There is a Word: Using a Queer Hermeneutic Toward Liberative and Prophetic Biblical Preaching

Dewayne L. Davis

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THERE IS A WORD:

USING A QUEER HERMENEUTIC

TOWARD LIBERATIVE AND PROPHETIC BIBLICAL PREACHING

by

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ABSTRACT

There Is A Word: Using a Queer Hermeneutic
Toward Liberative and Prophetic Biblical Preaching

by

DeWayne L. Davis

Preaching to, for, and about LGBTQ people is too often characterized by ambivalence, homophobia, and microaggressions couched as speaking truth in love. And yet, the biblical text includes themes, images, and stories with liberating and prophetic messages for LGBTQ people that include and affirm them within the body of Christ. This thesis argues that preachers can proclaim a liberating, prophetic word for the LGBTQ people within their congregations by using a queer hermeneutic, the intentional and conscious interpretation of the biblical text using the experience, information, and knowledge about LGBTQ people as the lens through which to bridge the world of the biblical text and the world of the contemporary church. Through a qualitative study of affirming sermons and surveying LGBTQ hearers’ experiences of affirming sermons, this thesis shows preachers how to use the marginalized perspective of LGBTQ people in their reading and interpretation of the Bible to make their preaching more liberating and prophetic.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGCMCC</td>
<td>All God’s Children Metropolitan Community Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer</td>
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Throughout my childhood and life in the church, I have regularly heard preachers and teachers warn congregants about the dangers of the tongue. Reminded often about the exhortations from the Letter of James about the tongue being “a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:9), many of us sought to be intentional about taming our tongues when we spoke to another. However, many preachers and congregants have not been so cautious with their language when it comes to how they describe or warn their hearers about homosexuality or non-conforming gender expression. Relying on an unexamined storehouse of biases, stereotypes, and suspicions about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) people, several faithful preachers and congregants have not been shy in using vile, demeaning religious and theological language about those whose sexualities and gender identities do not conform to the heterosexual and gender norms of the body.

The Church and LGBTQ People

Civil and human rights for LGBTQ people are contested in the public square most often using religious and theological language. Religious activists who consider homosexuality a sin from which people can be delivered often make their case against the acceptance of LGBTQ people using sin-talk that essentializes homosexuality as a
defilement of universal social and religious moral values.¹ When it comes to the conventional understanding that homosexuality should be rejected and stigmatized, Jennings maintain that “Christianity has been the conveyor and enforcer of homophobia both within Western Christianity and thence into Western culture generally.”² Heterosexuality is held up as the norm and ideal for sexuality and relationships and is reinforced by hundreds of years of received cultural and religious tradition and a particular reading and interpretation of biblical texts. Accordingly, heterosexism is embedded in our theological discourse, and preachers inadvertently allow or are unaware of theological constructs in their preaching that demean, negate, or invalidate the experiences of LGBTQ people within their congregations.

In the Church and in culture and politics, our discourse is saturated with anti-queer religious rhetoric that has become nearly synonymous with the Church’s view of homosexuality and LGBTQ people. It is rhetoric that paints LGBTQ people as a threat to “the very fabric of the United States because they want to celebrate, enjoy, adopt, and legitimate sinful, deviant behavior.”³ So accepted and expected is this approach that religious opponents of full inclusion of LGBTQ people rarely have to make a fully detailed or coherent theological argument. As Cobb maintains, when it comes to anti-queer religious language, “just nodding to the Bible’s words, in fact, just citing the

² Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., Plato or Paul? The Origins of Western Homophobia (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2009), 1.
location of sacred words from the Bible, will guarantee the strong, religious truth of any assertion one might have.”⁴ The tradition of the American religious jeremiad now regularly features preachers inveighing against the evils of homosexuality and pointing to LGBTQ people as evidence of the spiritual decay of the nation.

Because of the overwhelming presence of homophobia and anti-queer religious rhetoric, the voices, realities, and experiences of LGBTQ people have been largely missing from preaching. And to the extent LGBTQ people have been included, it has been as a topic, an afterthought, or an example of fallen humanity. Even preachers who mean well may inadvertently reinforce and promote theological constructs that have the potential to demean, negate, and invalidate the experience of those on the margins. Unfortunately, the prevailing images and stereotypes used historically to justify cultural and religious exclusion of LGBTQ people may be the most readily recalled and easily accessible to preachers attempting to understand the experience of LGBTQ people, especially if a preacher has minimal contact and relationships with them. A proclamation that starts with such a limited and biased view of LGBTQ people may result in the preacher relying on negative and demeaning stereotypes and assumptions in their effort to say something new and liberating.

Even when both affirming and non-affirming preachers address LGBTQ listeners indirectly, they often preach about homosexuality as a topic rather than addressing their LGBTQ hearers as members of the body of Christ who need a word from the Lord. Many preachers are reluctant to move beyond a superficial consideration of the lives and concerns of their LGBTQ hearers because they are uncertain or anxious about the impact

⁴ Cobb, God Hates Fags, 24.
of doing so, seeing the issue and LGBTQ people as a problem or finding themselves consistently unable to move beyond rhetorical tolerance of the LGBTQ people in their midst. Unfortunately, preachers who are anxious, or uncertain, or unsympathetic to the place and plight of LGBTQ people both in their congregations and in society often resort to homiletical silence or denigration. Homiletical silence or denigration of LGBTQ people reinforce the persistent bias and discrimination experienced by a historically oppressed group of people who have consistently sought meaning and community in the church.

The current Church has wrestled vigorously with its approach to homosexuality for more than sixty years. In 1955, theologian Derrick Sherwin Bailey published *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, in which, as part of the Church of England’s exploration of homosexuality as a theological issue, he studied the six texts that have been read and interpreted as prohibiting and rejecting homosexuality.\(^5\) It was a landmark in biblical interpretation, arguably the first time the Church undertook a study of homosexuality to understand the Church’s ministry to and about homosexuals and its influence on secular laws on homosexuality. While Bailey did not set out to write a pro-homosexual tome, he was sympathetic to the treatment of homosexuals and the Church’s role in encouraging intolerance and perpetuating “a great social injustice.”\(^6\) Not only did Bailey invite a re-reading of texts used to reject and stigmatize homosexuality, he invited

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the Church to discern its role in shaping laws and public opinion that harmed homosexuals.

Consequently, a focus on the six passages as well as the ongoing debate about homosexuality in the Church has resulted in proclamation on all sides that treats “homosexuality as an object of biblical discourse,” (i.e., “what does the Bible say about homosexuality”) with little or no regard for context, history, or biblical values. Non- affirming preachers rely exclusively on these texts to argue for stigmatization, rejection, and conversion of LGBTQ people, ignoring or avoiding more inclusive texts, choosing to read scripture presumptively with social and political opposition to homosexuality, and minimizing biblical values that encourage hospitality and lovingkindness toward those who are vulnerable. In contrast, affirming preachers who want to move away from homosexuality as an object of biblical discourse often rely on “homosexuality as a social location or perspective from which to read and interpret,” which, though well-meaning, may reinforce normative and essentialist constructions of sexuality, identity, and experiences and make scripture less authoritative in combatting homophobia. In both instances, there is little focus on the biblical values that should inform a faithful witness amid social and religious conflict.

While the perspectives and experiences of LGBTQ people can be a welcomed interruption of the perceived and assumed moral superiority of heterosexuality, liberating and prophetic readings must take place without locking in an “identitarian and

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apologetic” perspective that reduces the complexity of sexuality and identity to reductive binaries and categories and potentially misses the full, lived experiences of LGBTQ people. In the middle of this theological and homiletical tug-of-war are any number of faithful LGBTQ hearers and those who do not fit easy categories of identity hungry for good news but only finding themselves relegated to the margins because of silence, homophobia, or the best case scenario, anemic tolerance. The current state of reading, interpretation, and preaching leaves no “space to consider ‘others-not-thought-of’.”

The Problem of Homophobia

Homophobia has been called “the last respectable prejudice.” In this study, homophobia is treated not as a pathology or a psychological state but as a social and ideological project that rejects LGBTQ people and opposes their full human and civil rights within all parts of society. Specifically, for my purpose, homophobia is a sociological phenomenon, “characteristic of a social and cultural rejection and stigmatization of same-sex sexual practices.” Accordingly, homophobia is the province of people who arrive at the discussion and treatment of homosexuality with built-in biases and prejudices against LGBTQ people and oppose their acceptance and full

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10 Stewart, “LGBT/Queer Hermeneutic,” 290. Stewart’s phrase “others-not-thought-of” will be used throughout the study to highlight the aim of queer theology and interpretation to engage a range of minoritized and intersectional identities while avoiding reinforcing essentialist binaries and categories.


12 Jennings, Plato or Paul, 2.

13 Jennings, Plato or Paul, 1.
inclusion in the social, political, and religious institutions of society. The Bible becomes one tool in the homophobes’ arsenal to support what they conclude is culturally and religiously self-evident: that same-sex sexual practice and relationships are inherently sinful and undeserving of cultural and religious approval and permission.

Churches and their congregants, especially those who have worked on being tolerant and accepting of their LGBTQ members and visitors, take umbrage at being described as homophobic and are likely to protest that they do not advocate hatred or violence against LGBTQ people. However, their active or implicit rejection and stigmatization of LGBTQ people are likely to have the same effect: oppression, discrimination, and sometimes violence against queer people.\(^\text{14}\) Further, LGBTQ people are often subjected to rejection by their families or destructive conversion therapy encouraged and promoted by their churches and religious leaders who consider homosexuality and trans identities as sinful and changeable. In fact, Brent Childers, an evangelical leader who used to promote conversion therapy but renounced the practice and apologized for his role in legitimizing it, reports that “loving parents have been forced between either rejecting their church’s interpretation of certain Bible passages, and thus alienating themselves from their church communities, or rejecting the children they love. Sadly, many have chosen to reject their own children.”\(^\text{15}\) Many LGBTQ people

\(^{14}\) Violence against LGBTQ people is not solely a product of homophobia. Race, sex, and class are also implicated in the violence perpetrated against LGBTQ people, especially trans women of color and women regardless of their sexuality or gender expression. For a discussion of the role race, class, and gender play in anti-queer violence, see Doug Meyer, *Violence Against Queer People: Race, Class, Gender, and the Persistence of Anti-LGBT Discrimination* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

\(^{15}\) See this testimony and the testimony of survivors of family and religious rejection at the prompting of churches and religious leaders in Mitchell Gold and Mindy Drucker, eds., *Crisis: 40 Stories Revealing the Personal, Social, and Religious Pain and Trauma of Growing Up Gay in America* (Austin, TX: Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2008).
remain fearful and suspicious of faith communities and religious organizations because of this kind of spiritual and religious rejection and stigmatization.

Preachers and congregants have enormous power in setting the terms of acceptance or rejection of LGBTQ people, and to the extent that their practices and rhetoric serve to bolster the social and cultural rejection and stigmatization of LGBTQ people, they are being homophobic. If preaching reinforces prejudicial attitudes and actions toward LGBTQ people and “contributes to personal, institutional, and societal discrimination of LGBTQI individuals and the LGBTQI community as a whole,” it is homophobic. Preachers who think tolerance and acceptance are good enough would do well to consider how their proclamations fall short of creating a safe space for LGBTQ people and may be contributing to a state of affairs they do not intend.

Homophobia is evidenced and reinforced in particular readings and interpretations of Scripture. For instance, in homophobic readings of Genesis 1 or Paul’s view of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, many preachers and religious people predisposed to reject and stigmatize same-sex eroticism claim vindication in their conclusion that homosexuality runs counter to “God’s creative intention for human sexuality” often without giving serious consideration to the historical context of those texts or our distance from a pre-modern social scientific understanding of sexuality. Even when readers and interpreters confront the mitigating evidence of the context, history, and

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opacity of biblical context in making the case against affirming LGBTQ people, they resort to the years of moral teaching tradition that declares homosexuality as contrary to the will of God.\textsuperscript{19} Unfortunately, when readers allow the rules and assumptions of the pre-modern context of the Bible overshadow the radical, liberating message of the gospel, they may unintentionally render Church and theology abusive toward those who do not conform to unrealistic standards of purity and holiness.\textsuperscript{20} Preaching that starts with this premise, unable and unwilling to see the fullness of the lives, questions, and journeys of LGBTQ listeners, rejects unquestioningly queer sexuality as morally acceptable. Such preaching lands on queer bodies in the most oppressive and destructive ways.

The Roman Catholic Church has gone even further in creating the conditions for a preaching that not only cannot consider the perspectives of LGBTQ people of faith in Christian proclamation but that also leaves no room for a dialogue about the worth and dignity of queer listeners. The first Vatican document to address homosexuality, \textit{On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons}, declares that a same-sex orientation should be seen as an objective disorder and that same-sex sexual practice should be seen as “an intrinsic moral evil.”\textsuperscript{21} What is the word for a people deemed objectively disordered? What is the good news for same-sex couples, especially married same-sex couples, whose intimate sexual behavior is deemed an intrinsic moral evil? How many preachers, both well-meaning and non-affirming, seeking to do no harm, are influenced by this

\textsuperscript{19} Hays, “Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies,” 11.
\textsuperscript{20} Russell Pregeant, \textit{Reading the Bible for all the Wrong Reasons} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 82.
framework when having to confront homosexuality or the LGBTQ people in their congregations?

Unfortunately, many affirming preachers in open and affirming congregations have also become influenced by heteronormative readings of the Bible or the prevailing wisdom of years of moral teaching that rejects LGBTQ people. Consequently, these preachers assume that to affirm LGBTQ people and to counter the prevailing homophobia in religious discourse means that they must be “nonbiblical, prebiblical, or postbiblical.”

Sadly, this approach only reinforces the tendency to see homosexuality as a topic or issue and to see LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” as outside of the body of Christ. It further supports the myth that LGBTQ identities and Christianity are mutually exclusive categories and that the existence and embrace of LGBTQ identities presuppose the absence of faith. It would be a mistake and theological malpractice to assume that to simply refuse to read the biblical text at all is enough to counter homophobic preaching. Homiletical silence and hermeneutic incuriosity that leave the questions, concerns, and interests of LGBTQ people confined to spaces outside of the Bible or the Church are fertile ground for engrafting onto the body of Christ destructive homophobia.

Homiletical silence has the effect of reinforcing the idea that homosexuality, and thus, LGBTQ people, are a problem to be avoided. Sneed maintains that much of theological discourse, including liberation theology, continue to treat LGBTQ people as

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22 Jennings, Plato or Paul, 9.
“problem people . . . they are both problematic and bound by problems.” All too often, LGBTQ people are mentioned explicitly in sermons when preachers want to discuss promiscuity, AIDS, mental illness, or the latest anti-gay bashing or cultural flashpoint. Preaching that is unable or unwilling to consider the fullness of LGBTQ lives and experiences will be stilted and superficial, seeing LGBTQ people as abstractions and archetypes, mute and faceless issues to be debated and discussed rather than “concrete realities” with needs, concerns, and questions. There is much more to the lived experience of LGBTQ people than the latest cultural or religious newsflash or how particular faith communities decide to read and interpret six biblical passages to argue for their exclusion from the life of the Church. There are other spiritual and theological concerns for LGBTQ people than the sinfulness of sexuality. Societal and government discrimination is not the last word on justice and equality for LGBTQ persons. HIV/AIDS and promiscuity are not the only risks and challenges for queer life.

Preachers who choose a homophobic reading and interpretation of the Bible but protest that they are not demeaning or demonstrating bigotry often counter that they “love the sinner, but hate the sin.” “Love the sinner, hate the sin” is a woefully inadequate formulation for dealing with the presence of LGBTQ people in the body of Christ. It is a non sequitur, which seeks to mask the rejection and stigmatization of LGBTQ people in theologically meaningless rhetoric. It’s a defensive posture that hopes the assertion of love for LGBTQ people will mask the refusal to accept or include LGBTQ people within

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24 Sneed, Representations of Homosexuality, 11.
the Church. It is most often asserted by those who maintain that they are tolerant of their queer congregants and hearers. Yet, “love the sinner, hate sin” reveals the limits of tolerance. In reality, these leaders and churches who “love the sinner, hate the sin” are, in actuality, declaring that the so-called “sin” of sexuality and gender expression will not be tolerated.

The Problem of Tolerance

Preachers in congregations who declare themselves to be welcoming and affirming but are reluctant to speak directly to LGBTQ hearers or preach prophetically for justice for LGBTQ people highlight the limits of tolerance for LGBTQ people. Each of these approaches reinforces the status quo of silence and ignorance, asking LGBTQ to expect only to “be seen but not necessarily to be known in any meaningful way.” If LGBTQ people are not fully known, or if what is known about LGBTQ people is limited or incomplete or just plain false, then what exactly is being tolerated? Can tolerance bear the weight of new information or a reality different from what was previously “known” or expected?

LGBTQ people who thought that they were being tolerated have learned the limits of tolerance. Tolerance has not been successful in making room for the entirety of the

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LGBTQ experience nor has it been useful in facilitating intimate knowledge of the full contours of queer life. The persistence of homophobia suggests that what has been tolerated may have been an image of LGBTQ life that maintains the privileges of heterosexism and heterosexuality as the norm. How many conflicts have arisen in church settings when what and who was tolerated for a time became intolerable? It is cruel irony that LGBTQ people may never know what about them is intolerable until that moment when they do something that goes beyond what the heterosexual or cisgender majority thought was acceptable, such as getting married to someone of the same sex, or seeking to be ordained, or dressing in a way that conforms to their gender identity. For LGBTQ people, tolerance breaks down when at the moment they chose to live fully and authentically as who they are they are shown that they are not considered to be fully a part of the body of Christ.

Tolerance is a largely passive state for the congregation, allowing LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” to be allowed in without prohibition and also without an affirmative act by the congregation to know, respect, or be transformed by their presence. As Walters convincingly argues, “tolerance cannot do the work of deeper recognition because it is inevitably fixated on a (distancing) acceptance of the (intruding) other.” Respect, recognition, and affirmation are precisely how members of the congregation know that they are a part of the body. Especially in light of the persistence of


27 Sneed, Representations of Homosexuality, 83.

28 Walters, The Tolerance Trap, 265.

29 Walters, The Tolerance Trap, 10.
homophobia and heterosexism that repels, rejects, and stigmatizes LGBTQ people, mere tolerance ends up not being “an embrace but a resigned shrug, or worse, that air kiss of faux familiarity that barely covers up the shiver of disgust.”

Preaching out of tolerance is likely to be patronizing and superficial, evincing a failure by the preacher to know and engage the contextual realities of their hearers and congregants.

The Problem of Microaggressions

Preaching that is unable to bear witness to the fullness of queer life or that reinforces the status quo of heterosexism risks foreclosing on the possibility of a word that speaks to the depth and breadth of the human condition. Even more destructive than the risk of missing an opportunity to speak life in the midst of fear and death is the possibility of microaggressions creeping into our sermons and rhetoric. Preachers should be aware of how all of us have been shaped by ignorance, stereotypes, and epithets about LGBTQ people that have saturated the culture and the media. Such casual targeting of LGBTQ people furnished us with implicit biases that show up in microaggressions that we do not intend.

Preachers who are unsure or insecure about sexuality or anxious about the fallout from speaking prophetically about LGBTQ inclusion and affirmation are susceptible to microaggressions, inadvertently communicating “messages that are insulting, invalidating, and subtly denigrating to others based on their . . . sexual identities.” The culture has furnished us with a storehouse of stereotypes and epithets that, if not

30 Walters, The Tolerance Trap, 2.

intentionally confronted and excised from our language and consciousness, may lead to microaggressive communication. Intentionally or not, in public and religious spaces, some people use heterosexist and transphobic language to describe LGBTQ people; express their discomfort and disapproval of LGBTQ people unprompted; describe queer sexualities and trans identities as abnormal or pathological; or use insensitive and inappropriate words and names and questions about the LGBTQ experience.\textsuperscript{32} The impact on LGBTQ people of this kind of microaggression is well-documented: denigration, fragmentation, and compartmentalization of the self.\textsuperscript{33} Knowing their LGBTQ hearers gives preachers an opportunity to avoid communicating messages they do not intend.

**Preaching and Queer People**

Is there a word for queer seekers within newly welcoming and affirming communities of faith? Given the current environment of silence, homophobia, microaggressions, and anemic tolerance to and about LGBTQ people, how can preachers craft liberating and prophetic sermons that include and affirm LGBTQ people within the body of Christ? The biblical text includes themes, images, and stories with liberating and prophetic messages for LGBTQ people that embrace and affirm them within the body of Christ. To proclaim a word for LGBTQ seekers, returners, or faithful, preachers will have to proclaim a gospel that reflects the inclusion of LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” in the body of Christ, moving from silence or denigration to affirmation and

\textsuperscript{32} Sanders and Yarber, *Microaggressions in Ministry*, 85-89.

\textsuperscript{33} Sanders and Yarber, *Microaggressions in Ministry*, 92.
celebration. Preachers who want to ease the anxiety, conflict, ambivalence, and indifference that their LGBTQ hearers experience in religious spaces can choose to be more intentional and conscious about what and how they preach to LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of.”

I maintain preachers can proclaim a word for the LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” within their congregations by using a queer hermeneutic. Using Kim’s examination of an Asian American hermeneutic as a model for the approach to this study and her description of hermeneutics as the “art of understanding,” I define a queer hermeneutic as the intentional and conscious interpretation of the biblical text using the experience, information, and knowledge about LGBTQ people as the lens through which to bridge the world of the biblical text and the world of the contemporary church, which includes LGBTQ people. A queer hermeneutic or understanding will help the preacher remain open to recognizing and experiencing the revelation of God found in all the members of the congregation, including the marginalized queer hearer in the pews.

Using the action/reflection model, this study considers the insights and approaches to liberation and prophetic preaching of Justo and Katherine Gonzalez, James H. Harris, and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale to assess the sermons of preachers who have addressed LGBTQ people within their congregations and to explore ways preachers can use a queer hermeneutic in reading and interpreting the text for biblical preaching. A queer hermeneutic is an invitation to see LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” as more than a problem and as more than their problems. This study will show preachers how to address the marginalized perspectives of LGBTQ people in their interpretation

and preaching, offer strategies for a future-oriented preaching that seeks transformation, and provide examples of sermons that have a queer hermeneutic that is liberating and prophetic.

Preachers and churches can no longer avoid the queer people in their midst. Spaces other than religious are making room for LGBTQ people. The speed with which LGBTQ people have secured protection for their civil and human rights as well as social and cultural inclusion in many institutions of national life astounds. It happened so fast it makes sense that the Church and religious institutions confidently mired in a self-evident heteronormative understanding of their claims and practices would be caught unprepared for such progress. The issue of homosexuality in the Church simply was not a pressing concern for churches and religious institutions in the United States prior to the 1970’s. After the Stonewall Uprising in 1969, new questions and challenges to accepted norms and understanding about the place and prospects of LGBTQ people confronted every major institution, and the Church was not immune.

However, the challenge didn’t just arise among the LGBTQ citizens’ agitation for civil and human rights. The challenge also came from heterosexuals whose views of LGBTQ people begin to change, especially in light of the LGBTQ community’s emphasis on “coming out” to family and friends about their identities. The impact on public opinion of LGBTQ people in the United States cannot be overstated: Seventy-three percent of respondents to a recent Gallup Poll believe gay and lesbian relationships between consenting adults should be legal.35 Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%)

believe that marriages between same-sex couples should be recognized as valid with the same rights as marriages between opposite-sex couples.\textsuperscript{36} An overwhelming majority of respondents (93\%) believe that gays and lesbians should have equal rights as non-gays and non-lesbians in employment.\textsuperscript{37} How are these views reflected in the preaching week after week?

Given that heterosexual congregants are becoming increasingly comfortable with the presence and participation of LGBTQ people in their congregations as well as more willing to join their LGBTQ citizens in agitation for changes in law and policy to protect the civil rights of LGBTQ people, it should come as no surprise that these members would expect preaching to reflect this understanding of the worth and dignity or acceptance of LGBTQ people. One survey showed that approximately 36\% of respondents report that they have become more accepting of lesbians and gays compared to just 7\% reporting that they have become less accepting.\textsuperscript{38} Even the view of LGBTQ clergy indicates the acceptance of LGBTQ people with 72\% of respondents reporting that they believe gays and lesbians should be hired as clergy compared to 23\% responding that they should not.\textsuperscript{39} These increasingly positive data points create an opportunity for preachers to be more prophetic and pastoral in their proclamation around the LGBTQ people in their congregations.

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\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Gallup, “Gay and Lesbian Rights.”
\textsuperscript{39} Gallup, “Gay and Lesbian Rights.”
\end{flushright}
Larger religious bodies are also responding to the change in public opinion about LGBTQ people. Since 2009, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Presbyterian Church USA have joined the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Association in embracing gay clergy by allowing ordination into all ministerial roles and eliminating the requirement that gay clergy remain celibate in order to serve in parishes. These same denominations have either affirmed marriage between same-sex couples or allow local churches to bless same-sex unions, with the Episcopal Church approving new liturgy for blessing same-sex weddings. These developments in LGBTQ equality and civil rights will make these churches more inviting to LGBTQ people who are looking for welcoming and affirming communities of faith.

While denominations, especially Mainline Protestant denominations, have engaged in formal discussions about the place of LGBTQ people in their respective organizations, most of the change and conflict is happening in the local church. Sociologists of religion maintain that the congregation is a “significant social setting” which “consistently influences more Americans than any other voluntary social organization.” Accordingly, the congregation has a greater impact on the acceptance or rejection of LGBTQ people in the local church than denominational bodies. It is where

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42 For a survey of the research demonstrating that congregations serve as a significant social setting determining the place of LGBTQ people in congregations see Andrew L. Whitehead, “Religious Organizations and Homosexuality: The Acceptance of Gays and Lesbians in American Congregations,” *Review of Religious Research* 55, no. 2 (June 2013): 297-317.
members are influenced on how to talk and think about LGBTQ people and how congregations are socialized to engage or not with LGBTQ people in their churches.

With congregations as the loci of debate about and engagement with LGBTQ people, clergy play a critical role in using their moral imagination to help their hearers and congregants to envision how to both see and include LGBTQ people within the body of Christ. However, clergy report that they are anxious about speaking to and about LGBTQ people in their congregations and are hesitant to wade in on homosexuality even as a topic for fear of conflict and defections. Because of their anxiety and hesitation, clergy are less likely to take a firm stand on homosexuality, seeing it as divisive, disruptive, and distracting. Even those clergy inclined to support full inclusion of LGBTQ people within their congregations express fear and ambivalence about raising the topic in their preaching, approaching “the issue in a pragmatic rather than prophetic way.” Fear and ambivalence make it challenging for preachers to overcome or guard against silence, homophobia, or microaggressive language.

The frames that clergy used to talk about homosexuality not only reveal their ambivalence but also demonstrate why it remains a challenge to preach in a way that sees LGBTQ people as an essential, welcomed part of the body of Christ. Congregants were far more likely to hear the preacher speak about homosexuality as a topic and in largely pragmatic ways, focusing on conflict, schism, and membership issues. The dominant

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44 Olson and Cadge, “Talking about Homosexuality,” 153, 158.

45 Olson and Cadge, “Talking about Homosexuality,” 163.

46 Olson and Cadge, “Talking about Homosexuality,” 159.
frame clergy used to talk about homosexuality was denominational rather than congregational, describing homosexuality as a conflict for their denominations rather than as an opportunity to make their church more welcoming. This indicates that clergy were more concerned about the debate about gay and lesbian rights inside the Church rather than in the local church and the broader society.\textsuperscript{47} The second most prevalent frame used to discuss homosexuality was the push for rights, justice, and equality for LGBTQ people in the broader society even though clergy were far more likely to talk about the place of LGBTQ in the Church than in the society. Accordingly, there is little coherence in preachers’ approach to preaching to their LGBTQ hearers, leaving their congregants struggling to understand how to be in community with the LGBTQ people in their midst.

Also, clergy that wanted to speak more clearly and forcefully about LGBTQ people report feeling uncertain about homosexuality as a topic, expressing doubts about the veracity of their personal opinions about whether homosexuality is innate or chosen, about the nature of same-sex attraction, and about how to act or respond to the LGBTQ people in their midst.\textsuperscript{48} This lack of clergy confidence about the issue has resulted in clergy seeing scripture and denominational and congregational bodies as major constraints on their ability to speak prophetically.\textsuperscript{49} Uncertainty and feeling constrained show up in the language clergy use when talking and preaching about homosexuality.

\textsuperscript{47} Olson and Cadge, “Talking about Homosexuality,” 159.


\textsuperscript{49} Cadge et al., “Uncertainty in Clergy’s Perspectives,” 380.
Olson and Cadge found that an overwhelming majority of Protestant clergy (85%) “discussed issues related to sexuality through the language of ‘homosexuality,’ the ‘homosexual’ issue, or the ‘gay and lesbian’ issue” rather than using more personal or universal language.\(^{50}\) While clergy choice of language sometimes demonstrates attempts to personalize the issue by referring to LGBTQ persons, clergy largely stick with the clinical, pragmatic language when discussing LGBTQ people, always using “homosexuality” or “homosexual” issue, which serves to conceal inadvertently both the identities and humanity of the people to which the “issue” refers.

Preachers who are afraid, uncertain, or hesitant to proclaim a liberating, prophetic word to people within their congregations run the risk of missing the opportunity to inspire the moral imagination of their hearers. If a preacher is unable or reluctant to speak inclusively about LGBTQ people, their heterosexual listeners may have only the myths and caricatures of a homophobic religious tradition to rely on in their estimation of LGBTQ people in the pews. Can preachers use their sermons to help their listeners imagine a different, more affirming and inclusive space? To stoke that imagination, Thomas invites preachers to use their moral imagination . . . that is, their ability “in the midst of the chaotic experiences of life and existence, to grasp and share God’s abiding wisdom and ethical truth in order to benefit the individual and common humanity.”\(^{51}\) A queer hermeneutic may give preachers an opportunity to exercise their own and their congregations’ moral imagination in ways that create a beloved space for all concerned.

\(^{50}\) Olson and Cadge, “Talking about Homosexuality,” 163.

\(^{51}\) Frank A. Thomas, *How to Preach a Dangerous Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), xl, 3.
Silence, homophobia, microaggressions, or mere tolerance characterizes the status quo of preaching to, for, and about LGBTQ people and the theological language about LGBTQ hearers in the culture. These approaches create what Wendy Farley calls a “logic of domination” in the church whereby social and political binaries, theological certitude and tradition, and the “objective truth” of the Christian narrative make no room for the experiences of those driven away from the church because of their sexuality or gender identity. Preachers may not even realize just how much hurt and dismay their LGBTQ hearers are possibly bringing into the worship setting. As Farley so aptly describes:

“The world is full to overflowing with pain. It is a relentless source of dismay for a person of faith to struggle with the omnipresence of radical, destructive suffering. But for the source of suffering to come from the church and be justified by its Scripture and traditions is a kind of toxic, crushing pain that is hard to endure . . . When the church withholds divine love, where can we go to learn our true name? We can run away from home. We can create new family and identity. But we will forever be defrauded of the intimate nurture of our original family. Our first language will always be lies and danger.”

This is the atmosphere that a logic of domination has created for many LGBTQ people in Church. And it locks in the status quo for a congregation in which LGBTQ people can never be truly and fully known because heterosexuality and a gender binary remain the norm by which those on the margins are measured and excluded. The preacher has an opportunity to break the cycle of implicating God and the Bible in stigmatizing and ostracizing God’s LGBTQ beloved and to build a truly beloved community in which all God’s children can encounter a God determined to be known.


If our proclamation is little more than a reflection of or a concession to the prevailing political and ideological discourse about a marginal population, preaching loses its role as a facilitator and conduit for God’s self-disclosure in human speech. If preachers do not have anything affirming or liberating to say to or about LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of,” then a normative, essentialist approach to sexuality, identity, and experience will prevail such that members of the body will be unable to fully be the body of Christ. A queer hermeneutic can help preachers move from the pragmatic to the prophetic, giving preachers the confidence to engage their fear, uncertainty, and indecision about the word for their LGBTQ listeners and “others-not-thought-of.”

Preaching remains a reliable means by which to remind those who have been relegated to the margins of the community of faith that they, too, are beloved members of the body of Christ. In making the case for a more intimate, mutually satisfying preaching experience for both preacher and listener, Rose maintains that “when personal experiences are validated and encouraged, not discounted or ridiculed, worshipers begin to risk listening to and articulating the sounds deep within their own hearts, even the echoes and memories of abuse and pain.”54 What are the relevant questions that queer people are asking about God? What is the good news for “others-not-thought-of?” Even if heterosexism and a binary gender presentation are the operating norms for a community of faith, can those who follow the way of Jesus imagine what life is like for those relegated to the margins? Can they be transformed by proclamations that are fully

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conversant with the reality and experiences of sexualities and gender identities different from their own?

While there can be honest debate and disagreement about how to read and interpret Scripture, the commandment to love has always held out the possibility of making space and opportunity for testimonies about one’s experience of an encounter with God. Preaching that ignores, targets, assaults, or dismisses the experience of LGBTQ people in service to the promulgation of homophobia in the Church is a betrayal of the call and purpose of the body of Christ. However, it will not be enough just to make preaching prophetic and transformative for LGBTQ people who, for too long, have found themselves at best unseen and at worst denigrated during the preaching moment. It will not be enough to just get preachers to intentionally avoid silence, homophobia, and microaggressions in their preaching. My hope is that preachers will reclaim a proclamation so faithful that all hearers will be transformed in the hearing and inspired to operate with a moral imagination that both sees and is shaped by the presence of all God’s children regardless of race, sex, gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation.
CHAPTER 2
GOD, QUEERNESS, AND BEING

Can preachers’ proclamation be so faithful and so effective that hearers will be transformed in the hearing and inspired to operate with a moral imagination that sees, affirms, and includes all God’s children regardless of race, sex, gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation? There is no easy answer but surely the gospel has room for all God’s children even when we fail to make room for them in our churches and in our preaching. Over the years, preachers have wrestled with a range of issues and were confronted by diverse members of the body of Christ such that they have had to reconsider outdated biblical treatment of and discriminatory biblical rhetoric about people historically relegated to the margins (e.g., women, divorced couples, and African-Americans). LGBTQ people have become one of the latest groups of marginalized people in the Church agitating for a more affirming and inclusive reading and interpretation of the sacred text as part of their struggle for full civil and human rights.

Many LGBTQ people come into worship with trepidation and a lot of questions. For some, it is the last stop on a journey away from religion for good or an attempt to avoid or flee religious insult or violence. For others, it is another step on a winding journey of hope, suspicion, and resignation, wondering if what the frightening and intolerant things that church people have said about them is true or just the unquestioned acceptance of divine condemnation of same-sex sexual behavior. A few simply show up with family and friends with little or no expectation that church folk have anything good
to say about queer people. If, however, throughout the worship experience it is not easy to discern a church’s posture toward LGBTQ people, the preaching moment often becomes the moment of clarity. Preachers are most often the heralds of the church’s approach, good or bad, to LGBTQ people in their pews.

All too often, even if a preacher expresses tolerance or even affirmation of their LGBTQ hearers, the bar remains low. Anecdotally, many LGBTQ people in a range of churches are often satisfied to go unseen, unnamed, and unacknowledged as queer by a preacher as long as they are not called out and vilified in the proclamation.¹ Is the best we can hope for in the proclamation of the Word of God is that preachers either ignore their hearers or simply not vilify a certain segment of their hearers? Regardless of a preacher’s theological understanding of same-sex sexual behavior, can we assume that preachers take their ethical obligations seriously enough that they will not use abusive and manipulative language to demean and exclude certain people?² If preachers began with the assumption that God’s LGBTQ people are created in the image of God and fully known as they are, what would a redemptive encounter with God through the Word of God look like for LGBTQ hearers?

I am not expecting preachers to focus solely on the concerns and contexts of their LGBTQ listeners at the expense of others or at the expense of a deep engagement with the biblical text. Rather, I am inviting preachers to take seriously the concerns and

¹ In pastoral care settings with queer people who regularly attend non-affirming churches with their families, this is often the reason stated for remaining in a church that is theologically homophobic.

context of their LGBTQ listeners as the preacher engages the world and context of the
text and to draw their LGBTQ listeners into conversation with the text.\(^3\) It will not do for
the preacher to attempt to bring the Word alive in our midst for all of his or her other
listeners, but leave LGBTQ listeners at the mercy of a biblical context in which
homosexuality is only a marginal concern and advocacy for gay rights in our time finds
no support.\(^4\) Yet, preachers have the option of going beyond traditional or normative
readings and interpretations of the text to bring those who have been rejected or ignored
into conversation with the text. As described by Simpson, the implication of taking on
this approach can create a more informed and empathetic proclamation with LGBTQ
people and “others-not-thought-of” in mind:

> We owe it to the congregation to be broadly exposed and ever expanding in our
view of the kingdom of God. For many people in our congregation, we are the
inspired informant . . . The great and dangerous dance that the preacher is called
to lead recognizes that while we speak most authentically from our knowledge
and experience of God, our work is also about liberating the gospel from the
confines of language that deny that existence, presence, and participation of those
who are not ‘me.’ The gospel may be one story, but that story is lifted by a variety
of voices and vessels.\(^5\)

Yet, that gospel story has been jealously guarded and selectively read to exclude.
The use of the Bible, specifically the use of the few verses sardonically referred to as the
“clobber passages,” to condemn, convert, or exclude LGBTQ people have led a few

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within the LGBTQ community and some progressive people of faith to avoid relying on the Bible for preaching a word to LGBTQ people. The history of interpretation and the disputed inclusion of LGBTQ people within churches and denominations have resulted in the treatment of sexuality, sexual orientation, and LGBTQ people as topics to be addressed rather than as members of the church “struggling with the manifestations of the human condition.” There is a liberating message for LGBTQ people within the biblical text that can be examined and proclaimed by choosing a hermeneutical focus which sees the fullness of the queer hearer in light of the gospel claims about justice, liberation, neighborliness, and beloved community.

It is often the case that when people confront difference and otherness that make them uncomfortable, segregation is a seductive solution. We want the safety and comfort of living in proximity with only those who look, act, and believe as we do. The Church is not immune to this seduction. Preaching is not immune to this seduction and can serve as the rhetorical and theological justification for excluding others. In this way, preaching can both domesticate the radicality of God’s grace and reinforce the status quo of silence and indifference about those who have been relegated to the margins.

Jesus’ own preaching did not shrink from the reality of difference. Rather, Jesus’ preaching shook the foundation of a religious and political system mired in exclusion and an honor/shame system. His teachings, parables, and proclamation of the good news to the poor, the captives, and the oppressed obliterated expected and accepted categories

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that defined who was included and excluded from places and institutions that provided safety and belonging. Many of Jesus’ hearers responded positively to his message, especially because they felt the impact of his liberating and inclusive message immediately. As a consequence, people of different social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds could see themselves as a part of God’s kingdom without being required to leave any part of their identities behind.

Even as the Gospels provide accounts of the content of Jesus’ teaching and preaching by relaying the words attributed to Jesus, the evangelists who wrote the Gospels also provide colorful descriptions of what people thought of what they were hearing: they were amazed and astonished at this teaching (cf. Matt 7:28-29; Luke 4:32; Mark 1:22). His rhetoric was different, and the effect dramatic and immediate. Clearly, Jesus did not rely on or feel compelled to use the values, rhetoric, or commitments of the empire or the religious establishment in proclaiming the kingdom of God. His proclamation was not conditioned by the world’s system of domination and oppression or its lack of imagination about God’s diverse humanity. His words were not controlled for the purpose of promulgating the myths and narratives of national purpose and greatness.

Preaching with a queer hermeneutic gives us an opportunity to free our rhetoric and proclamation from the values, rhetoric, and commitments of a world that relies too much on the authority of assimilation, classification, and categorization to make sense of difference. It is our attempt to be faithful to Jesus’ expansive, liberating gospel so that we can be heralds of an invitation “to return to a more fully realized anticipation of the kingdom, which is not a return to the previous or the same, but to the new and the future,
since the Church is to be the sign of what is to come.”

8 This kind of preaching is an invitation to recapture the radicality of God’s grace, recognizing that we may have historically placed too much emphasis on being theologically orthodox rather than being surprised and transformed by Jesus’ scandalous liberating and prophetic gospel.

In Jesus’ ministry, the radical nature of his proclamation was revealed both in its content and context. Jesus confronted and addressed the range of manifestations of the human condition, concerning himself with the spiritual, physical, material, and social wellbeing of those he encountered regardless of age, sex, or ethnicity. In the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:1-12) and his blessings and woes (Lk. 6:20-26) Jesus named the various conditions and situations to which he proclaimed good news. In his parables, slaves, widows, farmers, merchants, laborers, and many others found themselves named and called out for the expressed purpose of describing the advent of God’s reign and their potential participation in it. Through Jesus, God was encountered. Preachers can bring this biblical encounter with the human condition to bear on our proclamation to LGBTQ people seeking a liberating encounter.

In the preaching task, God discloses God’s self and what God expects of humanity by the power of the Holy Spirit in the reading of Scripture and the preaching of the text.9 Accordingly, God is enfleshed within humanity through biblical metaphors that

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9 Charles L. Bartow, God’s Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).
communicate what God is like by looking at the experiences, good and bad, of humans.\textsuperscript{10} Through preaching, we bear witness to the conviction that “God is both transcendentally and immanently in relationship with humanity” in the doctrine of the \textit{imago Dei}.\textsuperscript{11}

Preachers are responsible for helping all of their listeners become aware of this relationship with God so they can encounter the God of the Bible and engage in dialogue with a God determined to self-disclose to the creation.

If our proclamation is God’s human speech, God using preachers’ voices, minds, and willingness to bear witness to both God’s unconditional love for the creation and God’s determination to self-disclose, is it possible that that revelation would be speech that kills the spirit of a particular people, especially LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of?” Even in the naming of what preachers believe to be sin, is the gospel to be a loose imitation of the angry, take-no-prisoners style of discourse that characterizes the political and ideological speech of talk radio and cable news? It is disheartening that so much of preaching today reflects the way we talk to each other in the public square as if we are more desperate to win a political argument than to proclaim the good news. How then does the preacher proclaim the gospel without letting the tenor and texture of current discourse crowd out God’s human speech?

Even if preachers are unwilling to affirm the LGBTQ listener in their congregation, it is possible to share the gospel in a way that does not target and condemn LGBTQ people. First, do no harm. This is an ethical principle that spans a range of


vocations and environments, recognizing the power we all have to harm others. One way that preachers can craft and deliver sermons following the ethical principle of doing no harm is asking, “What is the good news?” Even before preachers consider using a queer hermeneutic in their preaching, they can possibly mitigate against a harmful, dehumanizing proclamation that singles out a particular people by first choosing to do no harm and offering good news.

Granted, this a very low bar for proclamation, and yet, a lot of preaching fails to meet it. Unfortunately, there are many preachers who are unaware that there language is filled with microaggressions that insult, ignore, or demean LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” in their congregations. It should come as no surprise that preachers who engage in sin-talk or who are anxious about what is appropriate or inappropriate to say about homosexuality may intentionally or inadvertently use language that insults, ignores, or demeans certain hearers in their congregation.

For preachers who are anxious about what to say about homosexuality or what to say to the LGBTQ hearer, they can begin by being more intentional about ridding their language of microaggressions that arise out of seeing LGBTQ people only as abstractions or topics or problems to be solved. If LGBTQ people are viewed as topics, abstractions, or problems to be solved for the preacher, it is a short move from speaking about sexuality in ways that are superficial or simplistic to speaking about LGBTQ people as caricatures of sexual sin rather than as human beings who experience a range of feelings and life passages of the human condition. Amid the debate and disagreement about the place of LGBTQ people in the Church or the agitation and advocacy for civil rights for LGBTQ people in the public square, LGBTQ people within the Church and those hoping
for good news are living, searching, struggling, thriving, and existing just as they are.
There is a word for them that goes beyond the attempt to erase their existence or ignore their deepest longing for God and community.

Also, preachers who are anxious about their proclamation to and about LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” can confront their anxiety and ambiguity around sexuality and same-sex practice by naming the uncertainty and ambiguity in the congregation and inviting the congregation into dialogue. In seeking to proclaim in the midst of the contested inclusion of previously excluded people in the church, perhaps this is a moment to trust God in the ambiguity and trust the hearers to wrestle with their faithfulness when confronted with a more liberating and prophetic reading and preaching of Scripture. Such an approach can be a powerful antidote to preaching that demeans and stigmatizes LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of.”

Preachers who wish to move beyond sexuality as a topic, abstraction, or problem have an opportunity to invite their LGBTQ listeners and “others-not-thought-of” into a deeper discussion about the nature of God, the liberation of the gospels, and the joys of faith. God’s human speech does not have to be narrowed to reflect and conform to our political and ideological commitments. On the contrary, God’s human speech can be a clarifying interruption of the uncivil discourse of our current political rhetoric, which is devoid of grace, nuance, and dialogue. The good news of Jesus Christ doesn’t have to

have losers, especially when the losers are those on the margins who have already been
deemed unworthy and unfaithful simply because of who they are.

When preachers preach with the understanding that all of creation, including LGBTQ
people, have access to a love and abundance realized in God’s revelation in Jesus Christ that
counter the world’s system of domination and oppression, they have the potential to spark the
moral imagination of all of their listeners. However, to proclaim a gospel that reflects the
alternative vision for the world of the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed in the Gospels is
a destabilizing and discomforting challenge to business as usual in the way the world works.
It is a challenge to the assumption that LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” are
irredeemably excluded from membership in the reign of God. This is risky and rewarding
work, calling preachers to confront systems and structures that exclude and oppress
vulnerable people while inviting God’s beloved to accept God’s gift of love and grace.

The preaching moment can be a most powerful event for those who seek a
redemptive encounter with God to find restoration and affirmation of their full humanity
as God’s creation. Far too often, LGBTQ people have been prevented from participating
in faith communities and hearing proclamations that should facilitate such a redemptive
encounter. Faithful and careful proclamation of the gospel experience in the biblical
witness can be a source of inspiration for those who wish to return to God in faith and
share their stories and experiences in a safe, edifying way. Preaching can be the means
through which God works to make those possibilities come alive for God’s creation.
Preachers have an opportunity to interpret and preach in ways that identify and center
fully the reality of those seeking an encounter with a loving and forgiving God and,
through the preached word, offer just a taste of the grace and goodness that Christ
generously offers and makes available to all.
History of Interpretation about Homosexuality

The challenge that any scholar or preacher has in trying to read and interpret the biblical approach to homosexuality is that aside from the Bible’s few references to same-sex sexual behavior, homosexuality is not addressed or of much concern in the biblical witness.\(^\text{13}\) There is no record of the use of the term “sodomy” before the eleventh century.\(^\text{14}\) The Church’s general approach to homosexuality has been shaped and determined by medieval thought and theology with new readings and approaches to the question gaining traction only in the mid-twentieth century.\(^\text{15}\) Consequently, contemporary legal and cultural assumptions and language about homosexuality are based on early, erroneous and exaggerated claims about same-sex practices in biblical texts for the purpose of singling out, stigmatizing, and rejecting the practice.

There is evidence that the Church’s homophobic hermeneutic can be traced to a philosophical tradition that evolved from celebration of same-sex eroticism as an ideal form of friendship to denigration of same-sex sexual practices as against nature. The most oft-stated reason for the rejection and stigmatization—that it is against nature and that sex should be reserved for procreation—may not be an elaboration of the sexual prohibitions found in the Holiness Code of Leviticus, but rather, a harmonization of biblical

\(^{13}\) Collins, *What are Biblical Values*, 74.


hermeneutics with the increasingly shaming and condemnatory language about same-sex eroticism found in *The Laws* of Plato.\textsuperscript{16} This is not to deny that the biblical tradition has promulgated sexual norms and mores for its context that have been used as the basis for stigmatizing homosexuality. Rather, it is to propose that a Christian hermeneutical tradition developed in response to the larger philosophical evolution in the treatment of same-sex eroticism rather than as a self-evident, objective theological claim.

The impact of Platonic philosophy on cultural and religious approaches to same-sex sexual practice cannot be overstated. The success of Plato’s project of stigmatizing and rejecting same-sex love and behavior can be found in stoic philosophy, Hellenistic Judaism, and Greek philosophy.\textsuperscript{17} Plato’s influence is found in Jewish philosopher Philo’s work, in which he uses Leviticus to maintain that those who defy gender absolutes by assuming the passive role in same-sex practices are worthy of death and that nonprocreative sexual activity is “against nature.”\textsuperscript{18} Platonic influence is also found in Josephus who concludes that “the Law recognizes no sexual connexions, except the natural union of man and wife, and that only for procreation.”\textsuperscript{19} These arguments and conclusions are not biblical precepts. They sound very much like Plato’s philosophical argument against same-sex love and practice.

\textsuperscript{16} Jennings, *Plato or Paul*, 104-108.

\textsuperscript{17} Jennings, *Plato or Paul*, 90.

\textsuperscript{18} Jennings, *Plato or Paul*, 93-95.

\textsuperscript{19} Jennings, *Plato or Paul*, 104.
It will not be until the Middle Ages that Christian interpreters would construct a synecdoche for a range of what they considered a disordered sexual practice and ethic. While we can assume that the word “sodomy” developed in reference to and association with the biblical account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, we cannot assume that the meaning of the word has been constant over time and throughout every context. This is strikingly clear even within the Bible where there are contested meanings and interpretations of what happen at Sodom found in the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel and the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Early interpretations of the Bible to condemn same-sex sexual practice simply cannot furnish us with precise and reliable theological language for contemporary engagement with the sexual beings in our pews. As maintained by Jordan:

> Sexual vocabulary is particularly rich in metaphors, ironies, and allusions. This seems as true for medieval Latin as for modern English. Both use dozens of ways to speak about sexual things without speaking about them, to point without describing, to suggest without disclosing.\(^{20}\)

As early church interpreters developed the homophobic meaning of “sodomy,” they dispensed with the close reading of the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah or the subsequent biblical references to it, overlooking and ignoring “details, qualifications, restrictions in order to enable an excessive simplification in thought.”\(^{21}\) It is with the story of the martyrdom of St. Pelagius that we begin to see the honing of a Christian attitude toward same-sex sexual desire and practice as a category of sin, a vice that is


referred to as “Sodomitic” in nature, meaning unclean or illicit.\textsuperscript{22} The irony is that the Christian witnesses telling the story of St. Pelagius chose a stigmatizing interpretation of the Sodom story not so much to single out those engaging in same-sex sexual behavior as an abomination but largely as a Christian polemic against Islam. According to this understanding, unclean or illicit sexual practices are characteristic of the debased moral and religious traditions of foreigners.

The influence of the Platonic philosophical rejection and stigmatization of same-sex eroticism can be seen in the works of the Patristic church fathers Ambrose, Augustine, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory the Great, and John Chrysostom, who all rely less on the biblical text than on the received philosophical wisdom on the perils of same-sex eroticism. Ambrose characterized the sin of Sodom to be “lasciviousness . . . given to crimes beyond the mean of human wickedness.”\textsuperscript{23} Augustine claimed that Sodom is “a sign of human depravity” because the Sodomites had a “desire for same-sex copulation.”\textsuperscript{24} Clement of Alexandria characterized the men of Sodom as “burning with insane love for boys.”\textsuperscript{25} Gregory the Great would conclude that “the crime of the Sodomite” is “crimes of the flesh.”\textsuperscript{26} John Chrysostom concluded that “the Sodomites devised a barren coitus,” which caused God to punish the city by making the land

\textsuperscript{22} Jordan, \textit{The Invention of Sodomy}, 20, 28.  
\textsuperscript{23} Jordan, \textit{The Invention of Sodomy}, 34.  
\textsuperscript{24} Jordan, \textit{The Invention of Sodomy}, 35.  
\textsuperscript{25} Bailey, \textit{Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition}, 25.  
\textsuperscript{26} Jordan, \textit{The Invention of Sodomy}, 36-37.
These are intentional interpretive decisions shaped by the prevailing intellectual wisdom of their time. Interestingly, while persons who may have engaged in same-sex practices are not singled out, there is a growing sense that such behavior is to be seen as a perilous vice worthy of divine punishment.

But it would be the Benedictine monk and cardinal Peter Damien who would brand same-sex practice with the word “sodomy” in a way that severs it from any potentially neutral reading of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. In his book, *The Book of Gomorrah*, which was addressed directly to Pope Leo IX, Damien describes particular sex acts, specifically same-sex practices, that issue from “the spiritual condition of the Sodomitic soul” and sought “to persuade the pope to eradicate a widespread sin and all of its consequences” from among priests. Damien chose to read the Sodom story as a story about homosexuality, bringing the “full force of scriptural condemnation: the horror of divine fire at Sodom, the executions prescribed in Leviticus, the trumpet call of Paul’s excoriation in Romans.” He declared that those guilty of same-sex sexual behavior are reprobates and demoniacs who should be exposed and shamed.

By the late Middle Ages, the rise of administrative authority and ecclesiastical power as well as a desire for institutional uniformity are believed to have contributed to a decrease in social tolerance for same-sex eroticism. Theology and canon law converged

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by the thirteenth century to make homosexuality self-evidently and universally unnatural.\textsuperscript{31} The Dominican friar and bishop Albertus Magnus spelled out the opprobrium clearly, categorizing “homosexual acts as the gravest type of sexual sins because they offended ‘grace, reason, and nature.’”\textsuperscript{32} His student, Saint Thomas Aquinas, would follow this logic of his teacher by maintaining that sexual behavior in which “the propagation of the human species was impeded” was against or a misuse of nature, and thus, sinful.\textsuperscript{33} Aquinas goes on to propose a list of “vices against nature,” which included “masturbation, intercourse with animals, homosexual intercourse, and non-procreative heterosexual coitus.”\textsuperscript{34} This theological conventional wisdom about the unnaturalness of homosexual behavior and the stigmatization and sanctioning of homosexuality in the law, politics, and religion would go unchallenged until the twentieth century.

After centuries of unquestioned biblical assertion that the destruction of Sodom was God’s judgment on the sin of homosexual practice, and thus, the warrant for seeing same-sex sexual behavior as more abominable and detestable than any other sin, Bailey finally challenges the accuracy of the traditional readings of biblical accounts of same-sex behavior used to shape religious attitudes about homosexuality. In his examination, he concluded that “the Sodom story contains no reference to homosexual practices” and “has no direct bearing whatever upon the problem of homosexuality or the commission of

\textsuperscript{31} Boswell, \textit{Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality}, 315.

\textsuperscript{32} Boswell, \textit{Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality}, 316.

\textsuperscript{33} Boswell, \textit{Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality}, 322.

\textsuperscript{34} Boswell, \textit{Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality}, 323.
homosexual acts.”35 In his reading of Paul, Bailey further calls for a careful reading of the text such that readers and interpreters avoid collapsing the distinction between homosexual orientation and practice.36 While Bailey could conclude that Old Testament texts considered homosexual acts forbidden and warranting punishment and that the Pauline texts considered homosexual acts to be “inconsistent with membership in the kingdom of God,” he concluded that it is inaccurate to assert that God deemed homosexual acts abominable.37 It is safe to say that Bailey brought homosexuality out of the biblical and theological closet, opening up opportunities for re-reading and re-interpreting the texts that have been read to stigmatize homosexuality and create the prevailing Christian homophobic attitude toward homosexuals.

In 1960, another milestone in the treatment of LGBTQ people in the Church occurred with the publication of Christ and the Homosexual by an openly gay Congregationalist minister Robert Wood, who called on the church “to use its channels of preaching, ministering, and education in meeting the problems . . . engendered by the presence of the homosexual and homosexuality in our society.”38 In eschewing the stereotypes of gay men (effeminate, promiscuous, predatory, and degenerate) that harm homosexuals, Wood argued that “true Christianity must accept all human beings merely because they exist and are human persons, and not for any special ‘good’ or ‘proper’ or


36 Bailey, Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition, 39.

37 Bailey, Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition, 155.

‘successful’ behavior they may perform.”\textsuperscript{39} This apologetic approach would open the way for better and alternative readings to the homophobic readings of scripture.

**Liberation Reading and Interpretation for Queer People**

After the birth of the modern gay civil rights movement in 1969, it was natural that LGBTQ preachers, faith leaders, and theologians would find support for inclusion of LGBTQ people within the Church using liberation theology. The works of Gustavo Gutierrez and James Cone critiqued the theology of Western Christianity as ignoring the material conditions of the poor and dispossessed and failing to do a thoroughly biblical analysis of power and poverty.\textsuperscript{40} Analyzing the conditions of his context in Latin America, Gutierrez makes the case that “theology has a necessary and permanent role in liberation from every form of religious alienation” as demonstrated by the God of the Bible who intervenes in history to break down structures of injustice and oppression to liberate the poor.\textsuperscript{41} In light of the increasingly disappointing retrenchment from the advancements of the Civil Rights Movement and the growing critique of the Black Power movement, Cone situates black theology with the liberation theology framework, arguing that black theology “arises from an identification with the oppressed blacks of America, seeking to interpret the gospel of Jesus in light of the black condition. It believes that the liberation of the black community is God’s liberation.”\textsuperscript{42} These approaches set the ground

\textsuperscript{39} Wood, *Christ and the Homosexual*, 16.


\textsuperscript{41} Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 9, 56-57.

\textsuperscript{42} Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 5.
work for LGBTQ theologians and scholars to use liberation theology for the aspiration of
the LGBTQ people.

Theologies of liberation broadened the language and perspectives of clergy and
scholars who began to argue for liberation “from heterosexism and homophobia, as well
as the freedom to be one’s own authentic self.” Two edited volumes on gay liberation
theology, *Loving Women/Loving Men: Gay Liberation and the Church* and *Towards a
Gay Liberation* brought the liberationist framework into the Church, demanding
liberation for lesbians and gay men by welcoming, affirming, and celebrating same-sex
relationships and calling the Church to abandon homophobic readings of the Bible and
reaffirm the ethic of love. Cleaver takes on the liberationist project for LGBTQ people
by countering the silencing of lesbians and gay men in the Church, arguing that “almost
any passage of scripture could be used to show that lesbian and gay men have a vital
place in the body of Christ.” This focus on liberation converged nicely with the push for
a robust gay rights movement ushered in after the Stonewall Uprising of 1969.

Liberation theology also made it possible for LGBTQ people to see themselves as
part of and entitled to be a part of the church just as they are. A liberationist reading and
preaching of the Bible, in which the perspectives and experiences of LGBTQ people are
not ignored or silenced, allowed LGBTQ people to find themselves in God’s kingdom

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43 Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York, Seabury

44 Sally Gearhart and William R. Johnson, eds., *Loving Women/Loving Men: Gay Liberation and
the Church* (San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1974); Malcolm Macourt, ed., *Towards a Theology of Gay

45 See Richard Cleaver, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* (Louisville, KY:
and beloved community.\textsuperscript{46} This way of reading the Bible resonates with the LGBTQ experience of building alternative families and communities. LGBTQ people often lose their families, not because of a conscious choice, but because too many families have been unable to accept that their children or grandchildren or their siblings are queer. Family rejection, disappointment, or disapproval has been cited by many LGBTQ people as the reason why they do not “come out” as LGBTQ.\textsuperscript{47} Previous generations of LGBTQ people who have been rejected because of sexuality or gender expression or identity talk about a chosen family, a network of friends and former partners who make up their support system and offer them safety, meaning, and stability. Those who talk about the experience of coming out to family and friends speak about the calculation involved, the counting of the costs and being prepared to lose family, friends, livelihood, and possessions when the news of their sexuality or identity is not well received.

The liberationist perspective counters the idea that LGBTQ people are outside the circle of love, support, and inclusion in religious spaces and faith communities. When preachers and theologians lifted up a liberation reading and interpretation of the Bible, LGBTQ people gravitated to those faith communities, finding both a liberating message and the possibility of inclusion within the body of Christ. These readings take seriously Jesus’ characterization of his disciples and his followers as his kin and his proclamation of a kingdom in which the captives are released and the oppressed are set free.

\textsuperscript{46} In Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, \textit{The Liberating Pulpit} (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), explore how this reading and interpretation can be done by intentionally awakening to the experience and perspective of those on the margins.

\textsuperscript{47} Michael Bronski, Ann Pellegrini, and Michael Amico, \textit{“You Can Tell Just By Looking”: And 20 Other Myths about LGBT Life and People} (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013).
Gonzalez and Gonzalez’s *Liberating Pulpit* points the reader and preacher interested in liberation theology for LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” to the next step. It begins with the awareness that there are people, narratives, and situations in the biblical text we have difficulty hearing, seeing, and giving a full platform. Traditions and practices developed over time, like traditions of historical interpretation, preferred translations and commentaries, and cropped Scripture passages, even in some lectionaries, can all become “obstacles which impede a liberating interpretation.”

A truly liberating pulpit and interpretation requires preachers to confront the real social, political, and economic situation of both the text and the congregation. It means there is no avoiding the use and abuse of power against oppressed peoples and God’s movement and intervention into contexts of oppression to deliver the weak and the marginal. For preaching to be liberating for LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” the praxis and strategies of liberation theology require reading and interpretation that engage and confront concrete realities and contexts in which these marginal people are rejected, stigmatized, or oppressed.

In examining liberation preaching to and from the black experience, Harris is concerned about esoteric proclamations that do not address the hurt and agony of the disinherited. For preachers who want to develop a queer hermeneutic, Harris helpfully maintains that “hermeneutics is largely an experiential and contextual phenomenon”

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50 Gonzalez and Gonzalez, *The Liberating Pulpit*, 75.

which helps the preacher committed to the liberation struggle “to interpret the gospel and the current social situation in a way that speaks to the hurts and fears as well as the hopes and dreams of oppressed people.” This is faithful, purposeful, intentional work, which takes seriously the experience of the hearers of the word. There can be no change, no personal or social transformation, no liberation for oppressed people if preachers cannot see, engage, or confront real pain and issues and location of those seeking good news, especially if the Church is an active agent of the hurt.

Tisdale sees in the witness of the biblical prophets a confrontation with the way things are, “naming the reality as it is and placing before us a vision of the new future God will bring to pass.” This instinct, again, invites an engagement with the concrete realities and experiences of the oppressed to make change happen, to realize the Bible’s vision for justice. In inviting preachers to prophetic preaching, Tisdale is clear that “the promise of liberation to God’s oppressed people” is a hallmark of prophetic preaching, along with passion for justice for the world and empowerment of God’s people to work to change the status quo. Unfortunately, preachers avoid preaching in this way out of fear, apathy, and a commitment to a received tradition. And yet, the prophets and Jesus were compelled to share a hopeful vision of justice and liberation.

52 Harris, Preaching Liberation, 60-61.
54 Tisdale, Prophetic Preaching, 10.
Hermeneutics and Queer Preaching

New ways of reading and interpreting the text in light of liberation and queer theology will go a long way in helping preachers reflect “on the principles, processes, and methods of interpretation” in a way that relates Scripture to the current experience of LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of.”55 The essence of developing a hermeneutic is process. A queer hermeneutic is the intentional and conscious process of interpreting the biblical text using the experience, information, and knowledge about LGBTQ people as the lens through which to bridge the world of the biblical text and the world of the contemporary Church, which includes LGBTQ people. It is the effort to gain a deeper understanding of those who have been ignored or excluded from our proclamation because they do not conform to our expectations of what is normal.

Why queer? God is not confined to what is normal and expected according to the world’s prevailing wisdom (1 Cor. 1-3). The ways God shows up, imposes God’s will, interferes with humanity’s best laid plans, and obliterates known categories and boundaries cannot be described as normal. By extension, the Bible itself, in describing how God does all of what God does, spins an account of a wildly radical, unpredictable, creative, imaginative God who guides, inspires, cajoles, commands, negotiates, exhorts, and corrects humanity, remaining faithful and generous to us throughout time, history, and generations. There is nothing normal about God’s revelation and manifestation in Jesus Christ. Even though contemporaneous cultures told hero stories about virgin births, there is still something wildly radical about a God incarnating in flesh to experience the

human condition and proclaim the kingdom of God in their midst. Cheng asserts that the “queerness” of God’s movement into time and history is found in

The incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming of Jesus Christ, all of which are events that turn upside down our traditional understanding of life and death, divine and human, center and margins, beginnings and endings, infinite and finite, punishment and forgiveness.  

Why is so much of contemporary preaching devoid of this radical nature of a boundaryless and intrusive God determined to self-disclose to the creation? Crossan describes a dialectic within the Bible itself in which “the radicality of God has been co-opted by the . . . normalcy of civilization . . . so that the established order of life is maintained.”

It is not hard to imagine such a religious project within the Western religious world formed within and inextricably linked to the Western capitalist order. To assert and proclaim justice for people on the margins, those who do not reflect the myth and traditions of the established order, is to challenge what has come to be seen as normal.

The radicality of God can best be described as queer, not in its contemporary connotation solely as a descriptor of sexuality; rather, queer as in “blurring boundaries,” or “the erasing of boundaries” and eschewing fixed binaries and dichotomies often imposed on others. In the biblical witness, God calls and works through people who

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56 Cheng, Radical Love, 11.

57 Crossan, How to Read the Bible, 24, 27.


often do not conform to the expectations of the culture or the faith, people who are not normal, people who are queer. How can we connect these non-conforming biblical characters with the experience of similarly non-conforming people in our own time?

In making the case for using queer theory as a tool for interpretation, Stone maintains, “new meanings are generated from the biblical texts when they are read from the perspectives or concerns of queer readers or queer communities.”

Brueggemann has argued that the Church and preachers must take seriously the postmodern context of ministry and proposed “a meeting of liturgy and proclamation . . . [whereby] people come to receive new materials, or old materials freshly voiced, that will fund, feed, nurture, nourish, legitimate, and authorize a counter-imagination of the world.”

Can preachers, especially those who are in the majority and consider the normal standard by which all other people are measured, proclaim the gospel that recaptures the radicality of grace over the normalcy of civilization? Can they provide a fresh reading and preaching of the text through an encounter with the concerns and questions of queer hearers?

The power of Jesus’ proclamation of good news is that diverse, often marginal peoples saw themselves in the kingdom of God after their encounters with Jesus. Nicodemus, Zaccheus, the woman at the well, the man born blind, the widow of Nain, the twelve, to name only a few, all found themselves seen, known, and transformed within the presence and hearing of Jesus. Their individual statuses, conditions, and identities were not lifted up as reasons to be avoided or judged but were central to how Jesus

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60 Stone, “Queer Criticism and Queer Theory.”

responded to their needs, concerns, and questions. This is the kind of preaching that is all too often missing for LGBTQ people who either were once a part of the Church or who sought refuge and community in churches that refused to fully embrace them.

It is ironic that one need not even read the Bible to offer a biblical rejection of homosexuality. People have come to rely on the six proof texts to prove the biblical prohibition and condemnation of same-sex practice and relationship without re-reading or re-visiting such texts for more accurate examination. For the person already inclined to condemn LGBTQ, there is no need to re-read or re-interpret the text to determine if indeed the Bible addresses what we know and understand about the scientific, psycho-sexual phenomenon of sexuality. Their cultural and ideological frame is set and informs how they will approach the question of biblical or religious treatment of homosexuality. Therefore, their reading of the Bible will be from the perspective of heterosexual complementarity and only procreative sexual practice, which is deemed natural and normal. This particular way of understanding, if not reading, those texts is sufficient to remain opposed to the inclusion of LGBTQ people.

However, there is nothing about the six proof texts that speak to the current reality of LGBTQ people and their practices and relationships. Jennings demonstrates that homophobia in the Western church “lies not in the biblical tradition of Judaism and Christianity but instead in the Greek and Hellenistic sources” that influenced and inflected the tradition.62 If this is true, then perhaps it is time for preachers who want to affirm their LGBTQ listeners to reclaim the biblical witness as a reliable interlocutor for proclamation that can be heard by queer hearers rather than relying on a “nonbiblical,

62 Jennings, Plato or Paul, 1.
prebiblical, or postbiblical approach” as the only way to counter a homophobic reading of the Bible. More important, trusting that the six proof texts are not the only or definitive approach to same-sex practice and relationship opens up the rest of the Bible for reading, exploring, and interpreting in ways that make visible God’s concern for and solidarity with the queer people on the margins.

If there is no reason to read the Bible with a self-evident biblical condemnation of same-sex practice and relationships, the preacher can go to the text anew to read and interpret it with LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” in view. Reading, studying, and preaching from the Bible can be rescued from a “God vs. gay” paradigm that assumes that homophobia is a built-in feature of the Bible and Christianity. Such is the beginning of a queer hermeneutic, whereby the cultural and ideological worldviews that have previously rejected and condemned the queer and the marginal are now set aside as a particularly unhelpful and oppressive approach that reinforces homophobia and heterosexism. A queer hermeneutic first and foremost asserts that a homophobic reading or appropriation of the biblical text is neither assumed nor necessary for proclaiming the gospel, that whatever those proof texts may possibly mean, they do not always have to be or even necessarily are arguing for condemnation of same-sex sexual practice or relationships.

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63 Jennings, Plato or Paul, 9.
CHAPTER 3
LITERATURE REVIEW

There does not have to be a homophobic reading and interpretation of the Bible. Several works of history and theology demonstrate that centuries ago scholars, theologians, and clergy made a deliberate choice to read scripture in a way that rejects and stigmatizes same-sex eroticism. These sources support my thesis that preachers can re-read and re-interpret scripture in ways that are liberating and creative for preaching to LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of,” challenging biblical constructs and categories that deem same-sex relationships and behavior as unnatural and abnormal.

Jennings argues convincingly in *Plato or Paul* that a Platonic stigmatization of same-sex eroticism predates a Christian homophobic hermeneutic, finding the influence of Platonic and Hellenistic philosophy’s negative treatment of same-sex eroticism in the letters of Paul and in the works of Philo and Josephus. These influences and the choice to take the most negative and prohibitive reading possible about same-sex sexual practice baked homophobia into Church tradition and Christian hermeneutics for years to come. Jordan and Boswell find that patristic Church fathers and medieval theologians accepted the rejection and stigmatization of same-sex eroticism and used that homophobic

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1 Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Plato or Paul? The Origins of Western Homophobia* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2009).
conventional wisdom to read and interpret the story of Sodom. These Church fathers further developed and promulgated a category of sexual sin known as “sodomy” that was deemed unnatural because it was non-procreative. These sources help make the case that a homophobic reading of Scripture was an intentional development over time rather than fixed, unassailable biblical truth.

In *Homosexuality and the Western Tradition*, Bailey provided the first challenge to a homophobic reading and interpretation of scripture in Church tradition and Christian hermeneutics, highlighting the contextual influences on the early approaches to same-sex eroticism and calling into question the accuracy of conventional readings of six biblical passages presumably about homosexuality. In *Christ and the Homosexual*, Wood embraces a contemporary, non-homophobic reading of scripture for preaching to and about lesbians and gay men and challenges the Church to address homosexuality and minister to the needs of homosexuals both within congregational life and the larger society. This study relies on these groundbreaking works of theology to introduce preachers to the first efforts to break from a conventional, received tradition of homophobic reading and interpretation of the scripture to consider a more theologically accurate and compassionate pastoral treatment of homosexuality.

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To help preachers get a better understanding of the need for a queer hermeneutic, this study relies on several works to present the approaches, attitudes, and influences on churches, preachers, and contemporary preaching that have left preachers unwilling or unprepared to preach in a way that include and affirm LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” within the body of Christ. For instance, Whitehead establishes that the church is still a location of contested meanings and approaches to the acceptance of LGBTQ people in the local church, which makes it difficult for preachers to relay a consistently affirming message.\(^5\) Olson and Cadge and Cadge et. al have found that many clergy are fearful and ambivalent about their own views on sexuality and are unsure about how to talk about sexuality and LGBTQ people in general and in their congregations.\(^6\) Cobb finds that clergy are influenced by violent, anti-gay rhetoric in media and culture that shape and limit how they perceive and speak about LGBTQ people while Walters looks at the limitations and unintended consequences of a deliberate strategy of tolerance toward LGBTQ people rather than full acceptance.\(^7\) Knowing what preachers are confronting gives us an opportunity to propose alternative strategies that will encourage preachers to choose a different process for considering the presence and concerns of LGBTQ people.


Several volumes on the strategies of reading and interpretation for preaching help ground this study in the craft of preaching. I rely heavily on *The New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, a preaching reference tool in which scholars address a range theoretical and practical issues for preaching, including preparation and delivery.\(^8\) Several articles in this volume help me explore strategies for preaching on race and gender, the ethics of preaching, and hermeneutics and interpretation that can be useful in developing a queer hermeneutic.

Another helpful source on preaching that grounds this study is *Theology of Preaching*, which addresses the postmodern ethos of our contemporary context for preaching and its impact on how people think about truth, knowledge, and authority in our discourse.\(^9\) Walter Brueggemann invites readers and preachers to make peace with the reality that we live in postmodern context, which has ushered in a fundamental shift in our ways of knowing. He provides a powerful look at how the sacred text lends itself to fresh readings and interpretations to help the church provide a counter-narrative to the world’s wisdom.\(^10\)

Two edited volumes focused on queer reading and criticism, *Take Back the Word* and *The Queer Bible Commentary*, offer a series of strategies and examples for reading, interpreting, studying, and preaching the Bible with a particular focus on what is relevant to the concerns and experience of LGBTQ people, not only in the Church, but in the

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larger society. They also have the added benefit of demonstrating use of several different theories and discourses for analysis.

Liberation Interpretation and Preaching

Many activists and historians mark the beginning of the modern LGBTQ civil rights movement to the Stonewall Riots in June 1969, when a group of LGBTQ patrons of the Stonewall Inn bar in the Greenwich Village neighborhood in Manhattan rose up to resist routine harassment and mistreatment by police. On the first anniversary of the uprising, several communities organized gay pride observances and inspired gay rights groups to form throughout the nation. As a result, LGBTQ people began to press for equality, acceptance, and visibility in social, cultural, and political institutions, including within U.S. churches and denominations.

Recognizing the increasing visibility and human rights advances of LGBTQ people and their presence within the church, Childs and Stroup advised preachers to approach homosexuality as a topical issue. Using a critical reading of Genesis 19, Leviticus 18, and Romans 1, biblical texts historically cited by religious people to assert the incompatibility of the LGBTQ identity and Christianity, the authors maintain that it is not clear what “homosexuality” means, and thus, proclamation that considers the themes of love, justice, and covenant may help the preacher address the issue. While this approach went a long way in broadening preachers’ approach to LGBTQ people and

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opened the way forward for affirming and welcoming LGBTQ people in many congregations, this approach has led preachers to rely far too often on homosexuality as topical issue rather than letting the text reveal a liberating word to LGBTQ people and the human condition.

This study relies on Gonzalez and Gonzalez’s work to lay the foundation for inviting and equipping preachers to re-read and revisit the biblical texts and the received wisdom of their traditions, especially as it relates to LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of.” They are interested in a liberating homiletic, which flows out of an awakening to the experience and perspectives of those who were formerly voiceless and powerless within Christian faith and tradition. The authors call for preachers and interpreters to be more intentional in lifting up the marginalized perspectives of women, indigenous people, African-Americans, and others relegated to the social, political, and religious margins. They invite preachers to reread the text in such a way as to recapture Scripture as a liberating force rather than a tool for reinforcing the status quo of inequality and oppression.\(^{13}\) This liberation framework is demonstrated in the Bible’s foundational narrative of God vindicating a small band of weak former slaves in the Old Testament and the marginal outcasts who followed God incarnated in the peasant rabbi Jesus in the New Testament. It is a framework that opens up new ways of doing theology in which the witness of the powerless informs our proclamations.

Because our religious and theological approaches to sex and sexuality are historically and culturally constructed in a context in which masculinity and heterosexuality are normative, the church is shaped by normative narratives of masculinity and heterosexuality that reinforce paradigms of love, sex, and desire that protect and privilege heterosexuality and the masculine as right and good and homosexuality and the feminine as weak and inferior. Accordingly, the pulpit and preaching are shaped by a framework that relegates to the margins the needs, concerns, experiences and perspectives of those who are not heterosexual or masculine. In light of this prevailing paradigm, Gonzalez and Gonzalez’s approach demonstrates how preachers can reread and re-interpret the text with the marginal perspectives of LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” in view.

Gonzalez and Gonzalez do not call for the replacement of one biased and self-interested interpretation and hermeneutic with another; rather, they seek to approach the text from the perspective of the social situation of the oppressed and the powerless. They ask preachers “to listen anew to the biblical text and to interpret contemporary life in light of that text.”¹⁴ It is an invitation to the preacher to avoid reading the text alone or as if it is written solely to the preacher and read and wrestle with the text along with the various communities among their hearers. This approach recognizes preaching as a communal event in which the entire community hears in the words of the preacher a reflection of their faith and their situations.

Tisdale also helps preachers move away from silence with respect to the experience of LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” in their congregations, inviting

¹⁴ Gonzalez and Gonzalez, The Liberating Pulpit, 30.
preachers to be both pastoral and prophetic in tending to the needs and concerns of their congregations while also inspiring them to embrace God’s alternative, new vision of God’s reign. Tisdale’s seven hallmarks of prophetic preaching, a synthesis of the scholarly work on prophetic preaching, will be useful in developing homiletical strategies for preachers interested in a queer hermeneutic that will connect the needs and concerns of LGBTQ hearers to God’s concerns for justice. In particular, I make use of Tisdale’s hallmarks of prophetic preaching to include in a process for reading and interpretation that address LGBTQ people, such as lifting up the prophetic witnesses of the Bible, challenging the status quo and the oppressive current social order, offering the promise of hope and liberation to LGBTQ people, and empowering them to pursue change and justice.

Further, Harris develops a definition and method for liberation preaching, in which the character of God as a liberating God is the foundational theological framework, a framework that is directly counter to the image of God as a hater of homosexuality or LGBTQ people. This study relies on Harris’s argument that liberation and transformative preaching is textual preaching whereby the preacher is grounded in and interprets the biblical text rather than simply addressing issues in order “to restructure human consciousness.” Harris’s thesis supports my contention that liberating queer hermeneutic flows from the text itself. A preacher does not have to address LGBTQ

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liberation as a topic or avoid the biblical text as unhelpful or irrelevant to queer lives and experiences but can depend on the text to preach a liberating message to queer people.

If liberation theology provided a framework for countering the narrative of “God hates gays,” it also takes a club against the gratuitous nature of religious invective against LGBTQ people. Intentional focus on the words preachers use or take for granted fits well with the effort to read from a liberationist perspective. A helpful resource on our religious language comes from Sanders and Yarber, who argue that, while many Christian communities publicly condemn discrimination based on race, gender, and sexuality, individual ministers are products of cultural conditioning of the society and their communities and inherit the biases, fears, and stereotypes about LGBTQ people found there. Accordingly, we can unintentionally communicate messages that insult, invalidate, and denigrate others based on their sexuality or gender expression. This reference is important to this study because I maintain that preachers may be interested in preaching liberating and transformative sermons that could be life-giving and transformative to their queer hearers but remain unaware of the microaggressions embedded in their proclamations.

**Queer Interpretation and Preaching**

As this study explores and develops the process for reading and interpreting the Bible with a fuller understanding of the perspectives and experiences of LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of,” there are helpful resources on queer reading strategies. Cheng provides an introduction to queer theology, surveying the trajectory of liberationist

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and queer theoretical approaches that theologians have taken since the 1950s.\textsuperscript{20} Stewart bridges liberationist readings with queer theology to lay out possible ways of developing a queer hermeneutic that reflects queer theology’s concern to move beyond binary and essentialist constructions of identities.\textsuperscript{21} Stone invites preachers to see the limitations in the traditions received and realize that the “biblical literature shows us that it is sometimes exactly the task of the Preacher to point out how insufficient, or even how wrong, our most deeply held convictions, handed on by tradition, can be.”\textsuperscript{22} Helsel offers a practical first-step for preachers who want to queer their preaching.\textsuperscript{23} Unfortunately, Helsel’s approach assumes that preaching is “straight” or normative in the first place, a reflection of the heterosexism that pervades preaching, worship, and church life.

In an earlier study of preaching and LGBTQ people, Hinnant recognized the limitation of preaching on homosexuality as a topic or issue and sought to bring the perspective of LGBTQ clergy into the field of homiletics.\textsuperscript{24} Writing at a time when only two mainline denominations had fully embraced LGBTQ members and clergy and when the presence of the LGBTQ members and clergy in other denominations was far more contested and controversial than today, Hinnant examined the place, practices, and


\textsuperscript{22} Ken Stone, “ ‘Do Not Be Conformed to this World’: Queer Reading and the Task of the Preacher,” \textit{Theology & Sexuality} 13, no. 2 (2007), 155.


realities of queer-identified clergy to arrive at a homiletic for LGBTQ clergy and allies. It is a queer homiletic that built on the metaphor of “coming out of the closet,” breaking the silence of LGBTQ clergy to take seriously their lives and their perspectives as a part of the body of Christ.

Hinnant called for “whole body preaching,” whereby the queer preacher’s body, spirit, mind, and soul communicate the perspective of LGBTQ people and new images and dimensions of God.25 Such an approach helps to move preaching “from the dead-end discussion about sexual orientation to the light of movement, dance, music, and celebration at God’s banquet.”26 For this study, what would it look like for all preachers to use a hermeneutic that embraces and understands the experience of their LGBTQ listeners along with the myriad of other identities sharing the congregational space and waiting for God to be revealed in the preaching moment?

Even as preachers anchor themselves in liberation and prophetic preaching as a means to include the witness of voiceless and powerless queer hearers in their congregations, there is still the need to be intentional about rooting out the unconscious heterosexism and unintentional microaggressions that could potentially arise in theological discourse. Accordingly, Askew and Allen seek to provide preachers with ethical and theological language and homiletical strategies to address bias and behavior that reinforce discrimination against LGBTQ people.27 Using case studies and the occasions of religious rites and ceremonies, the authors seek to help preachers recognize


26 Hinnant, *God Comes Out*, 185.

and counter heterosexism and heteronormativity. While this reference continues to treat LGBTQ people’s presence as an issue for the church, it will help in making the case for a liberating queer hermeneutic as an ethical and theological enterprise when preachers approach and develop the text.

In discerning a liberating hermeneutic for Asian Americans, Eunjoo Kim described hermeneutics as an “art of understanding.” My hope is that preachers will be equipped with an additional tool of sensitivity and consciousness and an intentional theological practice of interpreting and preaching the text in ways that evince of knowledge of queer experience and give voice and power to LGBTQ hearers. Lucy Rose’s approach offers preachers ways of giving voice and power to those missing from the homiletical enterprise. Rose’s unique approach to the preaching task is an invitation to a conversational style of preaching in which the preacher and the congregation take on homiletics as a conversation, where they explore, wrestle, and interpret as partners and colleagues. The author is sensitive to the limitations of language and its associated biases and historical contexts and argues that inviting more voices to the table can help center the conversations of the range of people of God, including LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of.” Rose helps in the development of a queer hermeneutic because she offers insights into how to include the voice, experience, and participation of communities that have been historically excluded or invisible in our theological imaginations and proclamations.

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Throughout the study, we will be reading and analyzing sermons specifically preached in settings with LGBTQ hearers or that have been identified as welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ people to ascertain the use of a queer hermeneutic that is biblical, liberating, and prophetic. Snider pulled together a collection of sermons by LGBTQ preachers and allies as examples of proclamations lifting up justice and equality for LGBTQ people and ways that preachers can celebrate rather than condemn LGBTQ people.\textsuperscript{30} This is a critical resource for my research as I seek to determine if sermons can be categorized based on whether they treat homosexuality as an issue, problem, or topic or whether they offer a liberating message to LGBTQ people as members of the body of Christ “struggling with the manifestations of the human condition”\textsuperscript{31} just like every other person in the congregation.


CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY AND ASSESSMENT

While the goal of this study and the method of investigation seek to lay out the processes of a queer hermeneutic and to prescribe some helpful best practices for preachers who want to preach a more liberating, prophetic word to LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of,” I am aware that there are some preachers whose contexts may not be friendly or tolerant territory for proclamations with explicit calls for full inclusion of LGBTQ people. The author’s congregational context, however, is fertile ground for the kind of hermeneutical process informed by the experiences of LGBTQ people. Accordingly, the hearers invited to participate in surveys of the author’s sermons for this study are largely LGBTQ or allies of the community.

Congregational Context

All God’s Children Metropolitan Community Church (AGCMCC) in Minneapolis, MN is a unique congregation in that the majority of the members and attendees are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender who come from other Christian traditions and denominations. Accordingly, the sociocultural context of the congregation is characterized by multiple and multivalent expressions and subcultures, not only of faith, but also of identity and ideology.¹ This diversity and complexity of values,

meaning, and stories create a range of subcultures, known and unknown, operating and competing simultaneously, lending itself to a hermeneutical process that requires an engagement across a wide range of experiences.

AGCMCC was founded in 1974 as the Metropolitan Community Church of the Twin Cities, when Minnesota-area students in the gay and lesbian student movement in the Twin Cities and St. Cloud in the early 1970s (St. Cloud University and at Gay House in Minneapolis) joined together for bible study. They planned a series of religious services taking place on Sunday afternoons. The church grew quickly and was officially chartered by the denomination, the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, in July 1976.

In 2015, our church underwent a strategic planning process that included a survey of members and attendees about their identities and experiences as part of our congregation. The AGC Congregational Life Survey shows that the church remains an essential community of faith for the LGBTQ community, with 62% of the attendees and participants identifying as gay; 20% identifying as lesbian; and 5% identifying as bisexual. Four percent of the attendees and participants identify as transgender.\(^2\) Embracing these identity markers suggests that the contemporary LGBTQ civil rights movement and the ongoing legal and judicial questions about LGBTQ rights and equality remain a pressing point of reference and relevance for many in this congregation.

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The survey also indicates that there has been a steadiness in participation and attendance at AGCMCC, with 41% of the respondents reporting attending and participating in worship for over eleven years. Eleven percent have attended and participated in worship for more than 20 years. Forty-three percent of respondents have been participating and attending between 1 and 10 years. Over half of the attendees (59%) are 50 years old or older; only 6% are under age 30. Accordingly, in the 45-year history of this congregation, there are many who are familiar with the early days of discrimination against LGBTQ people, the tragic loss of life during the height of the early AIDS epidemic, and the agitation for a civil rights ordinance in Minnesota, which includes protections for sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. References to this history for many of the hearers will provide both a familiar and relevant context for proclamations about justice and salvation.

There is real diversity in religious and denominational background, and the blended worship and ecumenical liturgical practices and language at AGCMCC reflect the contribution of these various traditions. Over half of the respondents (55%) report coming from the mainline protestant tradition, including Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal/Anglican, United Church of Christ, Congregational, and Disciples of Christ, carrying with them all of the various traditions and practices that come with those identities. They share that space with 25% of people coming from a

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Catholic background and 19% coming from an evangelical or fundamentalist background. This diversity in theology and interpretation has led to the ongoing practice of intentional discussion about ways of reading and interpreting together, including more explicit recognition and discussion of these various traditions during Bible study and the preaching moment.

**Method of Investigation**

As part of the effort to develop a queer hermeneutic, that process of interpreting the biblical text using the experience, information, and knowledge about LGBTQ people, it is helpful to ascertain and acknowledge the current state of preaching in ways that affirm and celebrate LGBTQ people and the kind of preaching LGBTQ people say they are hearing. What are preachers who consider themselves and their proclamations to be open and affirming saying in their sermons? Can we discern a queer hermeneutic in the final form of their sermons? Accordingly, the first step of this study is to analyze sermons that have been identified as intentionally focused on helping LGBTQ people “to celebrate and accept the truth about their sexuality and/or gender identity; and for people of faith . . . to fully accept and celebrate their LGBTQ friends and family members.”

While this means these sermons may treat sexuality and gender as topics or issues, it is worth exploring to see what emerges for further analysis.

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Using grounded theory of qualitative analysis, with “its emphasis on emergence,” I undertook a textual analysis of sermons found in an edited volume of sermons by preachers and theologians who are described as having their “collective hearts broken on countless occasions as we’ve listened to friends share stories of rejection, exclusion, and sorrow.” These sermons are extant texts, which means they were constructed and proclaimed by preachers and theologians for a purpose with no direct connection with this study but within contexts and to persons that inform the kind of hermeneutic this study seeks to develop.

*Justice Calls* includes more than 25 sermons; however, for this study, I chose five sermons from a cross section of preachers and theologians of diverse demographic and religious backgrounds for analysis. Specifically, I chose the work of pastors and theologians with some notoriety in the field of theology and homiletics, whose publications and institutional affiliations increase the likelihood that they would have a large following and would be heard by a large, diverse audience of people: Carol Howard Merritt, David J. Lose, Barbara K. Lundblad, Christian Piatt, and Miguel A. De La

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7 I rely on Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2006) for this methodological approach to exploring these sermons as extant texts that can be analyzed for the theoretical possibilities that might emerge.

8 Snider, *Justice Calls*, xv.


Each of these sermons was selected because they explicitly address the place, treatment, and experience of LGBTQ people in the Church. Accordingly, they are topical. However, for the purposes of developing a queer hermeneutic, it is worth determining if these preachers are conscious and intentional about making use of the experience, knowledge, and relationship with LGBTQ people to proclaim a liberating, prophetic word.

Following Charmaz’s guidelines for textual analysis, I seek to ascertain the purposes, meanings, structures, and categories of these texts to see what theoretical possibilities emerge in these sermons that may be useful in developing a queer hermeneutic. Do these theoretical possibilities reflect or contradict the liberation and prophetic variables identified in Gonzalez and Gonzalez, Harris, and Tisdale? The hope is to build categories with analytic power that serve as data against which to measure our assertions and conclusions about a queer hermeneutic that includes liberation theology and prophetic preaching as methods and principles in the process of interpretation.

In analyzing the sermons of others, I do not assume that other preachers are not using a queer hermeneutic or that I am asserting that others are not exploring these same questions. Rather, I maintain that there are attempts, examples, and explorations of homiletical strategies for preaching differently to, for, and about LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of.” In fact, the works cited in this study and Gonzalez and Gonzalez’s liberating pulpit, Harris’s liberation preaching, and Tisdale’s prophetic

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14 Charmaz, Constructing Grounded Theory, 37-40.
preaching all set the theoretical and theological framework for the development and use of a queer hermeneutic for preachers who want to move beyond silence, homophobia, or tolerance for LGBTQ people and preaching on sexuality and gender solely as topics or issues.

Next, I hope to hear from a group of LGBTQ people about their experience of listening to sermons. Using a focus group, I seek to explore the opinions, attitudes, and experiences of LGBTQ people or allies who have regularly listened to sermons in a congregational setting. After exploring potential places where a group of people would be willing to participate in a focus group on preaching, including the Twin Cities Pride Festival, The Saloon Bar and Dance Club, and The Aliveness Project, an AIDS service organization and community center, I found the most interest and willingness to participate at The Aliveness Project, among people who were at the community center for lunch. The purpose of the focus group is to get the unfiltered perspectives of LGBTQ people about the nature of the theological discourse on LGBTQ people they have heard from preachers and discern what kinds of messages they seek from religious and theological discourse. The participants were invited to answer questions about the sermons they have heard and how LGBTQ people were addressed (Appendix A).

In the effort to propose strategies for preachers interested in liberating and prophetic preaching to LGBTQ hearers, I use the analyses of Gonzalez and Gonzalez, Harris, and Tisdale to identify variables that focus the preacher and interpreter on practical ways of reading and interpreting biblical texts and preaching in liberating, prophetic ways. I draft and preach sermons using a queer hermeneutic. It is an intentional process of reading and interpreting the biblical text using the experience, information,
and knowledge about LGBTQ people as a lens through which to bridge the world of the biblical text and the world of a church that includes LGBTQ people. The hermeneutical approach this study envisions seeks to bring to bear the analytical power of liberation theology and the moral imagination of prophetic preaching on the lived experience and social location of LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of.” Accordingly, these are the questions/variables for analysis of two sermons I will preach:

1. Are the perspectives of LGBTQ people recognized and centered in the sermon?
2. Is the sermon rooted in a biblical text(s)?
3. Does the sermon portray God as the source of liberation of LGBTQ people from oppression?
4. Does the sermon challenge the status quo of the existing power arrangement between heterosexuals and homosexuals?
5. Does the sermon critique the rejection and discrimination of LGBTQ people?
6. Does the sermon proclaim the promise of liberation for LGBTQ people?
7. Does the sermon empower the hearer to work for justice for LGBTQ people?
8. Does the sermon evince a concern for the LGBTQ hearers’ spiritual, physical, material, and social wellbeing?
9. Does the sermon attack LGBTQ people?
10. Does the sermon argue for the conversion of LGBTQ people to a “straight” identity?
11. Does the sermon include stereotypes or insensitive comments about LGBTQ people?
12. Is heterosexuality considered the ideal or universal example of discipleship and relationship?

Using a survey (Appendix B), I will seek to analyze what LGBTQ listeners hear and seek from the proclamation. Those surveyed are likely to be hearers who embrace the identity markers of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. Preaching must take into account these identities and the larger social and political context in which they live and work and make meaning. Accordingly, I will preach two sermons on special service days in which there is usually a spike in attendance by members and guests and use a survey to see how sermons constructed and proclaimed using a queer hermeneutic are heard and described. I
will ask the respondents questions to ascertain if the sermon meets those criteria of liberating and prophetic preaching that includes the voices and experience of LGBTQ people.

**Sermons for Analysis**

During the month of June, which is Pride Month, I develop a Pride Month sermon series to reflect the observance of LGBTQ history, the recognition of the struggle for civil and human rights for LGBTQ people, and a celebration of LGBTQ expression. I preached a sermon on June 9, 2019 (*Appendix C*), the day of Pentecost on the Christian liturgical calendar, that explicitly names LGBTQ identities and the social and political context for LGBTQ people, not as a topic or an issue, but as the product of a queer hermeneutic. Preaching from Acts 2, the focus of this sermon is that God’s Holy Spirit can transform and empower marginal, frightened, and powerless people to be witnesses to God’s work and movement in the world. I was hoping to invite people who have been rejected or stigmatized as spiritually unworthy to receive God’s Holy Spirit to see themselves as God’s sees them: beloved ones made in God’s image and candidates for God’s gift of the Holy Spirit.

I preached another sermon on September 8, 2019 (*Appendix C*), our church homecoming celebration in which those who have moved away or have not attended in a while return to celebrate our community. Preaching from Jeremiah 18, the focus of this sermon is on how God’s plans for us and the world are not fixed. I make the claim that God is willing to re-shape the world for the better if we are willing to be shaped and re-shaped in ways that reveal God’s love, grace, and mercy. I wanted to invite the hearers who have found themselves defined and stereotyped in the worst ways to open
themselves to being shaped by God’s loving hands. I will survey as many of those in attendance using the same survey instrument to see if a sermon that does not talk about LGBTQ people explicitly reflects the use of a queer hermeneutic and can be liberating and prophetic for LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of.” Each of these days offers an opportunity to proclaim sermons that attempt to preach to a wider audience and survey what can be heard when the focus includes gender and sexuality as more than issues or topics or identities to be tolerated.

It is important to note that these two sermons were preached in the larger context of the 50th Anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising and the questions about the place and participation of LGBTQ people in the United Methodist Church, which has recently proposed a formal division within its polity among those who support full inclusion of LGBTQ people, including ordination and marriage equality, and those who oppose full inclusion of LGBTQ people. I expect that the hearers will be listening to these proclamations in the context of an ongoing conversation about the progress LGBTQ people have made over the years and the remaining questions and contestations surrounding current rights and privileges currently be challenged religiously, politically, and judicially. I suspect that the hearers will already be primed to engage with proclamation in ways that address the current reality of the LGBTQ experience.
CHAPTER 5
ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

To convince preachers who want to preach liberating and prophetic sermons to and for LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” that their instincts are right and that there is a need for a different kind of preaching than most people on the margins have heard, it is necessary for us to have some idea about the state of preaching to and for LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of”; to gain some insight into what those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender hear preachers saying in their proclamations; and to explore what LGBTQ people heard after hearing a preacher deliver a sermon crafted using a queer hermeneutic.

What are Affirming Preachers Preaching?

While this study invites preachers to develop a queer hermeneutic such that their treatment of LGBTQ people within the body of Christ is not relegated to preaching about homosexuality as an issue or topic, the sermons chosen to get a snapshot of the state of preaching to and about LGBTQ people in the collection of welcoming and affirming sermons in Justice Calls are curated specifically because they are proclamations about sexuality. And yet, it is worth analyzing them to determine if these preachers and sermons reflect the approaches, like liberation theology and prophetic preaching, that are helpful components for the development of a queer hermeneutic. It is not possible to discern if these preachers used a queer hermeneutic in their sermon preparation.
However, we can identify some helpful examples of the ways in which preachers are intentionally combatting homiletical silence, avoiding macroaggressions, and providing liberating and prophetic messages for and about LGBTQ people within the body of Christ.

In an initial reading of the five sermons of analysis, we discover that each of the sermons make use of some of Gonzalez and Gonzalez’s pointers for biblical interpretation as part of a liberating pulpit and Harris’s call for liberating proclamations that address the hurt and agony of the disinherit. Each sermon lifts up and engages the political situation of the biblical text and the contemporary society. Preaching from the extended “God is love” testimony in 1 John 4:7–21, Merritt names the conflict within the Church over same-gender marriages, the Church and biblical treatment of same-gender relationships, and the political realities of marriage covenants in the Bible. In doing so, Merritt challenges the normative, conventional images and expectations about marriage by re-reading the biblical treatment of marriage, using the “God is love” discourse to highlight the Church’s obligation to love those people (and couples) who do not conform to what the tradition considers the norm.

Preaching on Jesus’ encounter with the Canaanite woman in the Gospel of Matthew, Piatt speaks to the political power dynamic of oppression against weaker people in the biblical text and our contemporary context, declaring “all kinds of behaviors become normalized in a culture that deems it necessary for things to function the way the

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majority in power want them to.”² Piatt uses this power analysis to acknowledge the normative and conventional structures that protect and privilege the majority, lifting up intentional parallels to the power and privilege that heterosexuals hold at the expense of LGBTQ people. Using the Canaanite woman as an example of what marginalized people look like, he shows how Scripture both demonstrates bias and practice microaggression against people on the margins. None of these preachers avoid the concrete realities and experience of oppression in their contexts.

Each of the five sermons also possesses at least one of Tisdale’s hallmarks of prophetic preaching. Lundblad and De La Torre are particularly prophetic in their proclamations, exhibiting a facility with all of the hallmarks of prophetic preaching to promote God’s vision of justice. Using both Isaiah’s oracle of deliverance with its specific mention of the fate of the eunuch and the recounting of Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch in the book of Acts, Lundblad names the reality of “the prohibitions in the Scripture, centuries of tradition, the threat to church unity, the fear in the bones” that are used to exclude people from the household of God.³ Lundblad models for preachers how to re-read the text in ways that allows for conversation between the text and our current context, raising the possibility of a witness beyond the assumed plain meaning of the text. Lundblad concludes that the Holy Spirit is that witness who cannot be rightly said to be so predictable or controllable that she doesn’t have anything to say about love and the inclusion of “others-not-thought-of.”


In re-reading the Genesis 19 story of Sodom and re-casting the sin of Sodom as the sin of unchecked heterosexuality, De La Torre is explicit in his call for the Church to acknowledge the benefits and privileges that accrue to heterosexuals and how the Bible is used to protect those benefits and privileges. He calls for the faithful “to adopt a liberationist reading of Scripture—an approach that seeks to understand sexuality from the perspective of those who have been oppressed by how sexuality has been historically defined by Christianity.”

These preachers and sermons are clear in their assumption and proclamation that their traditions are mistaken in a reading of the Bible that excludes and stigmatizes LGBTQ people and courageous in their countercultural claim and promise of God’s liberation for LGBTQ people.

Moving to a closer reading of the five sermons, without regard to the claims of liberation theology and prophetic preaching or to whether these sermons lead to the development of a queer hermeneutic, we are able to explore the sermons to see if there are some conceptual and theoretical possibilities emerging that may be helpful to preachers hoping to move beyond silence, homophobia, microaggressions, and superficial tolerance of their LGBTQ hearers and “others-not-thought-of.”

From the initial coding (Appendix D), it is evident that the preachers are particularly focused on the experience of LGBTQ people. Of course, that is to be expected considering that these sermons were selected because the editor was looking for sermons deemed to be welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ people. However, these sermons go beyond just a focus on the LGBTQ experience because they have to. What

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emerges in these sermons is an openness and attentiveness to the complexity and the controversy of affirming the queer experience and the willingness to challenge normative constructs of sexuality and gender in Scripture and tradition. Further, there is a consistent confrontation with the ways the Bible has been misused and misread and the Church’s failure to demonstrate the universality of God’s saving grace.

Further, each of the sermons includes an acknowledgement of homophobia, microaggressions, and injustice toward LGBTQ people in the Church. And yet, a deeper theme emerges in the importance of appealing to a witness beyond what we can reasonably know and proclaim about LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” within the biblical text and context. But even as they re-read and reinterpret the text, the preachers in these sermons do not view LGBTQ people as abstractions or assume that the biblical witness has nothing to say to them. Rather, they provide space in their sermons for the stories and testimonies of LGBTQ people, giving voice to queer perspectives on faith, ministry, and discipleship. Making room for the witness of LGBTQ people enables these preachers to affirm LGBTQ peoples’ relationships, their calls to ministry, and their inclusion within the body of Christ.

Finally, there emerges within these sermons an intentional act of re-reading and re-interpretation of familiar texts in ways that are liberating and prophetic. Even those preachers that do not explicitly call for such new readings, their proclamations demonstrate their own adoption of alternative or liberationist readings of Scripture. There are some who dabble in a queer reading and interpretation, whereby they undertake to obliterate categories or essentialist constructions of sexuality and identity to discern the unpredictable movement and revelation of God in surprising ways among unexpected
people. We can also discern both an implicit and explicit caution in relying too rigidly on historical interpretations and ancient biblical prohibitions to address contemporary sexual mores and affectational pair-bonding.

Guided by the concepts, definitions, and hallmarks of the liberation and prophetic preaching in Gonzalez and Gonzalez, Harris, and Tisdale, we can undertake a process of focus coding across the five sermons of analysis, honing in on some common themes found in all of the sermons. We are looking for those codes that “capture, synthesize, and understand the main” approaches to welcoming and affirming sermons and that also exhibit the marks of liberating and prophetic preaching. Further, the codes selected possess the analytic significance to reinforce the movement to a hermeneutic whereby the fullness of the lives and experiences of LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” are considered, embraced, acknowledged, and included for the purpose of liberation and prophetic preaching.

As a result of focus coding, the categories with the most analytic power and that reflect the features of liberation theology, prophetic preaching, and queer theology as part of developing a queer hermeneutic are as follows (Appendix D): affirming the experience of LGBTQ people and their relationships; acknowledging and challenging the sin and idolatry of heterosexism; sharing the stories of and giving voice to the LGBTQ experience in faith and ministry; proclaiming the inclusion of the other, LGBTQ people, and “others-not-thought-of” in the household of God; questioning the traditional biblical readings and teaching about homosexuality; and acknowledging and challenging oppressive readings of the Bible. These categories do suggest that there are promising

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indications and real-world models of liberation and prophetic preaching whereby the place, experience, and inclusion of LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” are taken seriously.

The focus coding reveals that the sermons in the collection of welcoming and affirming sermons analyzed possess the critical elements and strategies a preacher needs to develop a queer hermeneutic. What was so powerful about the five sermons of our analysis is the significance that the preachers placed on both possessing and exhibiting a knowledge of and relationship with the LGBTQ people in their midst. With the benefit of relationship and intimacy with the LGBTQ experience, each of the preachers was confident and prophetic in affirming the experience of LGBTQ people and their relationships. They were comfortable sharing the stories and lifting up the voices of the LGBTQ people in their lives and congregations.

All five sermons analyzed affirmed the experience of LGBTQ people, especially their relationships and their place in the body of Christ. This makes sense given that these sermons were preached at a time when the Church was engaged in intense debate about affirming LGBTQ people in major denominations and state and federal governments were negotiating how or whether to make same-gender marriage legal. All of the sermons acknowledge that the Church and society have reinforced a system of power and privilege for heterosexuality as the ideal norm for sexuality and relationship, giving license to degrade, stigmatize, and reject LGBTQ people. Accordingly, the preachers in these sermons conclude in a range of ways that the Church is guilty of the “sin against a Divine who created sexually diverse people and a community of people pledged to love
There is a boldness in these proclamations that inflects the sermons with a truly prophetic urgency. The response to such a prophetic proclamation is obvious: repent.

In acknowledging heterosexism as both sinful and idolatrous, these preachers reject the heterosexual experience as normative and universal. For instance, Merritt wonders aloud about the love and relationship of a deceased gay congregant caricatured or unacknowledged by the religious. Lose worries about an essentialist construction of heterosexuality (and homosexuality) that diminishes “the primacy of our baptismal identity.” Piatt recounts the experience of a gay minister whose ordination was stymied because his seminary and denomination do not ordain gay people even though his ministry was welcomed, essential, and successful. Lundblad uses the Ethiopian eunuch to wonder how often we ignore where the Holy Spirit may be calling us to welcome gay and lesbian people into the household of God by relying on Scripture and tradition to exclude those who are not a part of the norm. De La Torre names the systems and structures, specifically Scripture and tradition, used to privilege heterosexuality.

**What are LGBTQ People Saying about Preaching?**

It was a challenge getting people identified as LGBTQ to sit down for a conversation about preaching, especially those who do not have a church home, who are estranged from church, or who simply are unconvinced that church is a safe place for LGBTQ people. Early efforts to recruit self-identified LGBTQ people at unique

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7 Lose, “Descriptive or Definitive!” 20.
gatherings like Twin Cities Pride or local gay clubs were frustrated by no-shows or lack of interest. Through a series of conversations with one of our church’s community partners, The Aliveness Project, I was able to interest a few people at the organization’s community lunch in a conversation about preaching.

Joining the conversation were five people: Paul (a white man in his mid-40s); George (a gay African-American man in his mid-to-late 40s); Jerry (a gay African-American man in his mid-20s); Frank (a gay African-American man in his early 30s); and Mary (an African-American woman in her mid-20s who did not identify her sexuality). With the exception of Paul, George, and Jerry, there appeared to be a hesitation among the respondents to go into deep conversation. Many of the respondents were keeping me at arm’s length, remarking about how rare it is to have a clergy person seeking to get their ideas about anything. Even though the questions were open-ended, some of the respondents appeared to give either brief, but pointed, responses or took the invitation to raise issues unrelated to preaching related to LGBTQ people (Appendix E).

When asked about the experience, positive or negative, of the last sermon they heard, Mary, Paul, and George had positive experiences. Jerry reported an account of an explicit statement by a preacher in the sermon that homosexuality is an abomination. Frank reported having a negative experience but it is not entirely clear that the negativity he encountered in the last sermon he heard was related to sexuality. He was more concerned about issues other than sexuality, providing a critique of sermons and Church that reveals a far more complex religious experience. The recurring topic that a few

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8 Names have been changed and only general identifying characteristics were used to protect the privacy of individuals.
respondents mentioned as being negative or offensive had to do with tithing and the prosperity gospel. Accordingly, it appears that the preaching they heard rarely addressed sexuality or them as LGBTQ people, suggesting that perhaps they experienced more homiletical silence about gender and sexuality than macroaggressions.

When prompted to talk about what they heard that was helpful to them when they experienced a positive sermon, the respondents identified ideas and approaches that speak to a range of experiences and identities. For instance, what was helpful to them were sermons that motivated and inspired them, or that addressed life circumstances and how to navigate them, or possessed a universal message that “we are all children of God no matter what.” George spoke to the power of a positive witness that does not automatically condemn him for his sexuality, sharing as an example the response of his family to his coming out who told him to talk with God about his experience. Frank was more specific in identifying what he found helpful, which may speak to his experience of being infected or affected by HIV. He reported that sermons that welcomed people with HIV were most helpful to him.

Similarly, when asked what they were looking for in a sermon, especially when it came to their experience as LGBTQ, the respondents offered suggestions that, while are not specifically related to their sexuality, reveals that LGBTQ people are no different from other hearers in the kinds of messages they are looking for or that they find helpful. They reported looking for “something I can relate to;” or that lifts them up and encourages them. Jerry wanted the good news, and given his previous response that the last sermon he heard was negative, he is acutely aware that preachers sometimes do not share the good news. George responded that he is looking for “love, sympathy, empathy.
. . I’m looking for something to help me.” This response is a powerful indication that hearers do want a preacher or preaching that sees them, not solely as either sinful or sinless, but as people with a range of concerns, needs, and interests who need love.

Finally, the respondents all wanted to an emotional connection—sermons that addressed them as feeling people, that showed them that “God is not a God of hate,” that God is present. All of the participants in the focus group still consider Church to be a place to seek meaning and community and a relationship with God even though some of their experiences have been negative and their presence contested. These conversations also reveal that LGBTQ people have theological concerns that have little or nothing to do with their sexualities, such as stewardship and social justice. How often do LGBTQ people miss being shepherded on a host of other issues simply because they are not welcomed as members of the body?

We must be careful not to make sweeping generalizations about preaching from these few people, however, it is worth wondering how much preachers consider what people from all walks of life may be hearing and expecting from our proclamations, especially people on the margins who live at the intersection of several identities that are contested in majority spaces. Consistent with this need of preachers to consider both what they may be carelessly saying or what LGBTQ people are hearing, Frank closed out the conversation with a powerful exhortation that preachers, especially those who want to do right by LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of,” would do well to heed: “Choose the words wisely before you preach.” That this respondent would want this exhortation to be his last word is an invitation to preachers to revisit the words we are using to preach.
What Did the Hearers Hear?

The sermon I preached on June 9 (Appendix C) took place during the celebration of LGBTQ Pride Month, the national observances of the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising across the U.S., and as part of a sermon series The Story of Us, which focused on the history of LGBTQ people’s expression and experience of faith in the struggle for human dignity and equal rights. It also happened to be Pentecost on the Christian liturgical calendar. In light of the experience of LGBTQ people in history and the celebration of LGBTQ people during Pride, I wanted to focus on the Holy Spirit as God’s gift of empowerment to a marginal people who heard Jesus’ gospel of liberation and now are witnesses.

In the sermon, “Spirited Lives,” from Acts 2, I wanted the hearers to see how impotent a marginal people might feel in the aftermath of a crisis or trauma. However, Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit is an invitation to anticipate a transformation. And that’s exactly what the Holy Spirit did—landed on people considered weak and who were without a name and empowered them to break out of fear and hiding to be witnesses. I, then, pivoted to talking about how LGBTQ people were similarly hidden and powerless, relegated to a place of no name and no existence until Stonewall broke open the possibility for a new voice, a new way of existing. Can we discern God’s movement in the empowerment of a marginal people to break free from silence and hiding like God did for the followers of Jesus on the day of Pentecost?

The response rate to the survey (34 out approximately 109 worshipers) may have been larger had we held the survey open beyond one day. However, I wanted to examine reactions of hearers immediately following the worship service. Most of the respondents
were white (79%), male (73%), and gay (64%). The respondents, like the congregation, skewed older, with 68% of the respondents being 50 years old or older. As expected, most of the respondents came to this setting from other religious traditions: Mainline Protestant (41%); evangelical or fundamentalist traditions (28%); Catholic (17%); and the historically Black church (14%).

Overwhelming majorities strongly or somewhat agreed that the sermon recognized and centered LGBTQ people (100%); portrayed God as the source of liberation of LGBTQ people from oppression (100%); critiqued the rejection and discrimination of LGBTQ people (88%); and empowered the hearer to work for justice for LGBTQ people (100%). It is clear that the sermon included a prophetic, liberating message to LGBTQ people, and the hearers appear to recognize the preacher’s effort to both construct and proclaim a word using a hermeneutic that takes into account their particular experiences.

Approximately half the respondents (53%) felt that the sermon demonstrated a concern for LGBTQ hearers’ spiritual, physical, material, and social wellbeing. However, there were some surprising results. While I assiduously avoided anything that could be construed as stereotypical or insensitive about LGBTQ people, 12% of the respondents appear to have heard an argument for the conversion of LGBTQ people to a straight identity; 15% of the respondents thought the sermon included stereotypes or insensitive comments about LGBTQ people; 9% of the respondents thought that the sermon reinforced the idea that heterosexuality was the ideal or the universal example of discipleship. I suspect that these responses are outliers due to the design of the survey instrument. Questions 1 through 8 of the survey are posed in the positive with the
expectation that the respondents would affirm the positive statement. Questions 9 through 12 of the survey are posed in the negative with the expectation that the respondents would disagree. Were those who agreed that the sermon traded in negative stereotypes or reinforced heterosexuality as normative and universal unaware of the change in the structure of the questions?

If the surprising outliers are not the result of the design of the survey, perhaps the hearers who heard what they perceived as negative assertions about LGBTQ people need more explicitly affirmative assertions about LGBTQ people. It also possible that the references to a marginal existence in the closet or the sermon illustration about the founder of Metropolitan Community Churches organizing and participating in the first Pride parade could be viewed as outdated or stereotypical images about queer people.

The sermon I preached on September 8 (Appendix C) took place on our annual homecoming celebration Sunday during Ordinary Time of the Christian liturgical calendar. This sermon is far less explicit in naming the experience of LGBTQ people, offering a more universal treatment of religious and spiritual experience. It is a call to see that God remains willing to re-shape the world into something that better reflects God’s own love, grace, and mercy and to imagine how a misshapen, broken world might experience God’s blessings through our own God-shaped lives. It asks the hearers to consider whether we have truly allowed ourselves to be shaped by the potter’s hands or do we resist the promptings of a God seeking to shape us. I named explicitly all the ways we identify or are identified in the world . . . voters, citizens, consumers, taxpayers, LGBTQ and invited the hearers to consider what the world would look like if we let our God-shaped lives be the central identity marker for us.
The response rate to this survey (27 out of 127 worshipers) was smaller than that of the previous preaching moment. As expected and similar to those who responding to the survey in the previous preaching moment, most of the respondents were white (81%), male (63%), and gay (67%). The age breakdown was little more mixed with 37% of the respondents between ages 18-49 and 56% of the respondents 50 years old or older. The respondents were equally divided between Roman Catholic (37%) and Mainline Protestant (37%) in their previous religious experience followed by those who held from Evangelical/Fundamentalist (22%) and historically Black church (11%) backgrounds.

Like the previous sermon and survey responses, the respondents strongly or somewhat agreed overwhelmingly that the sermon recognized and centered LGBTQ people (97%) and portrayed God as the source of liberation for LGBTQ people (92%). And yet, there were smaller majorities strongly or somewhat agreeing that the sermon challenged the status quo of the power arrangement between heterosexuals and homosexuals (82%); that the sermon critiqued the rejection of and discrimination against LGBTQ people (73%); that the sermon proclaimed the promise of liberation for LGBTQ people (82%); and that the sermon empowered the hearer to work for justice for LGBTQ people (82%).

Surprisingly, there were an increasing number of respondents in the survey to report having no opinion on whether the sermon critiqued the rejection and discrimination of LGBTQ people (19%); or whether the sermon proclaimed the promise of liberation for LGBTQ people (15%). Like the previous survey, there were the surprising result that some hearers heard or perceived some negative assertions about LGBTQ people. Unfortunately, 23% of the respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that
the sermon included stereotypes and insensitive comments about LGBTQ people. Fifteen percent (15%) strongly or somewhat agreed that heterosexuality was presented as the ideal or universal norm for discipleship.

Again, it is not clear if these responses are a result of the design of the survey or if the hearers heard within the proclamation something that felt aggressive or insensitive. Also, the increasing use of the no opinion option as a response to some of the questions may suggest that a sermon that does not explicitly name the experience of LGBTQ people may not be viewed as an affirming proclamation even if it isn’t negative. Could it be that LGBTQ hearers somehow see themselves outside of a more general proclamation? Or is it possible that prevailing religious language excludes the experience and witness of LGBTQ people so consistently that LGBTQ hearers do not associate their experiences with a more general, inclusive proclamation?

Powell has demonstrated that hearers of sermons are sorting, processing, remembering, and organizing auditory data in ways that help them make meaning.9 While I am confident in the message that I wanted to convey and am confident that sermons were carefully crafted to avoid making insensitive or stereotypical claims about LGBTQ people or reinforcing heterosexuality as normative, some of the hearers may have judged, recalled, or interpreted the claims of the sermon differently than I expected. Perhaps there are some emotional and aesthetic touches I could have chosen that may have resonated more personally with those hearers.

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CHAPTER 6
EVALUATION

The study endeavored to ascertain the state of preaching to and for LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of;” to gain some insight into what those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender hear preachers saying in their proclamations; and to explore what LGBTQ people heard after hearing a preacher deliver a sermon crafted using a queer hermeneutic. We found out there are some good models of liberating and prophetic preaching happening and being made accessible through books, journals, and prolific LGBTQ allies publicly sharing their work. While this study did not undertake to determine if these preachers used a queer hermeneutic to prepare and draft their sermons, we were able to identify several approaches and intentional choices within their work that demonstrated a willingness to acknowledge and affirm the experience of LGBTQ people in the community of faith and to re-read and reinterpret the biblical text in ways that do not reject or stigmatize LGBTQ people.

In the focus group with LGBTQ-identified people and “others-not-thought-of” we found that there are some LGBTQ hearers who do not impose a high standard on preachers in their proclamation. Focus group respondents were looking for good news, for preachers to address the real circumstances of their lives, and for demonstrations of love, sympathy, and empathy. Surprisingly, while focus group respondents mentioned concern about the negative experiences of preaching, they were reluctant to evaluate
preaching solely in light of what preachers say about their sexual identities or gender identities.

We also learned that upon hearing a preacher deliver sermons crafted using a queer hermeneutic, those who responded to a survey immediately afterwards heard themselves and their experiences acknowledged and affirmed; detected a challenge to normative constructions of sexuality and romantic relationships; agreed that the sermons remained situated in the biblical text while in conversation with the current context; and agreed that the sermons did not trade in stereotypes or microaggressive attacks. While there were some problematic responses, possibly a result of a weakness in the survey design as well as the expected gaps between the message the preacher intended and the message individual listeners heard, there is overwhelming evidence from the respondents that the sermons moved beyond a superficial tolerance and engaged them at a deeper level of awareness and intentionality.

**Strengths of the Study**

One of the major strengths of this study is that it does not accept the suspicion or assumption that preachers must move away from the Bible to preach a liberating, prophetic sermon to and for LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of.” On the contrary, the very premise of this study is that the Bible contains themes, images, and stories with liberating and prophetic messages for LGBTQ people. This study invites preachers to trust the biblical text and trust the good news contained within it for all God’s children, including LGBTQ people. The sermons studied and preached and the hearers surveyed and interviewed for this study engage with the biblical text explicitly to make the case that preaching to and for LGBTQ people can be liberating and prophetic.
Another strength of this study is that it seeks to bridge reading and interpretation and proclamation as a praxis. This study takes seriously that “preaching is always situated rhetoric,” inviting preachers to not only undertake reading and interpreting the biblical text using liberation and queer theology but to use those theoretical tools as part of an ongoing process of engagement, conversation, and re-thinking and re-evaluating received traditions and wisdom with and about LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of.” While the study does rely on theories and strategies for reading and interpreting in ways that help preachers with liberation and prophetic preaching, the engagement with sermons and with the views and voices of LGBTQ hearers connects those theories and strategies to the praxis of preaching. This kind of preaching requires more than a superficial engagement with LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” to say something new and liberating.

Another strength of this study is the focus on hermeneutics as an ongoing process for deeper understanding and relationship rather than just a best practice for more tolerant preaching. At the beginning of this process, I thought that the conclusion would be a discrete list of things that a preacher could do that would make their preaching to, for, and about LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” more liberating and prophetic. However, while readers of this study can discern some essential best practices for preaching in a different way, the theological analysis and the qualitative and quantitative analyses highlight the need for a process for sermon preparation and delivery that includes intentionality; revisiting assumptions and received traditions; questioning boundaries and categories that reinforce a normative construction of sex, gender, and

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1 Ken Stone, “‘Do Not Be Conformed to this World’: Queer Reading and the Task of the Preacher,” *Theology & Sexuality* 13, no. 2 (2007), 161.
sexuality; and developing deeper relationships with those whose place and voice within
the body of Christ remain contested because of unconventional or a minority sexual
identity or gender expression.

Studying welcoming and affirming sermons, talking to a group of people about
what they hear in preaching, and surveying hearers immediately after listening to a
sermon constructed using a queer hermeneutic made this study concrete and contextual. It
would have been appropriate and informative if this study had been solely an extensive
theological analysis of the question of liberating and prophetic preaching to LGBTQ
people and “others-not-thought-of” in a postmodern context. However, the aim of this
study was to do that theological analysis but do it with engagement with actual hearers
and to see how the claims of this study’s theological and homiletical analyses hold up
under real-world conditions.

Another strength of this study is that the context was conducive to learning more
about a community long stereotyped and stigmatized and hear the stories and voices of
LGBTQ people who often aren’t welcomed in religious spaces. The contexts include a
community organization, The Aliveness Project, which provides support for those who
are infected or affected by HIV, providing a safe space for LGBTQ people and “others-
not-thought-of” free of rejection and stigmatization and no assumptions about their
sexualities and gender expressions; and All God’s Children MCC, which is part of a
denomination founded with the expressed purpose of welcoming, ministering to, and
ordaining LGBTQ people. A focus group convened and hearers surveyed in these settings
offered me an opportunity to hear directly from people who may have experienced both
the positive and negative side of preaching. They also can give us some sense of how
homophobia and microaggressions in preaching and religious spaces may have affected LGBTQ people socially and spiritually. Hearing these personal experiences helped the study focus, not just on what preachers may or may not be saying, but on what LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” may be hearing regardless of what preachers intend.

**Weaknesses of the Study**

While the context for this study was conducive to hearing directly from LGBTQ people about their experience of preaching, one of the major weaknesses of this study is also the context. The context for this study was overwhelmingly LGBTQ. Accordingly, there was no meaningful way to ascertain what non-LGBTQ people hear when preachers give liberating, prophetic sermons or what the impact of such preaching is on their views of the LGBTQ people in their midst. Would these proclamations resonate with a more mixed audience? Would those who identify as heterosexual discern that the sermons were constructed with an intentional and conscious relationship and experience with LGBTQ people? Most of the preaching that preachers will do and that LGBTQ people will hear will likely take place in contexts where LGBTQ people are the minority. The reality of more diverse settings for preaching means that, while the results of this study give us insight into the experience of LGBTQ people and what a queer hermeneutic could possibly do for preaching, we do not have a sense of what non-LGBTQ people are experiencing.

Another weakness of this study was in the survey design. There were some responses to later questions in each survey that appeared to be contradictory to the responses to earlier questions, suggesting that maybe the lack of consistency in the wording of statements and the multiple choice responses may have confused respondents.
Further, the survey design included questions that were posed to look for the elements of liberation and prophetic preaching found in Gonzalez and Gonzalez, Harris, and Tisdale, but did not include any questions about the specific focus and function of the particular sermons preached. It’s possible that the questions posed in the surveys seemed disconnected from the meanings, approaches, and intended messages of the sermons. If there were questions in the survey directly related to the focus of the sermons, could the hearers draw some more insight about what was liberating and prophetic about the sermon, not as general conclusions, but as the very crux of the sermons?

There were also a few technical, methodological weaknesses that would have made the study results more robust. For instance, the sample sizes were too small, which left the sample far less diverse than the actual population of attendees, and thus, overemphasizes the responses of the white, male, gay population. Furthermore, this small sample size and its tendency to skew toward a particular population make it harder for us to generalize and reproduce it in other settings that may be more diverse. At worst, it means that the chances go up for assuming a result is more powerful than it actually is. A more representative sample would give us more confidence that the results are generalizable and reproducible, confirming the conclusions of this study.

Additionally, the small sample size and the over-representation of the white, male, gay respondents as well as older respondents made it harder to rely on the explanatory value of race, sex, gender, age, and sexuality as independent variables in cross-tabulations. In such a case, we really cannot ascertain with any confidence or explanatory power the responses of those who identify as lesbian, transgender, or African-American who were in attendance. Consequently, this study must contend with constraints on the
true effect of the preaching on the respondents. However, in light of the focus group
discussion and the overwhelming majority responses to each of the questions in the
survey, these methodological weaknesses do not undermine the conclusions of this study.

Suggestions for Improvement

This study actually would have been served by more emphasis on the focus group
method of inquiry. Specifically, the method of investigation should have included
multiple focus groups, with a more experienced investigator and with at least 7-9 people
in each focus group. With more focus group respondents and more discussion, this study
could have made more robust use of grounded theory of qualitative analysis to analyze
what LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” say about preaching and see what
themes and ideas emerge from a range of thoughts and experiences.

Also, a less generic design to the survey in response to the sermons would have
greatly improved the study. In this study, the survey included questions that asked the
respondents to look for liberating and prophetic characteristics of each of the sermons but
I failed to include questions that prompted the respondents to recall and evaluate the
claims of the sermon. Perhaps if the survey included questions about the focus and
function of the sermon, the evaluation about whether the sermons were liberating and
prophetic would have been related more closely to the actual claims of the sermon. Such
an approach to the survey would also mitigate against any possible confusing
construction or positioning of particular questions that appeared to result in bizarre outlier
responses.

This study would also benefit from a larger, more representative sample. Given
that the sermons are recorded and made available on the church’s website and weekly
devotional email communication, the survey could have been left open beyond the Sundays on which each of the sermons was preached. With a more detailed survey made available over a few days, this study may have gotten more thoughtful responses, providing not only a larger sample, but also providing opportunities for more sophisticated cross-tabulations and regression analysis to show the interactions between a range of potential variables. We could then possibly see how race, sexuality, and gender influence hearers perception of the sermons and which elements they perceived to be liberating or prophetic.

Another missing component to this study that would improve it and provide preachers with another source for helping them with the art of understanding is an exploration of the gay and lesbian literary canon as a source for engagement with the lives, experiences, and history of LGBTQ people. In a seminal work of womanist theology, Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community, Katie Canon used the literature of Zora Neale Hurston and folklore and legends of the black community to demonstrate how the black literary tradition can be a reliable source for a truthful representation of Black women’s lives, values, and ethics. Perhaps, those seeking a deeper understanding of the queer experience, especially historically, may find truthful representations and ethical constructions of LGBTQ life and aspirations through the music, literature, and popular cultural artifacts LGBTQ people have relied upon for visibility and expression. Through periods of silence, persecution, hiddenness, the LGBTQ community has found literature a safer, powerful means of expression and

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giving voice to their experiences when they were ignored in the larger culture. Preachers interested in both queer history and contemporary queer experience as part of a process for the art of understanding for better preaching have a rich repository of stories, plays, poems, and essays chronicling the lives of LGBTQ people from which to draw.
CHAPTER 7

REFLECTION

Every week, I preach to LGBTQ people from a range of religious traditions and backgrounds. Many of them found their way to my congregation after being rejected by their faith communities because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Many others are unchurched queer people in recovery who have avoided religion because of the cultural acceptance that the Bible is anti-gay and the overwhelming influence of faith communities who reject and stigmatize LGBTQ people. While the former group of LGBTQ hearers expect that preaching will affirm them as God’s beloved and want fervently to believe that they are included in the body of Christ, the latter is cautious and suspicious about preaching because they have neither heard affirming proclamation nor do they expect that such a proclamation can come from the Bible.

In more than ten years of preaching in largely queer spaces and to mostly queer hearers, I have found there remain LGBTQ hearers who are anxious, conflicted, ambivalent, or indifferent about the proclamation as a result of homophobia in religious spaces. That anxiety, conflict, ambivalence, and indifference show up in the feedback from those hearers who ask why I don’t spend more time addressing or refuting the six passages that reject, condemn, and prohibit homosexuality. It is revealed in the critiques from those who find it hard to move beyond the fundamentalist approach to biblical interpretation and worry that I am misreading or misinterpreting scripture if I do not accept that the Bible condemns homosexuality unconditionally. It shows up in the
resistance of those who question why I read and interpret the Bible at all since both the
Bible and Christianity are irredeemably hostile to queerness. It is found in the expressions
of resignation that neither heterosexuals nor LGBTQ people can be sure about God’s
approach at all, therefore, it is futile trying to discern it in the Bible.

And yet, as I preach from a queer hermeneutic, using queer experience,
information, and knowledge as the lens through which to proclaim the gospel, LGBTQ
people find themselves elated and curious about what I am doing and seek to engage in
conversation about what I am preaching. Especially for those unchurched queer hearers
who speak to me after worship, the promise and possibilities the proclamation opens up
to them is exciting and encouraging. I have found myself fielding a range of questions
about the Bible and the theological themes that had previously been avoided or ignored
out of fear that they have nothing to say about the queer experience. In response, I have
tried even harder to be intentional and conscious about these questions of queer listeners
who all too often are not seen and heard in the proclamation of the gospel. I have also
come to realize that there are LGBTQ people throughout society wrestling with the
fallout of the religious tradition of homophobia while also hungering for a word that
brings good news and they are doing so in a range of religious traditions contesting their
presence.

Preaching matters. Even for those people who have been estranged from their
faith communities, especially many LGBTQ people, what preachers say, their messages
and rhetoric, positive or negative, has an impact on how LGBTQ people view themselves
and how they are viewed by their families, communities, and the culture. In talking with
LGBTQ people about preaching and surveying the responses of people who just heard a
sermon crafted and delivered using a queer hermeneutic, I saw vestiges of both anxiety about raising the issue of preaching to, for, and about LGBTQ people and curiosity about any intentional engagement with preachers and preaching about LGBTQ people. Such reactions are not surprising given the still contested place of many LGBTQ people in religious spaces.

And yet, there was a willingness to engage with this project for the sake of better preaching. Anecdotally, the people in the context of All God’s Children report coming to this church because it is a safe space. There are a few others who remain in the religious tradition of their birth or their families attending All God’s Children just to get a break from intolerant or indifferent preachers and churches. Whatever their personal situation or approach to faith and church, when potential participants and respondents heard about the focus of the study, there was vocal support for the idea that there should be better, more affirmative preaching to, for, and about LGBTQ people that take seriously their needs, interests, questions, and concerns.

As I went deeper into the study and the conversations, it is surprising how much LGBTQ people fear, avoid, or reject the Bible as a reliable and authoritative source of support or affirmation for their lives and experiences. Unfortunately, most churches of varying traditions have been effective and successful in reading and interpreting the Bible in ways that, not only do not affirm LGBTQ people and their experiences, but that are also overwhelmingly hostile to them. Accordingly, there were surprising expressions of relief about preaching that do not mention LGBTQ people at all. Sadly, the safest preaching that many LGBTQ people have encountered is preaching that ignores them completely.
Once the LGBTQ people I talked to and surveyed got over any anxiety or suspicion over preaching in general, there was a hunger for and curiosity about hearing fairer, more loving and ethical preaching as it relates to LGBTQ people. I saw no attempt to avoid the elements of a deeper faithfulness and discipleship among LGBTQ people. Rather, most of the LGBTQ people I talked to or surveyed had spent much time thinking about and practicing the substance of deep faith such as repentance, confession, prayer, worship, service, and a range spiritual disciplines. I saw no effort to avoid confronting one’s own sin and one’s need for forgiveness; just a frustration with the seeming belief of many preachers and churches that homosexuality and gender non-conformity are the worst sins there are. I did not encounter the LGBTQ people of the breathless evangelical polemics about godless sexual deviants who advocated for their full civil and human rights at the expense of freedom of religion.

For those preachers who are not likely to encounter a critical mass of LGBTQ hearers in their own contexts but who, nonetheless, want to move away from homiletical silence, homophobia, indifference, and microaggressions as it relates to LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of,” this study invites them to engage with what LGBTQ people have historically heard and experienced with preaching. Such an encounter with the views and concerns of a population of faithful people, many of whom are sitting in the pews, who have been marginalized and historically stigmatized provides a window into the ways preaching has been used to target people because of their sexualities and gender identities.

My hope is that preachers will listen closely to the testimonies and experiences of LGBTQ people, re-think the received wisdom of their traditions and the often
unintentional ways they reinforce heterosexism and normative gender construction, and revisit and re-read the biblical text to listen anew to the liberating and prophetic messages therein. In this way, preachers can broaden the conversation between the world of the biblical text and the world of the lived experience of the range of people in their context. Since LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of” have all too often been missing from that conversation, preachers have an opportunity to experience the gospel moving beyond the limits of their own imagination and their own wisdom.

While the aim of the study is to get preachers to use a queer hermeneutic for the purpose of preaching liberating and prophetic sermons to LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of,” the invitation to re-think the received wisdom of one’s tradition and to revisit and re-read the biblical text is a call for preachers to inoculate their encounter with the sacred text from the cultural conditioning we all experience so that they can be open to all the ways that God may be revealing God’s self. So much of our preaching conforms to and reinforces our cultural, political, and ideological commitments such that we hardly notice how our readings of the text seem to neatly reflect our own fears and biases. Perhaps, reading the biblical text through a lens of liberation theology or queer theology may open up new opportunities to be in conversation with and proclaim to others who do not conform to the norms we have set as the standard against which all others are measured.

I also hope that preachers in contexts with majorities of people who identify as heterosexual would explore what their own congregants hear about LGBTQ people and “others-not-thought-of.” Since the congregational context is shared space, preachers could learn a lot about how their preaching to, for, and about LGBTQ people is heard as
well as how that preaching is influencing the hearers who do not identify as LGBTQ or who may also be influenced by the cultural conditioning to reject and stigmatize LGBTQ people.

This experience has reinforced my belief that the biblical text remains a reliable source for preaching to, for, and about LGBTQ people. Despite an early church experience of a homophobic reading of scripture and homiletical hostility to my existence in preaching, when I was reintroduced to the Bible at a church that had practiced reading it through a lens of liberation theology and when seminary education taught me how to read and interpret, I became convinced that the Bible was not an enemy to LGBTQ people. When I started my own ministry, I realized that I had something to say to LGBTQ people that either had not been said or that they had never heard. In putting this way of preaching to the test, I am convinced that not only were my instincts correct but there is still more to learn in approaching sermon preparation using a queer hermeneutic.

I also learn how very timely this kind of examination is in our current social and political context. Throughout the work on this study, our community was participating in a heated political battle over the use of conversion therapy, a harmful practice opposed by every mainstream medical and mental health association aimed at changing a person’s sexual orientation or gender expression or identity. Several of the members of my church were subjected to this kind of “therapy” and carry the wounds and trauma from such a horrible experience, most often practiced by trusted pastors and parents. We were also wrestling with the ongoing epidemic of murders of transgender people, mostly women, around the world and the concerns about safety and health of our trans members and
friends. Preaching a liberating gospel was critical given this reality. Finding a deeper reading of the text was life-giving for so many.
APPENDIX A

Focus Group Guidelines and Questions

Welcome and thank you for taking the time to participate in this focus group study on preaching effectively to multiple generations. Before I begin with asking questions, I would like to go through a few guidelines to help facilitate our time together.

Guidelines:

- There are no right or wrong answers, only different opinions.
- This is being recorded so please speak up and do not talk over one another
- Use only first names.
- We do not need to agree with one another but please be respectful of other opinions and views.
- Please silence all electronic devices.
- My role as moderator is to guide the discussion but please talk to each other
- If you need further clarification at any point during our discussion please raise your hand
- There are three engagement questions, sex exploration questions and one exit question. However, additional questions in order to gain clarity may be asked, such as: “Could you please explain what you mean by…”? “Can you say something else about…”? “Could you share an example of …”?

Engagement Questions:

1. When was the last time you heard a sermon?
2. What was your general experience? Positive? Negative?
3. In the last sermon you heard, how were LGBTQ people presented or addressed?

Exploration Questions:

4. In what ways, if any, did the sermon speak to your identity as LGBTQ person?
5. In what ways did the preacher help you understand the Bible reading and its relationship to your identity as an LGBTQ person?
6. If the sermon you heard was positive, how was the sermon you heard helpful to you?
7. If the sermon you heard was negative, how did the sermon target or offend you?
8. What are some things you are looking for in a sermon, especially when it comes to your experience as LGBTQ?
9. What feelings, attitudes or thoughts are you looking for a sermon to provoke in you?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add about preaching and LGBTQ people?
APPENDIX B

Post-Sermon Survey (June 9th and September 8th Sermons)

1. The sermon was rooted in a biblical text(s).
   - [ ] Strongly agree
   - [ ] Somewhat agree
   - [ ] Somewhat disagree
   - [ ] Strongly disagree
   - [ ] No opinion

2. The perspectives of LGBTQ people were recognized and centered in the sermon.
   - [ ] Strongly agree
   - [ ] Somewhat agree
   - [ ] Somewhat disagree
   - [ ] Strongly disagree
   - [ ] No opinion

3. The sermon portrays God as the source of liberation of LGBTQ people from oppression.
   - [ ] Strongly agree
   - [ ] Somewhat agree
   - [ ] Somewhat disagree
   - [ ] Strongly disagree
   - [ ] No opinion

4. The sermon challenged the status quo of the existing power arrangement between heterosexuals and homosexuals?
   - [ ] Strongly agree
   - [ ] Somewhat agree
   - [ ] Somewhat disagree
   - [ ] Strongly disagree
5. The sermon critiqued the rejection and discrimination of LGBTQ people.

☐ Strongly agree  ☐ Somewhat agree  ☐ Somewhat disagree  ☐ Strongly disagree  ☐ No opinion

6. The sermon proclaimed the promise of liberation for LGBTQ people.

☐ Strongly agree  ☐ Somewhat agree  ☐ Somewhat disagree  ☐ Strongly disagree  ☐ No opinion

7. The sermon empowered the hearer to work for justice for LGBTQ people.

☐ Strongly agree  ☐ Somewhat agree  ☐ Somewhat disagree  ☐ Strongly disagree  ☐ No opinion

8. The sermon demonstrated a concern for the LGBTQ hearers’ condition (check all that apply). spiritual, physical, material, and social wellbeing?

☐ Spiritual wellbeing  ☐ Physical wellbeing  ☐ Material wellbeing  ☐ Social wellbeing  ☐ All of the above

9. The sermon attacked LGBTQ people.

☐ Strongly agree  ☐ Somewhat agree  ☐ Somewhat disagree  ☐ Strongly disagree
10. The sermon argued for the conversion of LGBTQ people to a “straight” identity.

☐ No opinion

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ No opinion

11. The sermon included stereotypes or insensitive comments about LGBTQ people.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ No opinion

12. The sermon presented heterosexuality as the ideal or universal example of discipleship and relationship.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ No opinion

13. My gender identity is: (Select one)

☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Transgender and I identify as female
☐ Transgender and I identify as male
☐ I prefer the following term(s) to describe my gender identity

☐ No labels
14. My age is: (Select one)

- Under 18
- 18-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70-79
- 80 or over

15. My race/ethnicity is: (Select all that apply to you)

- White, European American
- Black, African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- Asian or Pacific Islanders
- My race/ethnicity is not specified (please specify): No labels

16. My sexual orientation is: (Select one)

- Asexual
- Bisexual
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Heterosexual
- Pansexual
- Queer
- Questioning
- Same Gender Loving
- I prefer not to answer
- I prefer the following term(s) to describe my sexual orientation

________________________
17. My religious background/denomination prior to MCC is: (Select all that apply to you)

☐ Catholic: Such as Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, and others
☐ Orthodox: Such as Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, and others
☐ Mainline Protestant: Such as Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Reformed, Episcopal/Anglican, United Church of Christ, Congregational, Disciples of Christ, Quaker, American Baptist, and others
☐ Evangelical or fundamentalist: Such as Baptist; Evangelical Free; Independent or non-denominational Bible churches; Holiness churches like the Wesleyan Methodist, Christian & Missionary Alliance, Church of the Nazarene; Pentecostal/Charismatic churches like the Assemblies of God, Church of God, or independent Charismatic/Pentecostal churches; Anabaptist churches like the Mennonites, and others.
☐ Historic Black Churches: Such as African Methodist Episcopal (AME), Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME); Baptist such as National Baptist, Missionary Baptist and others; Pentecostal such as Church of God in Christ, and others; Holiness such as Church of Christ (Holiness) and others.
☐ Other Christian groups: Such as Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Christian Science, Unity, and others.
☐ Non-Christian Religion: Such as the Unitarian Universalist Church, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, New Age; Religious Science, Pagan, Wiccan, and others.
☐ None
☐ Other: (Please specify): ______________________________
The disciples were still basking in the joy and awe of resurrection and wandering when Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel when Jesus told them, “You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8). And after all that has transpired, after witnessing Jesus being taken from them up into heaven, they settle in an upstairs room to regroup, making decisions that will help them keep the ministry of The Way alive. They are in that liminal space of praying and waiting. Luke doesn’t tell us exactly what those disciples were feeling but I suspect that many of us know something about those times when the way forward is not clear even when our faith remains secure. I remember that the old saints in the church of my youth referred this to posture as a time when the people of God need to PUSH—they did not mean putting pressure on an object to move it. PUSH is an acronym which means pray until something happens.

When the day of Pentecost had come, something indeed happened. The images bespeak of the movement of God as of from of old . . . a sudden loud sound, a violent wind, divided tongues as of fire, God acts. The Spirit of God fills the room and fills them. Whatever fear, whatever hesitation, whatever disconnect the apostles felt was washed away in the unexpected, untamed, uncontrollable, indiscriminate grace filling the room and filling them. They ran out of that room and began to proclaim, testify, prophesy all about God’s deeds of power in the languages of all the pilgrims from every nation. The Spirit of God disrupts the routine of the festival pilgrimage to fulfill the promise of power. All barriers to speaking and hearing the gospel fall away and the word goes forth.
In God’s surprising intervention, there is no silencing the voices or languages of anyone open to speaking and hearing the good news.

The reaction of the crowd is telling. What does this mean? Those who could not or would not discern the movement of God thought that the saints were drunk. But the curious and the seeking soon found out what happens when the empowering presence of God falls on flesh. For Peter, the question—"what does this mean?"—was not a rhetorical question, and the slander that they were drunk could not go answered. And Peter, newly empowered by the very presence of the Holy Spirit, which fell on him, steps forward to bear witness, to proclaim, to testify . . . Peter takes Joel as his inspiration to prophesy about the power of the Holy Spirit indiscriminately empowering all God’s children, men; women; children; even slaves to find their voice and accept their call so spread the gospel.

The Holy Spirit transformed the frightened followers of a crucified leader into an empowered community determined to bear witness to the work of God in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit compelled a people considered powerless and inconsequential to the empire to break out of their closed room and reach out to a diverse community hungry for good news. Those same apostles sitting in that room praying until something happens now display spirited lives, empowered and emboldened to be witnesses to One who was crucified.

No matter how bleak things looked. No matter how acute and wounding the absence of God seemed. No matter how powerless they felt. God was not through with them yet. God was pouring out God’s spirit on all flesh so they will have everything they need to move out of that closed door and speak a word. And there was no turning back. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, this people will no longer be silent. They will no longer be afraid. They will no longer hide out. And so it begins. The Spirit of God’s dramatic disruption of the status quo unleashes a radically new way of being and living for the followers of Jesus. In the unfolding of God’s imagination, “a people unknown and undesired”\(^1\) now filled with God’s power and presence are driven out into a hostile world to tell the story of the crucified Jesus who made God known in his life, death, and resurrection.

On any given day, I suspect all of us have reached the limits of our power. We have prayed for strength, for a breakthrough, for something to happen. In confronting fear, sin, or failure, there have been those moments when we needed the very presence of God to just get us through. Those who live and exist on the margins know what it’s like to languish in the futility of powerlessness and to go to God in prayer for liberation. During this 50\(^{th}\) Anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, in the story of us, I think often about those people who “were scheduled for nonexistence . . . [who] were supposed to have no reality,”\(^2\) and wonder how they found their voices and accepted their calls.

In 1970, on the one-year anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, LGBTQ people walked out of hiding, out of closets, and out denial to do something that had never been done before . . . they dared to march down public streets in major cities, letting everyone know that they were God’s LGBTQ people with worth and dignity. Rev. Troy Perry, the

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\(^2\) Attributed to Tommy Lanigan-Schmidt as quoted in *Pride: The LGBTQ+ Rights Movement*, 1.
founder of Metropolitan Community Churches, was one of the organizers of that first Pride March in Los Angeles. Nobody knew what was going to happen, and many admitted being afraid. This was all new, and people wondered if there would be violence and many knew that being seen would mean losing everything. During what started off as a tense and hesitant parade, Troy Perry described riding in a convertible with the members of MCC-LA following behind him singing *Onward Christian Soldiers*. Something empowered him and these people to bear witness with their bodies.

After the parade, instead of going home, Rev. Troy Perry felt led to hold a prayer vigil at one of the busy intersections that had been often populated by Krishna kids, the Salvation Army, and holiness churches fundraising. And when he began to pray, a police officer came to tell him to disperse or get arrested. A minister of the gospel, who two years before tentatively reclaimed his call, refused to stop praying or to move and was arrested.

What does this mean? What does it mean when a people unknown and undesired are no longer afraid to claim their full humanity? What does it mean that a preacher and pastor can be empowered to testify to his identity as both a follower of Jesus and a gay man and bear witness to that identity at a Pride March? Can we discern God’s movement in the decision of a marginalized people, who could lose their jobs, their families, their careers, and possibly their lives, empowered to step out into public view to declare their full humanity? Perhaps it is the Spirit of God falling unexpectedly and unpredictably on all flesh. Perhaps this is the empowering of God’s expansive love and reach calling displaced and disconnected believers to participate in God’s work in the world in a new way to reach new people. After Troy Perry’s arrest, MCC churches were being planted in 8 cities. Isn't it just like the empowering presence of God to inspire, not a riot, or violence, or even anger, but a Pride March and a prayer vigil and new church plants? For this time, for this movement, perhaps the Spirit of God was calling these to be the ones through which to spread good news.

I hope we see what is possible here. I hope that this experience of the Holy Spirit reminds us that we have the power. The Holy Spirit isn’t moving because of what we are doing or our desire to have it. The Holy Spirit is a gift of God sent to us to give us the power to do what Jesus did; to serve like Jesus serve; to bear witness to the world to what God is doing. The Holy Spirit’s arrival means that we can come out of hiding, come out of our closets, come out of fear and shame, and let the world know about Jesus’ unconditional love for all people.
Since the last time I stood behind this sacred desk, the state of the nation and the world has taken a decidedly pessimistic turn. Since then, there have been three mass shootings in the United States, killing, maiming, and injuring people who were just going about their lives expecting to be safe; in response, there have been cowardly leaders unwilling and unable to take action to make us safer. Since then, economists and corporate analysts have been warning of an impending recession as the nations engage in a trade war without regard for the impact on the most economically vulnerable. Since then, the Amazon Rainforest, which is home to 10% of the earth’s known species, 1500 species of birds, and 40,000 plant species and which is referred to the “Lungs of the Planet” because it produces 20% of the world’s oxygen, is ablaze, with fires destroying its wildlife and plant life faster than previous years. Since then, four more trans women of color have been viciously murdered in the United States and the cultural and religious silence is deafening and infuriating. We are more divided than ever before; and racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and poverty continue to plague our body politic. The shape of things is not good.

And as I wrestle with how to respond to this shape of things, I have a deeper appreciation for prophets. You see, prophets do not have the luxury of looking the other way; they must confront the world as it is and name what is happening. They are called by God to tell the truth about the way things are. In speaking to, for, and about God, prophets cannot pick and choose what they will care about; they just have to tell the people what they see and what God cares about. Prophets are not satisfied with giving speeches or singing songs about patriotism and nationalism. They cannot soothe their guilt and anxiety with the myths nations tell themselves about their goodness, their heroism, or their exceptionalism.

The prophet Jeremiah finds himself in just such a position in looking at the shape of things in Israel. Even before he was born, God chose Jeremiah and gave him a word to speak to the nations and kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. Jeremiah’s task was to speak “the governing word”3 of

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3 Brueggemann, To Pluck Up, To Tear Down, 22.
God over against Israel’s royal consciousness and self-deception. Israel had become so convinced of her blessedness and her covenant relationship with God that she started to skimp on living God’s dream for herself and for the world. Israel began to rely on human wisdom and human strength for her future. She was guilty of amassing wealth unjustly. The land of promise was made desolate by the people’s abuse and exploitation. As Jeremiah himself declared in echoing God’s complaint about Israel, “They did not obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels, and looked backward rather than forward” (Jer 7:24).

Like a good mediator, Jeremiah appeals to God for deliverance for Israel. When he prays for hope and healing, God sends Jeremiah to the potter’s house. God wants Jeremiah to see in the actions of a potter signs and symbols of God’s own posture toward Israel. The image that Jeremiah sees is God as an artist, a shaper of nations and peoples. And yet, the image is not reassuring. . . for God declares God’s sovereignty not only to build and plan what is good for them, which we expect from a loving God, but also God’s freedom to shape evil and design a plan against the people. That is a disturbing image, and it speaks to our fear that God may be orchestrating against us. We’ve all had powerful religious figures using this image of God to control and frighten us.

But even as we wonder about this frightening image of God’s wrath, there is a hopeful message in God’s response to Jeremiah. For in this role as a potter, in this role as the shaper of things, we see a God who is willing to be changed, who is willing to reconsider the divine response to the creation, who is willing to begin anew when God’s people have re-committed to God’s ways. In this image of the potter, God is not rigid and God’s plan is not fixed. God can be ministered to; God can be influenced by what faithful people do. Israel can avoid destruction if she turns back to God. The people can change the shape of things if they allow themselves to be shaped by God’s hands again.

Since God is willing to re-shape the world, I wonder why we so easily adjust to a misshapen world. We have become comfortable in our privilege and in our power. Even as the shape of things continue to deteriorate, pundits, politicians, columnist, and even some religious folk tell us that our democracy and our institutions remain strong and steady. We are told that even as things take a bad turn, we just need to double down on doing what we’ve always done; that our best hope is in maintaining the status quo. We are told that we are an exceptional nation . . . that the racism, inequality, and the violence in our nation are bugs rather than features of our nation.

It seems to be lost on far too many people that perhaps the shape of things now are a result of our failure to respond to God’s promptings. Perhaps the shape we are in is because we have not let ourselves be transformed by the love and grace of God. Perhaps we have been given over to our worst instincts because we have resisted God’s desire and attempt to mold us into something good and lasting and beautiful. Lest we think we still have time to do better, we must face the truth that we have, in too many cases, simply run out of time. . . the dead infant and toddler asylum seekers at the southern border, the lives taken by gunmen with assault rifles, dead animal and plant species in the Amazon rainforests are convincing indications of how bad things really are. They are the horrible costs for our refusal to be shaped by God’s loving hands.

Before anybody takes umbrage and protest “this preacher is blaming us for this mess,” I invite all of us to simply look at how we are showing up in this moment . . . are we responding as clay to the divine potter’s touch or are we resisting what is good and
lasting and beautiful in the midst of this cruel, divisive social and political culture? In light of the separation of families at the border, what is the potter’s loving touch trying to mold us to be? In light of racism and homophobia, to what is the potter calling us to in response?

We, the people who gather in the name of God; we, who call ourselves followers of the way of Jesus Christ have been shown a better way. We have been called and called out by God and responded. And yet, we resist the potter’s hands and all others to shape us. We have allowed the Republican Party to shape us. We have allowed the Democratic Party to shape us. We have allowed our ideologies to shape us. We have allowed being white to shape us. We have allowed being black to shape us. We have allowed being LGBTQ to shape us. We have allowed living in Minnesota USA to shape us. When are we going to allow God to shape us? When are we going to allow the potter to transform us?

Here’s the good news: The shape of things now can be re-shaped. It doesn’t have to be this way. We don’t have to do this on our own. We can trust God again. God is open to change if we are willing to be changed. We can allow God to shape us. God is an artist, a master at the craft of creation, full of love, hope, grace, and imagination. That divine artist is willing to do something about the troubling shape of the world. We don’t have to give in to the influence of the nation, or politicians, or our ideologies. Our fate is not sealed; God’s plans are not fixed. We can do better and respond to God’s promptings and God’s loving attempts to make and mold us. By being shaped by God, we minister to God. We can influence the shape of things right now.
APPENDIX D

Initial Coding of Five Welcoming and Affirming Sermons

1. Initial coding of Carol Howard Merritt’s “The Rule of Love”
   - Being attentive to the hearers’ emotions
   - Being open to alternative relationships and experiences
   - Demonstrating a knowledge of the complexity and normalcy of a range of affectional orientations
   - Recognizing the microaggressions visited upon LGBTQ people
   - Calling out religious intolerance
   - Identifying those on the margins unnamed and unrecognized within the body of Christ
   - Proclaiming the inclusive universal and unifying love of Christ
   - Affirming the experience of LGBTQ people and their relationships
   - Honoring the experience of love and commitment in same-sex relationships
   - Connecting queer relationships with the image of God
   - Challenging the normative, conventional images and expectations of marriage
   - Offering a critical re-reading of the biblical treatment of marriage
   - Rejecting the use of Scripture as a formula for marriage
   - Advocating for the visibility of LGBTQ people in the body
   - Highlighting the obligation of the faithful and the church to all of God’s beloved
   - Appealing to the abiding wisdom and ethical truth of love with respect to LGBTQ people

2. Initial Coding of David J. Lose’s “Descriptive or Definitive?”
   - Re-casting what is considered normal
   - Re-framing sexuality as a descriptive category
   - Challenging an essentialist construction of sexuality
   - Highlighting the primacy of identity in Christ over other possible identities
   - Affirming the permanence of the identity as God’s children
   - Challenging heterosexism
   - Affirming the diversity of sexuality as normal and expected

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• Emphasizing the universality of God’s saving grace
• Acknowledging the idolatry of heterosexism
• Affirming the equality before God among God’s homosexual and heterosexual children

3. Initial Coding of Christian Piatt’s “Dogs of Canaan”
• Admitting the limits of tolerance
• Confronting the internal feelings of homophobia
• Admitting discomfort with LGBTQ people
• Exploring what it feels like to being seen and treated like an outsider
• Recognizing the privilege of rarely being made to feel like an outsider
• Recognizing the biases and microaggressions against marginal people in Scripture
• Acknowledging normative & conventional structures that protect and privilege the majority
• Acknowledging the injustice experienced by LGBTQ people
• Showing solidarity with LGBTQ people
• Celebrating personal relationships with LGBTQ people
• Demonstrating concrete practices of inclusion and affirmation of LGBTQ people
• Confronting the ways that Church and the faithful reject and stigmatize LGBTQ people
• Sharing the stories of LGBTQ people’s experience in ministry and faith communities
• Giving voice to the queer perspective on faith and ministry
• Making space for the testimonies of LGBTQ people
• Affirming discipleship and calls to ministry of LGBTQ people

4. Initial Cody of Barbara K. Lundblad’s “Water on a Desert Road”
• Recognizing otherness
• De-mystifying otherness
• Exploring who may be “others-not-thought-of”
• Confronting the nature of the authority in the biblical text
• Highlighting the unpredictability and uncontrollability of the Holy Spirit
• Recognizing the fear and discomfort with difference
• Recognizing “others-not-thought-of” in the biblical text
• Raising the possibility of a witness beyond the text
• Inviting the hearer to explore beyond the assumed plain meaning of the text
• Proclaiming inclusion of the other & “others-not-thought-of” in the household of God
• Affirming the inclusive power of the Holy Spirit
• Modeling the re-reading of the text to be in conversation with current context
• Urging hearers to see the Holy Spirit act beyond the prohibitions of Scripture
• Questing the easing exclusion of others from the household of God

5. Initial Coding of Miguel A. De La Torre’s “A Queer Eye for the Straight Bible Reader”

• Admitting discomfort with LGBTQ people
• Confessing to a history of rejecting and stigmatizing behavior toward LGBTQ people
• Making a distinction between what is biblical and what is traditional or cultural
• Questioning the traditional biblical readings and teaching about homosexuality
• Testifying to personal acts of spiritual harm done to LGBTQ people
• Acknowledging the prevalence of oppressive readings of the Bible
• Acknowledging the sin of “heterocentricism”
• Seeing LGBTQ people as created in the image of God
• Rejecting the heterosexual experience as universal and normative
• Advocating for the adoption of liberationist reading of Scripture
• Refusing to be silent in the face of oppression of LGBTQ people
• Acknowledging the benefits and privileges that accrue to heterosexuality
• Re-reading Genesis 19 from a liberationist perspective
• Identifying the dangers of relying on ancient biblical prohibitions to address contemporary sexual mores
• Affirming the experience of LGBTQ people and their relationships
• Honoring the experience of love and commitment in same-sex relationships
• Re-casting the sin of Sodom as the sin of injustice and refusal to show hospitality
• Connecting the sin of Sodom to contemporary national policies that harm the poor and the alien
• Re-casting the sin of Sodom as unchecked heterosexuality
• Affirming that all that God creates is good
• Admitting the limits of tolerance
• Advocating for the full inclusion of LGBTQ people within the tapestry of society
• Expressing regret as the spiritual burden of biblical ignorance imposed on LGBTQ people
Focus Coding of the Five Sermons Analyzed

1. Affirming the experience of LGBTQ people and their relationships
2. Acknowledging and challenging the sin and idolatry of heterosexism
3. Sharing the stories of and giving voice to the LGBTQ experience in faith and ministry
4. Proclaiming the inclusion of the other, LGBTQ people, and “others-not-thought-of” in the household of God
5. Questioning the traditional biblical readings and teaching about homosexuality
6. Acknowledging and challenging oppressive readings of the Bible
APPENDIX E

Transcript of Focus Group Session

Focus Group
The Aliveness Project, Minneapolis, MN
August 8, 2019
12:51 PM-1:36 PM

Group Members (names are pseudonyms)

Paul (white man, mid-40s, gay)
George (African-American man, mid-to-late 40s, gay)
Jerry (African-American man, mid-20s, gay)
Frank (African-American man, early 30s, gay)
Mary (African-American woman, mid-20s, sexuality unidentified)

Moderator: Thank you for speaking with me today. I have shared with you the guidelines for our conversation. And I want to remind you that I am recording. So, let’s get started. When was the last time you heard a sermon?

Frank: Father’s Day . . .
George: Sunday . . . a week from last Sunday
Mary: Last year . . .
Jerry: I was at . . . what’s his name’s church . . . Pastor (redacted). Yeah, Pastor (redacted). He was talking about homosexuality that day, too. And he said it was an abomination.

Moderator: When was that?
Jerry: That was on Sunday. Last Sunday.

Moderator: What was your experience of it? Positive? Negative?

Jerry: If that’s what he wanted to preach out of the Bible . . . I mean it was negative to me. I feel as though God did not die for my sexuality, he died for my sins . . . They say homosexuality is a sin; they didn’t say it was a
sin. They say is was an abomination. An abomination is something that is unforgivable.

George: Um, I talk to a lot of gay people who don’t like to go to church. They talk about homosexuality so much. I just know that God is love. Jesus [unintelligible] for the woman at the well . . . the sinner . . . and talked to her. I totally disagree with anybody that downs people and focus on the bad . . .

Paul: The last experience I had was at All God’s Children so, of course, it was positive. I like AGC because it’s accepting . . . come as you are.

Mary: My church back home was always good. Nobody worried about that. Pastors are very understanding.

Frank: Father’s Day was the last time I went. It’s a good church. But the pastor spoke about what he got. (Mimicking the pastor) ‘I got a brand new garage; my wife love diamonds.’ You know what I’m saying. It’s like I gave money . . . It’s Father’s Day. Why would you say that? In the other [unintelligible], I was going to get baptized. They got a clothing store and they sell stuff. I didn’t know you need some shorts. They could have given me a pair of shorts . . . they could have had a pair of shorts available. They told me what you could do is I could get baptized in my suit. But they had shorts. They could (trails off) . . .

Moderator: But they wanted you to pay for shorts?

Frank: Yeah. The donated clothes they sell.

George: Then he talked about his car . . . like the car was all . . . real good. Then I went in the back. He got an antique car. That car cost about at least seventy, eighty thousand dollars. And to me, it’s like this is what I got from the church . . . give me money . . . my wife likes different stuff like this . . . bragging on what you got when you get money from the church. Then he spoke on [unintelligible] the other church. But in the end, the only thing he said about the shelter, he said not to come on one day. I just stop going. But the music is good. He was the senior pastor. He and his wife [unintelligible] the church.

Jerry talked about that the sermon did speak directly about LGBTQ people. Did others hear sermons speak directly to or about LGBTQ people? Or if they . . .

Jerry: (possibly referring to the pastor he identified earlier) He said it briefly. He didn’t have a whole sermon about it. He was just talking about salvation and all that . . . and if you living that lifestyle . . . if you die in your ways, your salvation was not there . . . Salvation is salvation.

Moderator: If homosexuality was not the issue, did they give a sermon or use the Bible reading to say something about or address LGBTQ people?

Paul: I used to live in Catholic Charities out in St. Paul. And it was after I went to church . . . I was coming back . . . I’m a smoker so there was another female resident who described herself as a prophetess, but like the desk
person because it was a controlled entry to the building . . . the lady that worked there . . . it was kind of her position to find out what’s going on with the residents so she could clarify things and help them out. And she was very religious. But they would sit up there for hours and gossip . . .

crosstalk

I was leaving one time in a hurry to go catch the bus and . . . um . . . I had left coffee creamer in the staff fridge and she was in the staff kitchen. I knocked on the door [and she said], “What’s going on?” And I said can I get the creamer I left in the fridge. “Well, what are you in a hurry to do?” I’m going to meet a friend of mine and then she made the statement to me, “You know homosexuality is an abomination to God.” I say you know what they say about gossip-mongers, too? I said don’t preach to me cause I can preach right back to you.

Moderator: If the sermon you heard was positive, how was the sermon helpful to you?

Mary: It totally helpful to address that whatsoever [unintelligible] . . . like life circumstances . . . it’s never anything negative.

George: Motivates me . . . inspires me . . . And when I’m wrong, I admit that I’m wrong. And when a preacher says something, I just go to the word of God myself or to God myself. The preacher is not God, you know. When I told my mom that I was gay, she said you need to talk to Go about that. She couldn’t give me no answer, and I respect her to this day for that . . . both my adopted mother and my real mother told me that . . . “We can’t answer that, you should ask God.” So I realize that [unintelligible] is just a tool . . . I can go ask God for myself.

Paul: When I came out when I was 23 years old to my mom and dad, my mom basically said I was going to hell. My dad said nothing. He was an elder in the church and he was a cop. It took him about a year later when we were driving . . . long story short . . . he basically said I don’t care what anybody else thinks or says, you’re my son, and I love you regardless.

Frank: Welcomed people with HIV.

Jerry: I hear a good, positive sermon the other day about we are all children of God no matter what. God loves us. He is going to protect us. He’s going to be with us. No matter where you are . . . no matter what you do in life, God is with you. He’s going to protect you . . . and . . . his rod and staff . . . bet not nobody mess with you . . . you’re going to reap what you sow [laughter and crosstalk] . . .

Moderator: If and when you heard negative sermon, how did it offend you?
Jerry: I think another negative sermon I heard was about prosperity and how the reason some people are broke is because they didn’t pay their tithes. If I don’t have it, how the hell am I going to pay it. If I had it, I’ll pay it! If I had it, I’d give it to myself. I mean, I do when I do have it, I give ten percent, you know. But if I don’t have it this Sunday, I done paid it the rest of the Sundays. But I didn’t have it this Sunday, so I’m cursed, huh? I’ll be cursed for life because I didn’t pay one Sunday? That’s how some preachers are. (mimicking voice) “You know you got it in your pocket, and you won’t even pull it out” (laughter and cross-talk).

George: I go with the money thing. They tell you do this and do that. I get offended but then I always say they don’t know the word of God because when Solomon built the temple, he didn’t ask nobody to bring this or that. God touched their hearts, and they just brought an overflow and the temple was built. I tell people we as a people we have to read the word and get an understanding for ourselves. Don’t believe what everybody telling you. And the New Testament does say anything about ten percent. Most people don’t know the word themselves; they just depend on what some men told them.

Paul: I don’t know if there is an exact scripture verse for it but whatever you give be a cheerful giver.

Jerry: When I’m cheerful, I give more (laughter and cross-talk).

Mary: What I’m saying. I’ve been going to the same church since I was a little girl. Compared to these stories, I’m appreciative of my pastor (laughter and cross-talk). He is awesome. He just. I don’t know. I haven’t experienced what they have (laughter and cross-talk). I’m really grateful.

Frank: For me it’s I give you my money so I can live better. That’s why I stop going.

Moderator: What are you looking for in a sermon? When you hear a preacher, what are you looking for?

Mary: Something I can relate to; something you can use for later.

George: I want a combination. I want love, sympathy, and empathy. If I’m out there doing this and that, then there’s a reason for that, so if you forgive me (laughter and cross-talk). I’m looking for something to help me. I did what I had to do. That don’t mean I don’t love God. We have wrong we shouldn’t have done in the past. He that is without sin cast the first stone. (laughter and cross-talk). Pray for me! Help me! Glory!

Frank: Lift me up . . . encourage me to go on, to get [unintelligible]

Jerry: Get the word, the good news . . . there should be good news delivered.

Paul: The Bible is the best instruction booklet for life.

Moderator: What feelings, attitudes or thoughts are you looking for a sermon to provoke in you?
Mary: Cry, happy, angry . . . a range of emotions . . .
Paul: God is not a God of hate. Everything that his up with first of the Spirit
Frank: That the Lord is there.
George: Preach the word . . . living word of God.
Jerry: Feel the Holy Ghost

Moderator: Is there anything else you would like to add about preaching and LGBTQ people?

Mary: Preachers should be called.
Paul: God calls you. God has a plan. I was raised in the Church. I was homeless.
God brought me out of it. I fell back on the peace God gave me.
Frank: Choose the words wisely before you preach. Come as you are.
Survey Responses to the June 9 Sermon

Q1 The sermon was rooted in a biblical text(s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>100%</td>
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Q2 The perspectives of LGBTQ people were recognized and centered in the sermon.

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<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q3 The sermon portrays God as the source of liberation of LGBTQ people from oppression.

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<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q4 Challenged the power arrangement between heterosexuals & homosexuals?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q5 The sermon critiqued the rejection and discrimination of LGBTQ people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q6 The sermon proclaimed the promise of liberation for LGBTQ people.

<table>
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<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>91%</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q7 The sermon empowered the hearer to work for justice for LGBTQ people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q8 The sermon demonstrated a concern for the LGBTQ hearers' condition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spiritual wellbeing</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Physical wellbeing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Material wellbeing</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Social wellbeing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>All of the above</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q9 The sermon attacked LGBTQ people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q10 The sermon argued for the conversion of LGBTQ people to a "straight" identity

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q11 The sermon included stereotypes or insensitive comments about LGBTQ people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q12 Presented heterosexuality as the universal ideal of discipleship & relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q13  My gender identity is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Transgender/Female</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Transgender/male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Preferred term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>No labels</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q14  My age is

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>30-39</td>
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<td>12%</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>80 or over</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Q15  My race/ethnicity is

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Am Indian/Alaska</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hisp/Latinx</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Asian/P. Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>No Labels</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Q16  My sexual orientation is

<table>
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<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Asexual</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Same Gender Loving</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Prefer no answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Prefer this term:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q17  My religious background/denomination prior to MCC is

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Catholic:</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Orthodox:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mainline Protest.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Evang./fundamentalist:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Historic Bl. Church</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Non-Christian Religion:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Survey Responses to the September 8 Sermon

**Q1** The sermon was rooted in a biblical text(s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 27 (100%)

**Q2** The perspectives of LGBTQ people were recognized and centered in the sermon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 27 (100%)

**Q3** The sermon portrays God as the source of liberation of LGBTQ people from oppression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 27 (100%)
Q4 The sermon challenged the power arrangement between heterosexuals & homosexuals?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q5 The sermon critiqued the rejection and discrimination of LGBTQ people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q6 The sermon proclaimed the promise of liberation for LGBTQ people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q7 The sermon empowered the hearer to work for justice for LGBTQ people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q8 The sermon demonstrated a concern for the LGBTQ hearers' condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spiritual wellbeing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Physical wellbeing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Material wellbeing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Social wellbeing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>All of the above</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q9 The sermon attacked LGBTQ people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q10 The sermon argued for the conversion of LGBTQ people to a "straight" identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q11 The sermon included stereotypes or insensitive comments about LGBTQ people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q12 The sermon presented heterosexuality as the ideal of discipleship & relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Q13
**My gender identity is**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Transgender/Female</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Transgender/male</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Preferred term</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>No labels</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Q14
**My age is**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>80 or over</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>93%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Q15
**My race/ethnicity is**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Am Indian/Alaska</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hisp/Latinx</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Asian/P. Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>No labels</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>96%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q16  My sexual orientation is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Asexual</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Same Gender Loving</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Prefer no answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Prefer this term:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>96%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q17  My religious background/denomination prior to MCC is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Response Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Catholic:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Orthodox:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mainline Protest.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Evang./fundamentalist:</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Historic Bl. Church</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Non-Christian Religion:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


