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A Measure of Grace

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Gay Marriage *by Roger Jones*

On June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that it is now legal for gay marriages to be performed in all fifty states. In essence, the Court ruled that marriage is a civil right and should not be denied anyone, regardless of the gender(s) of the couple who wish to be married.

In response to this decision, the rift between those in favor of gay marriage and those opposed to it seems to have grown even wider. I clearly remember my Facebook page being filled with rainbow tinted profile pictures for those in favor of the Supreme Court's ruling, along with celebratory remarks. There was quite a reaction from those who were in disagreement as well, although it was not quite so colorful to behold.

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As is usual for me and Where Grace Abounds, I found myself wondering what the “third way” might look like in this situation. I think that there are others like us who have found themselves in the middle of all this. Those must have been the others who were “silent” on June 26th, at least on Facebook.

I have to say that I have really wrestled with how to approach this whole topic. I began writing this a month ago and got stuck. It isn’t that I don’t have an opinion about gay marriage, because I do. It isn’t because I am afraid to voice my opinion, because I’m not. I find that I am simply aware of all the people who land on one side or the other with regards to gay marriage, and there are people that I love deeply on both sides. And I can see and understand both sides, to a degree.

Over the past number of years, I have heard stories of gay and lesbian couples who have been together for years and then suddenly were denied access to their partners during a medical crisis or a death. This was because they were not considered to be “family,” and my heart

would break. Oftentimes, the blood relatives would purposely prohibit the partner from seeing their “spouse” for religious reasons. I am not sure if they thought that separation would provide opportunity for their gay son or daughter to make things right with God, or if there was another purpose. Regardless, the lack of legal rights for those in same-sex relationships, whether rights to property, medical access, or other reasons, deeply troubled me.

As is usual for me and Where Grace Abounds, I found myself wondering what the “third way” might look like in this situation.

I have also found myself heartbroken over the reality of marriage in our culture. Gay marriage and all the battles that have surrounded it have seemed a big distraction from the state of marriage in general. Divorce rates hover around 50%, and Christian marriages do not fare much better. I have

often wondered why the church is not rallying to make heterosexual divorce more difficult.

I realize that the issue is more complicated than this. There are some who do not really care if gay people are allowed to marry or not, but they are troubled by what they see as the Supreme Court’s overreaching and overturning the will of the

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What's Mary Been Up To?

By Mary Heathman

A couple of weeks ago, I attended Wilmington Yearly Meeting of Friends (Quakers), a regional association for Friends churches (called meetings) from Ohio and Tennessee. The event was held in Maryville, TN. I felt right at home, even with the local pronunciation, which would be spelled something like "Mrvlle." It takes a lot longer to say it—you have to roll it around in your mouth a bit—than it takes to read it! It was a privilege to spend time with Friends I met a few years ago when I did workshops in Kenya, and to meet new Friends as well. I was graciously hosted by one of the Maryville Meeting leaders. It was a pleasant time; the workshop I was asked to do is one of my favorites to lead. Here is a report from a Friend who agreed to write a summary from her perspective. (For more info on Wilmington Yearly Meeting, please visit their website at

www.wilmingtonyearlymeeting.org/ and click on the tab marked Faith and Practice.)

Summary of the workshops at Wilmington Yearly Meeting, 2015:

This year, the Wilmington

Yearly Meeting annual sessions featured a workshop on human sexuality led by Mary Heathman, founding director of Where Grace Abounds and a member of Denver Friends Church in Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting (Evangelical). Mary had led a similar workshop at the 2012 World Conference of Friends in Kenya.

The workshop was held in three sessions, each devoted to a different question: What is God's creative intent for human sexuality? How has the expression of human sexuality fallen short of its original intent? What might God have Friends do?

The format was based on worship sharing, with reflexive listening. Mary prodded with questions, and then restated each response, making sure that the point was understood correctly.

Sometimes we danced around the main issues. For example, the first session, which was de-

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Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks



Marianne

We were intended to be enemies. She had that I-used-to-be-a-cheerleader bounce in her short, blonde step. A few years my elder, her confidence was based more on experiences in the real world than on a misguided sense of bulletproof, youthful immortality like the rest of us. Plus she could sing like Bette Midler. She was vivacious with a capital “V” and as intimidating as all get out. I wanted to hate her, but I couldn’t help admiring her.

To make matters more personal, we both had the same goal: the one open alto position in the elite, (all tuition paid), traveling PR singing group for the college. The current group had divided itself into opposing teams – half rooting for her and half for me. It was war; kind of.

The semester of the auditions we found ourselves to be the only two students in an American Literature class. (Small colleges have their unusual perks). We met in the professor’s office twice a week and discussed Hawthorne, Twain and the transplanted Poe in focused, academic, business-only discussions. Two weeks before the auditions we showed up and neither of us had pre-

pared for class. It quickly became apparent that we could not both bluff our way out of the derelict corner, so we opened up a discussion of the pressing tension.

There are moments in life that float by with barely a whisper and only in looking back can you cipher the faint message that altered the course of your life. This is what happened in that tiny office that day. Its whisper was the gentle invitation into a refuge I would rest in for the rest of my life.

We agreed that day to resist the churning forces around us and instead to join and work together. We agreed to celebrate the success of whichever of us made the cut.

We auditioned. And in a fluke of possibility, we both made the cut. We were both chosen and spent the year crammed in a van driving all over the state making music and memories together. We went on to be bridesmaids for each other in our weddings. I heard two of her four children take their first breath on the earth. She cared for my children when my life was in shambles. We have loved, laughed, cried, and confronted each other for 32 years. We have a commitment to pluck the

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crone hairs on the chin of whoever ends up in the nursing home first – a commitment to love and dignity for each other.

A crossroads: it was an opportunity for war or cooperation. I don't know

why we chose as we did. We could just as easily have buttressed our forts and prepared the battlements. A whisper saved us. She still bounces her vivacious blonde way through life. And I am grateful everyday for our serendipitous movement against the tide towards each other.

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voted to describing positive aspects of the gift of sexuality, was almost over before anyone mentioned pleasure and fun. Other times there was more passion. Generally, the mood was attentive. People spoke, candidly sharing their points of view, and listened openly to what others had to say. Clearly, there were points of disagreement, but, given the whole of human sexuality, they were few.

Mary ended the workshop by asking Friends how they had been affected by participating in it. One described it as enlightening. Another was pleased that we had been able to address the topic in peace, with love and honesty. We left proposing to pursue the topic further, addressing the nature of truth, the place of Scripture, and how to apply it."

As I read this summary, I was reminded of several people thanking me after sessions for coming to lead

them in their discussion. I heard personal stories of desire to address sexuality from a biblical perspective and how much they appreciated a positive context in which to place those conversations. I was also reminded of similar stories when I did the same workshop in Kenya and then in Northwest Yearly Meeting in Newburg, Oregon a couple of years ago. I am grateful to have the support of the many who support WGA so that we can go and serve in these ways when we are invited. I pray for all these folks who are grappling with important issues, seeking God's direction for their sexuality and relationships. May the Holy Spirit who has promised to guide us into all truth carry each one forward into the intents and purposes of God.

I will wrap up this article with another quotation. This one is from a teenager at the World Conference in Kenya in 2012, who attended all three sessions (thread groups) of my workshop. She posted this on her blog:

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Thread Group #2: This was not an easy group to be a part of. But it was also one of the most rewarding experiences that I had at Kabarak. Mary Heathman led us in an exploration of sexuality and sexual brokenness. We all agreed, more or less, that our sexuality is a “gift,” a “blessing,” and a “miracle.” We also agreed that there are a great deal of ways in which sexuality can be broken. What is the way to combat that brokenness? Search for the love in every situation. Even the deepest of sexual brokenness can be healed through forgiveness and love. And though Quakers’ views on what things fall under the category of brokenness are very diverse, we all agreed that it would do a great deal of good to discuss the topic openly and respectfully in our Quaker meetings. In the 6th World Conference’s atmosphere of split opinions concerning homosexuality, it was highly useful (to me at least) to have this Sexual Brokenness thread group to discuss the issue with.
<http://singingpeacemaker.tumblr.com/page/2>

I am most grateful to be a catalyst for conversation about things that matter. As the participants in my workshops are often coming from

very different perspectives, it is sometimes a challenge to facilitate their discussions. But it is pure delight when I see the hope ignited and the relief flood their eyes and faces when they discover that the truth can still be spoken without compromise, and that love can flow freely.

I often leave the sessions with a bit of melancholy, though. I would love to walk with them on the journey they are just starting. Down the road, if some in their fellowship walk away, I would like to grieve and seek the Lord’s comfort for them. So too, I would love to rejoice with them when insights and breakthroughs come in their meetings or in their private moments with God. I would like to enjoy their company as they work together to glorify God in their own corners of the world. Instead, I let my sadness flow into prayers for them. I pray that the seeds of grace, truth, hope and healing that are planted in these sessions will be nurtured and sustained. I pray that they will be steadfast in their pursuit of God’s purposes for their lives.

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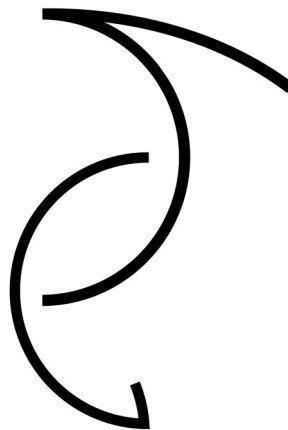
people. There are activists on both sides of the argument who are much more interested in making a point than they are about entering into a loving marriage or withholding that opportunity from others. I'm certain there are many other perspectives as well.

I guess the "third way" that I mentioned earlier feels more lonely than usual with this issue. While I would not choose to enter into a marriage with someone of the same gender, I was able to recognize the importance for those friends of mine who felt validated by the Supreme Court's ruling. I was also able to feel sad because it seems that we are moving further and further away from the traditional family unit. I don't believe that gay marriage is the cause of this, but yet another indication of the shift in our society.

So how do we live in the middle place? How do we live out the "third way" that shows the love of Christ to people wherever they find themselves? Today, I don't have an answer to those questions. I find that I am angry with my fellow Christians for being jerks about the way they want to see laws and regulations written, seemingly without thought for the people who are affected. I am angry with some in the gay community for not allowing

disagreement about whether gay marriage is acceptable or not. Disagreement is interpreted as hate, and that is unfair.

So, I guess I will pray. I will ask God to show me how to continue to love those in the LGBTQ community, those within the church and everyone else as well. I will ask Him to show me when to speak and when to listen. Most importantly, I will ask Him how He wants me to live my life today.





July In Review

July 25th - 27th: Mary presented at the
Wilmington Yearly Meeting

July 26th: Roger spoke in both services
at Greenwood Community Church

Thursday Night Group

July 2nd: No Group
July 9th: 15 people
July 16th: 25 people
July 23rd: 17 people
July 31st: 17 people

Orientation meeting: 8 new
people

August And Beyond

August 13th—16th: Mary at Rocky Mountain
Yearly Meeting

September 2nd: Roger and Scott will be speaking
at Wellspring Church

September 5th: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00
am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray
for the needs of the ministry.

September 17th: Monthly Orientation Meeting
required for participation in WGA's Thursday Night
Group—invite a friend!

October 16th—18th: Annual WGA Leadership
Retreat

WGA Staff

Roger Jones
Executive Director

Scott Kingry
Program Director

Mary Heathman
Founding Director

Steve Huston
Chaplain/Church Liaison

Jill Huston
Family & Friends Coordinator

Dianne O'Brian
Asst. Program Director
Beyond Containment

A Measure of Grace
is edited by
Elodie Ballantine Emig

*Where Grace Abounds exists to
guide and support men and
women who seek to understand
sexuality and relationship, and
to inspire all people to know
and personally appropriate
God's plan for their sexuality
and relationships.*

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