

# Happenings At Hope

June – July

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## From The Pastor

This is not going to be a “normal” issue of our church newsletter. On June 28<sup>th</sup>, the Supreme Court ruled that homosexual marriage is guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States—it is a civil right. We do not yet know what this will mean for our congregation, legally. Will we lose our tax-exempt status as a non-profit? Will we face lawsuits? Will we face other, unforeseen, difficulties? Only God knows. What we do know, however, is that this ruling from our highest court has not changed what is true and false regarding marriage and sexuality.

Our entire worldview is based on God's inspired Word. Even though we are in the world, we are not subject to it's shifting sands of social opinions. Now, and at all times, we will remain faithful to God and His Word. This will not always be easy. In fact, it is guaranteed to keep on getting harder and harder, as we find ourselves forced to choose between God's approval and that of society. But we have not been called to tell the world what it wants to hear. God has called us to tell the world what it needs to hear—His Word. Through this, God will continue to bless and preserve His Christian Church, no matter the opposition. God grant you a safe, blessed, summer

–Pastor Webber

## What the Supreme Court Ruling on Same-Sex Marriage Will Mean for Confessional Lutherans

*This article was written just prior to the June 28<sup>th</sup> ruling.*

Back in 2014 the three judges of the 7th Circuit Court ruled that Wisconsin and Indiana could not limit marriage to heterosexuals. According to Judge Richard Posner, this ruling was necessary because traditional (natural) marriage is based on “a tradition of hate...and savage discrimination.” A similar ruling will likely come from the Supreme Court sometime this June, only this time it will be applied to every state. And the rationale above will be a major factor.

The upcoming ruling on same-sex marriage is much more than a political issue. It will impact not just a small segment of the population, but federal and local governing bodies, schools, businesses, families, individuals, and many other institutions. Over the last 50 years (and especially the last 15) we have seen a radical shift in culture where God's ordained ordering for society has taken hit after hit. And what is so significant and historic regarding the expected decision is that this change will be cemented into the fabric of society

by the highest court of the land. Furthermore, if the majority of justices rule as anticipated, individual Christians and our confessional Lutheran churches will be challenged – and persecuted – like never before. This is not hyperbole. It is simple reality. Satan’s finger prints are all over this and he knows exactly what he is doing. As usual he is telling a lie, a lie that more and more people have bought so that supporters of gay marriage now outnumber supporters of natural and God-ordained marriage.

He has been able to convince a majority – including youth, adults, seniors, professors, lawmakers, judges, governors, a president, teachers, business owners, the news media, local city councils, and even virile organizations like the NFL – that marriage is not something defined by a transcendent God (as confirmed by natural law, history, and the inerrant Scriptures), but is something constructed by man and society so that man and society can do with it as they please.

Culture has quickly moved marriage from the bin of “constructed by God” to the bin of “constructed by man.” Just a few years ago most people believed that God had said of marriage, “This is mine.” Now most of these same people are saying, “No, it is ours.” They bought into a lie. And as Hermann Sasse wrote, *The lie is the death of man, his temporal and his eternal death. The lie kills nations. The most powerful nations of the world have been laid waste because of their lies. History knows of no more unsettling sight than the judgment rendered upon the people of an advanced culture who have rejected the truth and are swallowed upon in a sea of lies. Where this happens, as in the case of declining pagan antiquity, religion and law, poetry and philosophy, life in marriage and family, in the state and society — in short, one sphere of life after*

*another falls sacrifice to the power and curse of the lie. Where man can no longer bear the truth, he cannot live without the lie. Where man denies that he and others are dying, the terrible dissolution [of his culture] is held up as a glorious ascent, and decline is viewed as an advance, the likes of which has never been experienced. [1]*

Throughout history marriage between a man and a woman was something that nations treated as natural and sacred – as an institution that has a transcendent source and approval. We biblical Lutherans “believe, teach, and confess” this understanding of marriage. It is one of those sacred teachings that is supported and revealed both in nature and the Scriptures. But do we confess this teaching in the same way we confess other



Scriptural doctrines? Or do we recognize a higher confession for those doctrines that deal with eternal things? After all, marriage, as Scripture teaches, is only for this life and not the next (Matt. 22:30). So, is our conviction about marriage something we should be willing to suffer for? If the government tells us as individuals or as a congregation, “Endorse and support this new court ruling, or suffer,” do we have to say, “No, here I stand”? Or do we have the Christian freedom to avoid paying a price as culture shifts away from natural law and God’s ordering?

First, if we love our neighbor we will confess the truth. God-ordained marriage is for his good as

well as ours, even if he is not a Christian. Marriage of one man and one woman is the basis for civilized society. Without it, a nation will crumble. Man, woman, and child all benefit from God-ordained marriage in this fallen world. So for the sake of our neighbor, here we stand.

Second, if we love God and his Word we will confess the truth. We cannot think wavering in one teaching will not carry over to others. Jesus said, "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much." (Luke 16). Or as St. Paul said, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." (Gal. 5). But we go further than this. The marriages in this life are not the ultimate marriage. By their very existence they direct us to the much greater and eternal marriage (Eph. 5:22ff.). A groom and bride here, reflect (albeit dimly) the forever marriage of Christ, the Bridegroom, and his Bride, the Church. If we do not stand firmly on the biblical teaching of marriage – by word and deed – we end up robbing God of one of his purposes of the earthly bride and bridegroom relationship, that of pointing to the eternal Bride and Bridegroom relationship, an eternal Marriage established by the Gospel. Natural marriage is clearly related to the Gospel and eternal things. If we do not stand firm on marriage, we will soon not stand on Christ. So out of honor for God and his Word, here we stand.

We don't yet know all that will happen, though individual states and countries like Canada where same-sex-marriage is the law give us some clues and examples. And considering the rapid "progress" gay marriage has made in just the last several years, there is good reason to believe that proponents are determined to push it to be legally and ethically binding as far as they can; it is a steam engine that has not yet slowed down. Pressure will be put upon both the individual and

many institutions not only to tolerate the new definition of marriage but also to agree with and support it. This pressure, as is the case now, will continue to take the form of name calling such as intolerant, bigoted, hateful, homophobe and therefore evil (who wants to such labels attached to them?). But with a legal court ruling that applies across the board, the pressure will come in the form of court costs, hefty fines, businesses and institutions forced to close their doors, or jail.

We have seen some of this already in the several states where gay marriage is legal: families and small businesses (bakeries, florists, wedding photographers, a T shirt company, bed and breakfast inns, banquet halls) have paid a high price, simply because they said they could not with a clear conscience allow their services to be used in support of gay causes. Parents will have no recourse when their children are taught that same-sex marriage is good and traditional marriage is bigoted, for that is what the new law of the land will in essence say. Pastors will apparently have an exemption from having to perform same-sex weddings (though Justice Scalia suspects that will not last), but in Canada there are examples where pastors and others have been silenced and even fined for simply stating the biblical position in public.

It remains unclear how congregations will be affected, but they are vulnerable, especially those that allow facility usage by outside groups (e.g. the rental of the church for weddings by non-members). The tax-exempt status of confessional churches will likely be challenged. Updates to their constitutions and bylaws may be helpful, but this is no guarantee when facing a Supreme Court decision. But the challenge we may have to face first of all will be our Bethany Lutheran College.

Federal money and grants will become an issue as long as we teach as we do. So will Bethany's tax-exempt status. According to one attorney, *"[D]octrinal provisions in the governing documents of religious schools may not be enough to fend off IRS challenges to tax-exempt status if the IRS or the courts conclude that the right of same-sex couples to marry is a fundamental and compelling public policy."*[2]

So even with a clear confession of faith by our synod, college policies and practices may still be found to be unconstitutional. Many judges and local authorities, as we have seen, are more than willing to compel all sectors to comply, in spite of the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Some of us may be called upon to testify in ways we would rather avoid. We may be tested with the words of Christ, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." (Matt. 10).

The question that we as individuals, as Christian parents, as Christian business owners and managers, as Christian congregations, as a Board of Regents, as a confessional Lutheran synod, need to ask ourselves is: When is it okay to support a lie of Satan with our actions, our business, our money, our words, our policies, our silence, instead of drawing a line and saying, "No, I can't do that; no, here I stand"? What if the government says, "We demand that the services you provide, your business, your policies, your churches, your college be used to support the decision of the Supreme Court in spite of and contrary to your sacred beliefs." When would we take a stand, draw a line and say, "Here, and no further?" If we will not stand here, we will not stand firm when they tell us to

deny Christ. If we will not be "faithful in a very little", we will not be "faithful in much."

Though it does, none of this should take us by surprise. Jesus predicted that as long as we live in the Church Militant we will be hated, persecuted, called names, and even delivered over to death (Matt. 10). It just happens to be that what the devil is currently using to bring about this current and coming trial is the biblical teaching on marriage. And so it is essential that we remember that "our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). And this implies that we have already won, or more accurately, that Jesus the Son has already won everything for us. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ... In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Rom. 8).

The earthly kingdom, our nation, is temporary. The Kingdom we have through faith in the crucified, risen, and ascended Savior is eternal. He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, where he rules all things for the good of the Church, even though we often can't grasp how.

So we walk by faith in Jesus. And that includes confessing our sinfulness, a sinfulness that puts us in the same boat with any and all enemies. We claim no moral superiority. We are by nature, with everyone else, sinful and unclean. What we do claim is grace: that we are cleansed by the blood of Christ in the waters of baptism, comforted and sustained through gospel found in the Word and the other sacrament. This we trust, even as the world and Satan press hard against us.

We also fight. We hold to and faithfully teach the word of God, especially to our children.

We defend the Word of God in our churches, college, seminary, and in the public square. We need to be ready to take legal action to defend ourselves from wrongful intrusion by the government. The synod, the college, congregations, and pastors have to be prepared to seek sound legal counsel. But we also often fight in a strange way: We love the very ones who oppose God's Word, God's Christ, and God's children. We love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5). While they place before us the fiery furnace, we hold out to them a cup of water and, when the opportunity arises, the Water of Life, for they are loved by the God of all mercy just as much as we are.

And we pray, confessing our many sins and praising God for his free forgiveness. We pray also for steadfastness, for we will be tempted to compromise when we shouldn't and even deny our Lord. And we pray for our neighbor: our pastors, our churches, our synod, our nation, our governing authorities, and our enemies. And then we wait for the return of the King and the new heavens and the new earth.

-Pastor David Thompson

[1] Copied from a May 19th, 2015 statement by LCMS Pres. Matthew Harrison on the same subject (<http://blogs.lcms.org/2015/harrison-we-speak-the-truth-in-love-to-all-on-same-sex-marriage#.VVtdkylsxA.facebook>).

[2] [http://www.churchlawandtax.com/web/2015/may/six-questions-about-supreme-courts-upcoming-same-sex-marria.html?utm\\_source=yourchurch&start=3](http://www.churchlawandtax.com/web/2015/may/six-questions-about-supreme-courts-upcoming-same-sex-marria.html?utm_source=yourchurch&start=3)

## What God Has Ordained is Always Good

God has established his own criteria for what determines marriage – the intimate and lifelong union of a man and woman into one flesh, entered into by mutual consent and promise. His institution of marriage is for the great benefit of our families and of our nation. No human authority – even the highest court of our land – can overthrow what the Supreme Judge of all mankind has defined as marriage.

Will this unfortunate 5-4 ruling of validating “same-sex marriage” for the entire country have a direct effect on our pastors and congregations? Will litigation be brought against any pastor who for conscience sake refuses to officiate at a homosexual wedding? More study is needed in the days and months ahead to realize the full range of what the ruling entails. But – no matter – our obedience is to the Lord, and we know He will be with us as we seek to do His will. He also provides the necessary strength to remain steadfast when the torrents of secularism rush against the church.

It is a day that calls for national repentance. The Supreme Court's decision presents an occasion for each of us fellow Christians to speak another word – a better word – pointing people not only to what Scripture states on marriage but also to what is at the heart and center of that Word. We desire to use every occasion to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ and his forgiving love.

May God help us all, for the sake of His beloved Son!

-John A. Moldstad

President, Evangelical Lutheran Synod

# Parish News

## Special Events

- July
  - Ladies' Bible Study, 11
  - Golf Outing, 12
  - Mid-year forum and voters meeting, 19
  - Synod Youth Convention, 23-25
  - Utah County Bible Study, 25
- August
  - Ladies' Bible Study, 1
  - Youth Group Getaway, 14-15
  - Pot-Luck, 30

## **!Birthdays!**

Stephanie Olsen – July 9<sup>th</sup>

Dale Morgan – July 15<sup>th</sup>

Carol Olsen – July 20<sup>th</sup>

Katie Broome – August 7<sup>th</sup>

Brandon Lujan – August 15<sup>th</sup>

Mckenna Larson – August 27<sup>th</sup>

Eva Huckaby – August 31<sup>st</sup>

If you haven't told Pastor Webber your birthday,  
please do so, so that you can be included here.