

A little girl caught her father off guard one day with one of those outrageous question and answer sessions in which children sometimes engage. "Daddy," she asked, "Are you afraid of wild animals?"

The father replied with a paternal boast, "No, of course not."

"Well, Daddy, are you afraid of the dark?"

"Never!" said the father bravely.

"Daddy, are you afraid of the long wooly worms?"

"No way!" said the father, feeling more and more invincible with each reply he made.

"Well, Daddy," the little girl concluded after a brief pause, "Then you aren't afraid of anything but Mommy, right?"

That little girl had her dad's number. I love it. What are you afraid of? More importantly, when you are afraid, what do you do?

I am convinced that when we make decisions out of fear. They tend to end up not being good decisions.

Right now, I believe that we have a lot of fear going on in our world. The fear comes from knowing the world around us has changed drastically. The fear comes from voices that offer simple solutions. The fear infects us so easily, so quickly, so subtly that we sometimes don't even recognize it.

Today we are continuing our sermon series called, *At the Crossroads: Allowing Our Faith to Guide us in a Confusing World*. During this sermon series, we are intentionally looking at contemporary issues facing us during these days and trying to make some sense out of them.

Today's topic is the upcoming Marriage Amendment. The Proposed Amendment asks: "Marriage. Shall section 13 of article XIII of the constitution be created to provide that only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a

marriage in this state and that a legal status identical or substantially similar to that of marriage for unmarried individuals shall not be valid or recognized in this state?"

The title of this bill makes it seem pretty simple. Almost as if to ask, do you support marriage? That's almost like asking do you like baseball, apple pie and mothers? Of course we do.

But when you read what is stated in the language of this bill, you clearly begin to see that it is not so simple. In fact, it is the language of this bill that has caused the Wisconsin Annual Conference to pass legislation two years in a row that encourages all of us as United Methodists in Wisconsin to vote no on this bill and not support it.

The reason the Annual Conference urges us to consider not supporting this amendment is that; first of all, our constitution already defines marriage as between one man and one woman. The second reason it is not supported is because of how it takes away civil rights that have already been given.

In fact, it would limit rights for people of all sexual orientations, not just for those who are gay and lesbian but for all people. For those people who are in a committed relationship, but not married, health benefits would not be able to be extended to a partner, pension benefits would not be able to be extended to a partner, health decisions would not be able to be extended to a partner. This would be the first amendment to the constitution that would limit rather than expand and protect human rights.

You might say to me, "Gee Scott, I disagree with you on this one. And I really don't think the church should be talking about such issues."

However, before you say that to me; let's take a look at our scripture for today. Jesus has come back to his hometown. He is handed the scriptures to read and he turns to a passage in Isaiah to read, "God's spirit is upon me, God has chosen me to preach the

Message of Good news to the poor. God has sent me to announce pardon to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind. God has sent me to set the burdened and battered free, to announce, 'This is God's year to act!'

In this scripture from Luke, Jesus is pretty clear about his mission. It is to the least and last of that society. It is to proclaim good news, that God really does care about you . . . about all people in our society, even those who have been rejected by much of society. In Jesus' day that rejection was to the poor, the prisoners, and the blind. It was a society where many people were burdened and battered who felt as if God had forgotten them and left them out.

I believe that if we are going to work at seriously following Jesus Christ, than I think our mission should also be to those who need to hear a message of good news, of God's news that we are loved, not rejected.

In all honesty, I believe God is calling us to stand with Jesus for the least and most vulnerable of our society. I believe God is calling us to act on behalf of those most at risk and most in need in our world.

I see this so called marriage amendment as a way to put down others who may not have the values of some. I see this marginalizing whole groups of people and placing unnecessary and harmful burdens on people that simply are not needed.

I don't know where you may stand on offering marriage to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are gay or lesbian. But when I think of this amendment I think of my daughter, Amanda.

Some of you know that she is a single mother. When she became pregnant, she was living with a man who was her fiancé, who happened to be the father of our precious granddaughter. It wasn't ideal. I had personally hoped for something different for my daughter. But that isn't what happened.

At the time of Brooke's birth, Amanda wasn't sure if she was going to go back to work or if she was going to stay home and care for Brooke. I knew that Wisconsin was a state, that if she lived here, she could and would have some rights under a common law arrangement that would have covered her. I encouraged her to check out of the state she was living in had those similar rights.

She got back to me after a couple of days and said, "Well, the decision has been made. I am going back to work."

I said, "How come? I thought you wanted to stay home with Brooke?"

She said, "Well, Dad, I really didn't have a choice. Our state doesn't have a common law arrangement. I have too much to lose to not go back to work. And don't try and talk me into getting married yet."

Because the state she lived in didn't even *offer* the very rights we now have but would lose if this amendment passed, she suffered and my granddaughter has suffered because she has had less time with one of her parents.

For me, this is the very type of justice issue in our society that Jesus invites us to stand up and be counted on, in caring for the least and the last, the most vulnerable of our society.

My hope, as you decide what to do on this issue, is that you will hear Jesus' call for us to care for the most vulnerable in our world. My hope is that we can make our decision not based on fear. But on our values and on our search for justice for all.

Amen