline and preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry.

This morning the Synod affirmed that it is the doctrine of this Church that marriage is the union of a man and a woman. It did the same in 2004 and 2010. This was reaffirmed as the doctrine of the church by the Primate in his Presidential Address, and he reminded us on Tuesday that at their consecration Bishops in our Church subscribe to the doctrine of the Book of Common prayer which of course, includes the form of the solemnisation of matrimony. Lambeth Resolution 1.10 from 1998 and the Statement of the Primates of the Anglican Communion in January 2016 all affirm the teaching of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church that marriage is the union of a man and woman. The consistency and catholicity of this view is no doubt attributable to the fact that this is the clear teaching of Jesus, for example in Matthew 19 when he quotes Genesis saying : "Haven't you read that at the beginning, the Creator 'made them male and female,' and, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Matthew 19, verses 4-6)

Marriage is a good gift of God. It is not given to the church, it is given to humankind. The church does not create marriage, and the church may not define marriage. The church receives marriage. As the Book of Common Prayer puts it, it was ordained first for the procreation of children to be brought up in the fear and instruction of the Lord; second for

the avoidance of sin; and third for the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other in prosperity and adversity.

But marriage has a theological and eschatological purpose as well as an ecclesial, social and procreative purpose. Marriage gives a picture of the glorious union of Christ with his church through the costly servant faithfulness of Christ the groom. Marriage anticipates the wedding feast of the Lamb, the consummation of all things, the new Creation.

Marriage is a good gift from God. But marriage is not ultimate. Marriage does not endure into the new creation; union with Christ endures. And so it is not marriage that the church is called to hold out to the world. Rather we hold out Christ. We hold him out by his gospel.

So when the church seeks to include within marriage same sex couples, it does so only by excluding them from Jesus teaching and purpose in marriage. The very people we seek to love and embrace, we separate from Christ. I can barely express how tragic this is.

Christ is known by his gospel word of truth. He rules his church by his word, and comes to us clothed in his gospel, as the reformers said. If we reject the *word* of Jesus, we separate ourselves *from* Jesus. We will fail to love our same sex attracted friends and neighbours and family if we purport to include them within marriage, while at the same time separating them from Christ.

Marriage is to give the world a picture of the redemptive purpose of Christ; the fruitful life of the Christian who is not married gives the world a picture of the sufficiency of Christ. Marriage is good but it is not ultimate; we are not completed by our marriage partners but by Christ; we were not made for that 'special someone' but for Christ; the soulmate in whom we find our rest, our home, our hope is not a marriage partner - indeed it would be cruel to require such a thing of another broken sinner like ourselves - the soulmate for whom we are made is Christ. Joined to Christ we are incorporated into his body - a global, cross-generational, multicultural and eternal family in which we experience life in the Spirit, life to the full.

So it is not marriage that we hold out to the world but Christ. There is no marital test for union with Christ - male and female, greek and jew, slave and free, married and single, straight or gay - we are justified by Christ through faith by grace.

To purport to offer marriage to couples of the same sex fails to honour the Lord by rejecting his word, and fails to love gay people by misunderstanding marriage, and separating them from the truth that Jesus taught.

You are asked to consider some amendments to this motion. They are not without merit and you may choose to accept them if you wish. But this motion brings to Synod's attention that the decision making of any church within our communion in this area, is a matter for the whole communion.

The Primus of Scotland in his announcement of their decision poses the question to the Anglican Communion whether a commitment to unity in diversity can embrace this change. The motion invites this Synod to express its opinion that the decision of the SEC is inconsistent with the teaching of Christ and therefore inconsistent with the Fundamental Declarations in s1-3 of our Constitution. The motion invites this Synod to express its opinion that section 6 of our Constitution requires us to acknowledge that a painful break in our communion with the SEC has emerged.

The unity of Christians and the fellowship of churches is created by the gospel. Unity however, does not mean uniformity. Unity in diversity has validity in the church; but it also has limits. Indeed, Scripture speaks of godly unity and ungodly unity; and of ungodly division and godly division.

The self-exalting of the Tower of Babel is an example of ungodly unity. The factionalism and personality cult of the Corinthian church is an example of ungodly division. In Ephesians Paul uses the image of the body to describe the church - each part doing its work, growing in love and knowledge, rooted in the faith and attaining to maturity - an example of godly unity.

And throughout the NT we find examples of painful but godly division. Paul confronts Peter, Galatians 2 says “when I saw that he was not acting in line with the truth of the gospel.” We do not have fellowship with Christ or with each other apart from fellowship in the truth of the gospel.

In the NT, the painful recognition of division is the road to joyful restoration. This is a motion of lament over a sister church of the Anglican Communion making a misstep in abandoning the teaching of Jesus and the doctrine of our church regarding marriage. It is a motion that acknowledges the impact of the decision of the SEC on our fellowship with them. And it is a motion that prays for a change, and the renewal of fellowship in the truth of the gospel.

I commend the motion to you.