

The Advent of Repentance

This Advent I had the privilege of preaching several times at '[Water of Life](#)', a large church in Southern California. After each service, many people came up to me seeking counsel on what to do with 'gay' friends and family members. Most poignant were the pleas of parents and siblings: 'How do we love them while we disagree with their moral choices?'

These family members are now subject to deceived, politicized loved ones whose 'gay selves' have turned hard and cold toward the ones they left behind. Times have changed, people. No longer are we dealing with same-sex strugglers in search of alternatives to 'the gay self'; this generation seeks only its confirmation. Those family members who cannot in good conscience bless him as 'gay' or her as 'lesbian' are deemed unloving at best, and probably abusive.

Repentance unto Mercy is the key. The Advent reading for that Sunday was from Is 40:1-11: 'Comfort my people with great tenderness; the war is over--I shall give you a double portion for all your sins! I will lift up the low and dry valleys and level the mountains; I will make the crooked roads straight! Declare the good news boldly, do not hold back! I will shepherd you well, especially mothers with kids...'

I thought of the Gospel reading from that day, John the Baptist reiterating the essence of this call to repent unto the coming of Jesus, the One full of Mercy who fills us with His Spirit as the basis for a whole new way of living! (Matt. 3:1-12)

William Stringfellow says it best: 'John the Baptist identifies repentance as the message and sentiment of Advent'--turning unto the tender Mercy of the God who grants us double in exchange for the mess we've made!

Amid the many questions and concerns about 'gay' loved ones, a river of Mercy ran through our exchanges. We repented of judgmental, critical attitudes, entrusting the loved one wholly to the One who knows all and works all for the good. Our prayer: help us to be insightful, patient agents of that good, that the deceived would have a loving witness of saving Love when they are ready for it.

We discovered that we can love deceived ones without compromise as we eagerly await their

return to Mercy.

For every 3 or 4 tales of family angst that I heard, a man or woman would come up to me and quietly admit that like me they too had come out of homosexuality and were living hopeful, humble lives in that community of faith. And one lovely Mexican-American couple confided in me that after three years of loving and interceding for a sister who had 'married' a woman, their beloved just left the relationship and is once again seeking the Mercy of God for her sin and conflict.

They are there for her. We the faithful are there for any who turn from worldly solutions to the Merciful One who gives us everything—Jesus Christ.

'Water will gush forth in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.

The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground, a bubbling spring...

And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness.

The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way...

But only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads.

Joy and gladness will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.'

Is. 35:6-10