

Motherhood & Apple Pie

*First Parish of Sudbury
Sunday Worship May 11, 2003
Rev. Katie Lee Crane, preaching*

OPENING WORDS

Let us serve love with our strength this day,
let us serve love with our strength.
In heart and mind and body this day,
let us serve love.
- J. Phillip Newell

CALL TO WORSHIP

This is a service about motherhood and apple pie. It's about lovers and weddings and babies and families. Not just the Norman Rockwell version, but the real version.

Mother's Day for me, for example. I am not a mother in the traditional sense, but I had two mothers, a birth mother and an adopted mother, and, I am a mother, a step mother. I know as well as anyone that we form families by love, and that motherhood and family (and even apple pies) don't always look "traditional" (whatever that is). That's the kind of motherhood and apple pie I mean – the real kind.

UNISON CHALICE LIGHTING

We are called, you and I, called to serve a dream.
In us burns an ember: glowing, white hot,
buried deep in the womb of passion and compassion.
Kindle that ember for the sake of human dignity.
In the name of love, call forth justice.
Kindle it 'til it leaps into a flame, blazing and primordial.
Burning bright, it will light our way.
We are called, you and I, called to serve a dream

RESPONSIVE READING

Love Casts Out Fear by Sarah York
(formerly Sara Moores Campbell)

In fear we isolate ourselves.
In love, we connect with others.

In fear we become immobilized.
In love, we are empowered to act.

In fear, we judge others.
In love, we seek justice.

In fear we seek punishment.
In love, we seek mercy and forgiveness.

In fear, we see death.
In love, we see life.

In fear we retreat.
In love, we reach out.

Let us respond ... with love.
Let us reach out.

READING

Five Stories

Each of these stories is based on a true story.

Cathy and John are expecting a child. So are Lilly and Louise. Both relied on sperm donors and the in vitro fertilization technology to conceive their much-wanted and long-awaited children. There's only one difference. When a child is born to Cathy and John, it will be recorded as their child. When a child is born to Lilly and Louise, it will be recorded as Lilly's child. Louise will have to adopt the infant through a lengthy and complex court process called "Second Parent Adoption." The difference? Cathy and John have a legal document that sanctions their union. Lilly and Louise do not; Lilly and Louise can not.

Dan and Josh had been partners for eighteen years. They owned a home together, traveled together, made their life together. Because there is no legal sanction for a partnership like theirs, Dan and Josh made sure to have legal documents that granted each other the power of attorney in cases of emergency. They had wills and living wills and "DNR" (do not resuscitate) instructions. It was expensive and time-consuming, but worth it. They made sure every "i" was dotted and

every “t” was crossed. So when Dan had a stroke and was rushed off in an ambulance, Josh grabbed the documents and headed off to the hospital. When he arrived, he was barred from the room. In spite of the legal documents, the hospital refused to recognize him as “next of kin.” Days later, when he finally reached the hospital’s lawyers, he was told: “You can pick up his body at the morgue.” Dan had died three days earlier. Why this horror? Dan and Josh have no legal document that sanctions the family they’ve formed together.

Sue and Veronica – she likes to be called “Ronnie” – have two children together. Sue is the stay-at-home Mom because she is self-employed as a copyeditor. She manages to fit work around the children’s busy school schedules. Ronnie is a state police officer. She earns a good salary and has good benefits. There’s only one problem. She is ineligible for family health insurance coverage. Because her partnership is not recognized by the state, she can only insure herself, not her family. Her colleague, Jack, married Teresa last week and was able to add Teresa and her children to his policy right away. The difference? Jack and Teresa have a legal document that sanctions their union. Ronnie and Sue do not; Ronnie and Sue cannot.

Vicky and Claire had quite a wedding. The dresses were stunning. The flowers to die for. Vicky’s sister, sister-in-law and best friend were bridesmaids. Her niece, then 4, was to be the flower girl, but at the last minute she was overcome by shyness and she wouldn’t budge, so the child’s father, Vicky’s 6’4” brother, had to take over the dainty basket and scatter rose petals as he walked down the aisle to signal the approach of the bride-to-be. Both mothers cried; both fathers beamed. Family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and in-laws witnessed the marriage; their minister blessed it. It was a grand and joyous occasion, but it wasn’t legal. There is no legal document that will sanction this marriage; there is no legal document that can.

Deb and Marshall came to me asking to be married at First Parish. They had personal ties to the town and friends in our congregation. I was delighted that they had chosen our beautiful meetinghouse, but as it happened, I was not available to officiate at their ceremony. In cases like these, I simply call upon a UU colleague to serve as the officiant. This particular time, I called on my friend Erica. Erica serves another congregation and often helps me out in cases like this. (I do the same for her.) She stepped in. She officiated at the wedding. She signed the license. But, get this: no one will sign a license for Erica and Janet, her longtime life partner, because no one can. There is no legal document that will sanction Erica’s union, even though, as clergy, she is legally sanctioned to sign such documents for couples like Marshall and Deb.

READING

Simply Love by Holly Near

Why does my love make you shift restlessly in your chair
and leave you in despair
It’s simply love – it’s simply my love for a woman.

It’s a simple hand on a warm face to say
A glance to see if love is still ok
A glow at dawn when love is still there

Tears and strong arms at the end of the day
And simply love – my love for a woman.

It's the laughter as the kids clown
And tease our weary thoughts away
It's looking 'round the table
And knowing hard work fed us one more day
And simply love – simply my love for a woman.

Why does my love make you shift in your chair
It's the bombs across the border
That should tear your hair
And yet it's my love leaves you screaming out your nightmare

Perhaps you know there's something you should fear
If my love makes me strong and makes you disappear
It's simply love – simply my love for a woman.

SERMON

Motherhood & Apple Pie

In The Blue Jay's Dance Louise Erdrich defines marriage this way:

Forged love, married love, [is] love that starts molten and throughout its life must be thrown back into the fire, recast, reshaped, restored... Married passion is a quest, in the end, and the lovers are its heroes, fighting along the way demons of their own making and of others, changing identities, carving their initials into each other's hearts.

Love is necessity, all else about it is up for grabs.

In the latest proposed amendment to the Massachusetts constitution, marriage is defined this way:

It being the public policy of this Commonwealth to protect the unique relationship of marriage in order to promote other goals, the stability and welfare of society and the best interests of children, only the union of one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in Massachusetts. Any other relationship shall not be recognized as a marriage or its legal equivalent.

The first is pure poetry and requires love, simply love.

The other is legal mumbo-jumbo that defines fear, fear that judges, fear that isolates, fear that punishes.

Which is closer to your definition of marriage?

I have some experience on this subject; I've been married twice. The first time I married for love it was with the flowing dress and the candles and the Catholic Mass. A crumpled piece of paper, mailed weeks later, declared it legal. Eighteen years later, we divorced for love. A piece of paper declared it legal, too.

The second time I married for love, it was in a public garden, just me and him (and everybody else who happened to be out strolling by the pond on that beautiful spring day). It wasn't legal. We simply held hands, read some poems to one another, vowed our love and commitment to one another, and, for us, from that moment on, we were wed. The state did not recognize our commitment or our private ceremony as marriage, but we did, and so, we believed, did our God.

A few years later, we married again, this time mostly for health insurance and respectability. It was lovely and it was legal. From that day forward, I could phone the doctor or the school or the camp director and make arrangements for the children. I was their stepmom. I was legal. All we needed was someone's signature on that little piece of paper.

Today, I am talking about doing whatever we can to ensure equal rights for all couples who wish to commit their love and their lives to one another. I am talking about a little piece of paper with a signature that makes that commitment legal. I am talking about one little signature that guarantees something in the neighborhood of 1,400 civil rights – everything from health care to parenting to immigration to taxation.

At the center of my own story is what this issue is all about. Jonas and I married for love AND for health insurance and respectability and a signature on a little piece of paper that made it legal. My friends Lisa and Kathy could not. John and Brian could not. Bev and Donna could not. Sherene and Sheila could not. Brian and Rob could not. Nancy and Diane could not. They have the love, and the blessing of many who love them, but not the crumpled piece of paper that entitles them to health insurance and respectability. Not the legal sanction that guarantees the rights that Jonas and I got automatically with the stroke of a pen.

Then there's John and David and the countless others who have gone to Vermont so they can have a legal document. Actually John and David live in Vermont. They had a beautiful ceremony in their backyard, officiated by two UU ministers. It was legal, but still they weren't married. Theirs was a Civil Union. Separate but equal. At least it guaranteed the right to share health insurance and retirement benefits and the rights to inherit and visit each other in the hospital. At least, when the time comes for one to bury the other, he will be able to do so without the need for expensive and complicated legal machinations to protect their property and their relationship – as long as they live in Vermont. Others, like our own Judy and Elaine, who also had a Civil Union Ceremony in Vermont, can only hope that, someday, states like Massachusetts will honor the legal document they obtained on that day.

You only need to look at the legislative docket this session to see that Massachusetts is trying. There is a *civil union* bill in the Senate and an identical bill in the House. There's a *gay marriage* bill on the House docket and a similar one in the Senate. There's the perennial

initiative to repeal the state's sodomy laws and another to extend health insurance to same-sex partners of state employees.

And these are the *proactive* bills.

There is also H3190, the so-called Super-DOMA bill. It is the proposed amendment to the state constitution that seeks to *defend* marriage. In my opinion, this is a *reactive* bill. It seeks to ensure that any future legislation or court findings that legally sanction domestic partnership benefits for same-gender couples, or civil unions, or gay marriage, would be rendered automatically *unconstitutional*. This bill would not only deny rights, it would roll back many rights already granted. It would keep children of same-gender couples from state-run day care centers, eliminate second parent adoptions, and deny elders the social security benefits of lifelong partners. And, it could do even more damage if private organizations chose to use such an amendment as leverage to discontinue domestic partnership benefits.

In commenting on what I call the "proactive" legislation, Senator Jarrett Barrios noted that "education is the key" to winning passage of legislation that offers equal rights to all couples.

Education *is* key. This congregation has been educating itself about issues like this since the 1980s and we have no plans to stop. But education alone is not enough. We also act, advocate, march, lobby, and do everything we can to work for positive change.

Now clergy all across Massachusetts have been challenged to sign the Freedom to Marry Pledge that states "I will joyfully perform religious weddings, but I will sign no Massachusetts marriage license until the Commonwealth extends the freedom to marry to couples regardless of gender." Some clergy have already signed. Others, like me, are considering taking the pledge.

For couples like Bob and Janet, my taking the pledge means that they can be married at First Parish and everything will be and look the same, except that *I* will not be the one to sign their marriage license. For \$75, they can arrange with a justice of the peace to do that. Or, for \$25 and a character reference, anyone who does not have a criminal record – their best man, for example, or the bride's cousin – can apply for and receive a "one-day marriage designation." I will bless the marriage and this other person will sign the legal document.

Joyce and Barbara, too, can have their commitment blessed at First Parish and it will look to all their loved ones like the wedding they'd always dreamed of having. I will give them a signed certificate (suitable for framing) that blesses their union. The certificate is not a legal document does not earn them the same rights as Bob and Janet, but I sign it with great joy, knowing that my signature is a public statement that I and First Parish bless their love and commitment.

Signing the Freedom to Marry pledge means that I will not sign the legal document for couples like Bob and Janet until I can also sign a legal document for Joyce and Barbara too. It means making a statement of conscience. My signature on the pledge means that I choose not to serve as an agent of the state in implementing an unjust law.

I'm guessing that many couples like Janet and Bob, will be proud to make such a statement with me. As one bride-to-be whose minister had taken the pledge said, "I've become an accidental activist," and, she added, "it feels really good." Couples like Joyce and Barbara, on the other hand, will have not only our blessing but tangible evidence of our public witness and advocacy for their freedom to marry. Every couple would know that, at First Parish, every family formed by love – forged in love – is worthy of our blessing and support *and* deserving of a little piece of paper with a signature that makes it legal.

What will my taking the pledge mean for us here at First Parish? I think it means we're still "walking the talk." We say that discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people is unfair and harmful. This would be one more way we'd bear witness to that. It will mean we are being true to our commitment as a Welcoming Congregation, that we are, indeed, intentional about the full presence and participation of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in all aspects of life, not just in our congregational life, but also the life we share in this Commonwealth.

I have to admit that I worried when I first heard about the pledge. I worried that couples wouldn't want to be married at First Parish if they had to find someone else to sign their marriage license. I worried that someone who grew up at First Parish would be hurt or disappointed that it was not my name on her marriage license. I wondered, too, if this was an effective strategy – would it merely deny something to certain couples that others have been denied all along? I worried that I would be one of only a handful of ministers who signed the pledge, perhaps most of us Unitarian Universalists, and that we would be perceived as a "fringe element." I worried that I was committing myself to something with no foreseeable end in sight and that it would be a gesture without "teeth." (Something with "teeth" I thought, would be all of us continuing to lobby our legislators, working to pass the proactive legislation and defeat the reactive legislation. I worried that, in my own passion for interfaith dialogue, I might be marginalized for this act. I worried that First Parish would become known as "the gay church.")

Some of these worries may be valid. But I'm not as worried any more. I believe most couples and clergy colleagues will respect an act of conscience. I see that there are ways around the inconveniences, and, there are opportunities to educate people who question this position. I also recognize that there are possible advantages I cannot even imagine. There came a point in my process when I recognized that my worries were rooted in fear – fear of losing something, fear of marginalization, fear of labels. I do not want to act from fear.

I see now that, by itself, taking the pledge cannot create the change I seek, but it is one more strategy toward that end. I see that an act of conscience isn't about waiting to see how many others are going to act first. I see that if one middle-aged, middle-class, middle-of-the-road, heterosexual suburban minister signs, others may follow.

In the month since I first heard about the pledge, I've been wondering what to do. How to make the decision. How to involve you in making that decision. What decision to make.

And then I came across this letter I wrote to my former husband on the occasion of his second marriage:

May 18, 2001

Dear John and David,

I write to offer my sincere best wishes on the occasion of your marriage. (I know they would have you call it a 'civil union' but to me it is a marriage.)

...[M]y gift to you is my passion and my commitment to justice for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. My gift to you is a promise: I will speak out. I will give witness and testify. I will stand before couples who love one another – regardless of gender or orientation – and I will bless their union. I will give voice to the blessing of the people and of God. And, whenever it is possible, I will sign, with great joy and affirmation, the document that certifies that union to be legal....

With love, Katie Lee

That letter brought me to where I am this morning. Speaking out. Giving witness. Testifying to my experience and my process.

This is a time of discernment, mine, certainly, but all of ours, really. It calls for education. It calls for conversation. It calls for action. As a Welcoming Congregation we have already taken a position, now we are called to serve the dream. The question before us is one of strategy.

To that end, I am inviting you to take a pledge with me, not the Freedom to Marry pledge, but a pledge that involves you in the process. Some of you may have seen it in the newsletter. Others of you can pick up a copy downstairs this morning. It invites all of us – me and you – to educate ourselves about the issues, participate in a congregational conversation, voice our opinions, and take action that is consistent with our deeply held values. I sign THAT pledge before you now:

Because I believe in the right of conscience and the democratic process, I believe it is my privilege and responsibility to be informed and voice my opinions about issues that arise in this congregation.

Because I celebrate our diversity and value my freedom to search for truth and meaning, I enter into conversations about such issues, sustained by the First Parish covenant that reads:

We the people of First Parish of Sudbury pledge that we will come together with open minds and open hearts, always seeking to learn, to share, to respect and forgive, and to help each other grow towards our best selves.

One community, first and foremost, compassionate, respectful, and generous, we pledge to listen to each other, express our views openly, handle disagreement with honesty, humility and humor, and nurture our sense of belonging together.

We pledge to participate in the work of the congregation to the best of our abilities, to practice and encourage leadership, and to support our ministry materially, emotionally, and spiritually.

Because First Parish is a Welcoming Congregation and because I understand that the freedom to marry is an issue of vital importance at First Parish, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and in our nation, I agree to educate myself about the issues, participate in a congregational conversation, voice my opinion, and take action that is consistent with my deeply held values.

Therefore, as minister of First Parish of Sudbury, understanding that I am challenged to make an important decision of conscience, I agree to participate fully and listen deeply to the conversation at First Parish during May, 2003 before I make any final decision.

s/ Rev. Katie Lee Crane May 11, 2003

CLOSING WORDS

We are called – you and I – to put on our strength.
We are called to cast out fear and call forth justice.
We must not judge. We cannot retreat. We will not stand immobilized.

Let us respond with love.
Let us serve love. In heart, and mind and body, let us serve love.
Because no matter what they say, this is about love, simply love.