

Will you be on the wrong side of history?

On last weekend's Youth Trip to Maine, Danny Asper perfected the seat of both navigator and historian. During the more quiet moments of our ten (!) hour drive north, Danny randomly broke into long-winded (a compliment here) narratives recounting the more magnificent blunders in the records of known civilization. Perhaps the most fascinating of these missteps, to me at least, was the construction of the Maginot Line, which I admit, I had never heard of before.

France. 1929. Building began on a line of military fortifications, which were to be extended from Switzerland to Luxembourg in defense of the Germany-facing French border. The motive was three-fold. 1) To protect French territories from any further invasions from the east. 2) To provide a defensive advantage – the fortifications allowing additional time for their army to mobilize in the event of an attack; and 3) to force Belgium's hand into entering the war – accomplishing the latter by *strategically* leaving Belgium's border open and vulnerable to German advances, so that in turn the Belgians would feel compelled to throw in with the allied forces.

It took nearly 9 years and 3 billion Francs for France to complete the line. An incredible amount of time, energy and resources; but when it was accomplished, oh, how the compliments ensued. Oh, how the French military prowess would finally be vindicated, they said! Oh, how the annals of history would remember the Maginot Line as a work of genius, they said! Oh... well, that is... until the German army simply went around the line by marching through Belgium (the irony!) and forced France's surrender in just six weeks. Nine years – six weeks. In a war that would last another five years, France's role was reduced early on to one of mere **resistance** (Business Insider). As such, reference to the Maginot Line is used to recall a strategy that people hope will prove **effective** but instead fails miserably (Wikipedia) or as a **defensive** barrier that inspires a false sense of security (Merriam-Webster).

Now speaking of a false sense of security... how about that Rick Scarborough huh? This guy, this pastor, was so convinced that a SCOTUS ruling in favor of marriage equality had the same odds of shooting 12 ("Midnight") in craps – a 30:1 shot at best – that he wagered the temperature at which his flesh would burn if it was so ordered. Does anyone know if there was ever a video-stream of his setting himself ablaze? Hey Rick, I sincerely doubt that lighting yourself on fire is an **effective** way of bringing prospective Christians into the fold, let alone demonstrating Jesus' compassion and love for all of life, yes, even your own.

But before we feel too sorry for old Rick, at least he has friends. For there were also his buddies Nick and Sarah Jensen in the news, a truly authentic Christian couple if there ever was one! They stated: "For us, fundamentally, when we got married we signed a contract with the state and that contract was around the current (past!) definition of marriage and all the things that comes with it. Man and woman for life, for the sake of children." The truth is, 'marriage' is simply too important. It is a sacred institution, ordained by God and any attempt to change the definition of marriage by law is not something in which we are able to partake." And so, presumably, they agreed to file for an immediate divorce as a sign of holy **resistance**. Yes, talk about upholding the sanctity of marriage!

And finally, last but certainly never least, there was Robert Gagnon, Associate Professor of the New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. If ever there were a more **defensive** little man, God never knew him. Write one small rebuttal of his conclusions and you can expect a novel in response. Self-proclaimed as the world's most foremost expert in the Bible and Homosexual Practice (he very well could be), he wrote on his Facebook wall (yes, I too was surprised he had one!): "Today, June 26, 2015, a day of national tragedy, the Supreme Court of the United States rendered what should rank as the worst decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in the lifetime of every living American (rivaled only by Roe v. Wade) and at least one of the two or three worst decisions since the Court's inception." Now, this is the same Robert Gagnon, mind you, who once was heard defending that "incest is not as much of an 'abomination' as same-sex intimacy because incest is typically male-female couplings as opposed to male-male (quote: Daneen Akers)."

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Those who have fortified their insecurities behind the veil of un-Christ-like Christianity have truly wasted an incredible amount of time, energy and resources. As one commenter on Friday's ruling opined, "I think that we will wonder what the fuss was all about in 10 or 20 years. Certainly, our children are already wondering this." Honestly, it is a shame that it has taken this long. It is a shame that a multitude of good people have lived and died single and fearful of being open and honest within their very own societies and even their families. It is a shame that such a great many other people, endowed with and educated by this beautiful faith, have squandered so much of it away in the eye of the public such that the secular world is rendered surprised when Christian ministers and congregations demonstrate their support and love for the LGBT community. And it is a crying shame that so much more could have been accomplished for the kingdom of heaven, and indeed the world at large, if these adversaries of change instead focused their passions on things that were truly egregious to God, like hunger and homelessness, like war and like famine, like genocide and female genital mutilation, like... condemning your other and not loving your neighbor as yourself.

Friends, make no mistake. Though Gagnon, Mike Huckabee, and their countless disciples are talking more loudly now than ever, so too is God. God is still speaking and this is God's appointed time. It is no longer 11:59pm. It is midnight. It is a new day. A day of celebration, a day of rainbows and cake, a day where we can finally say let it be, it is so ordered, allelujah and amen! And so what a striking coincidence it is then that our Old Testament lesson for this week, of all weeks in the lectionary series, highlights David and Jonathan and their affectionate love for each other.

Now, I should admit up front that Gagnon has written a long rebuttal of what I'm about to illustrate, but so too has he been rebutted on this point by numerous scholars and peer-theologians (he dismisses their opinions of course, for as he has worded it, they are not on his level of scholarship), so to me, it's an honest and fair reading of our text.

Here then are the facts, as they are presented in Scripture: In 1 Samuel chapter 18, it is said that David and Jonathan's souls were knitted together and that immediately afterward, Saul, Jonathan's father, took David into his house. A couple of verses later, Jonathan made a covenant with David, because "he loved him as his own soul," and then he stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, as well as his armor, his sword and his bow, and yes, even his belt. Standing naked then before him, Jonathan gave David his love and David reciprocated with his soul. Later in the narrative, when Saul is attempting to kill David, Jonathan defies his father and warns David of the attack. And ultimately, when both realized they would likely never see each other again, David and Jonathan share a kiss until, as the Hebrew words it, David "became great/large"...conjure whatever meaning you may like. Now, I admit, Hebrew is notoriously tricky, especially for its omission of certain helping words, where the reader is left to piecemeal the original thought back together. Could the writer have merely meant (as the NRSV and others take it) that David simply became great with emotion -- perhaps? Could it be that David became large, physically -- perhaps? And so I say again, conjure whatever meaning you may like.

Finally, after Jonathan is regrettably killed in battle, David utters what we also hear in our text: "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women (2 Samuel 1:26)." Now Gagnon would argue that all of this is a descriptive, yet merely platonic demonstration of a strong and true friendship. I however have been persuaded to think otherwise, especially when considering how prone David was to unsanctioned sexual dalliances (Bathsheba!). It seems at least plausible to me then, that once more David allowed his eros for another to overtake him.

But you know what? My opinion on this text, or Gagnon's, or even yours, doesn't really matter. We can mud-sling scripture verses back and forth at each other, arguing that *here* is where God supports Homosexuality and yet *there* is the evidence that states otherwise, but really, in the end, it matters not. It certainly matters less after Friday's decision, but more, it matters least because the only thing that has ever truly mattered at all is Jesus' commandment to love. To love your neighbor as yourself, no matter their skin color, their ethnicity, or their sexual orientation. "Pastors and scholars and all followers of Jesus are bound by the clear, incontrovertible teaching of Scripture, introduced in Leviticus, reinforced in the prophets but blazing out in Jesus and the apostolic writings that says, in effect, *Pay attention to how your beliefs affect other people* (Ken Wilson)" and if nothing else, look after and care for persons disenfranchised.

Our text from Mark speaks of just such a person in need of our attention. For here was an outcast, a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for 12 years (the same amount of years, consequently, of the father's daughter's age made mention of in the beginning of our passage). She had been to doctor after doctor, physician after physician. And as if it wasn't enough that they all reported back that there was nothing they could do for her, her religious leaders, of all people, contended that she also no longer had a place even amongst their society, for, as their law stated, God detested those who were "unclean." Can you imagine? This coming from the supposed ambassadors for the Divine? Unfortunately, you can imagine it. For we have heard the same rhetoric from the Gagnonites for decades.

Oh but this woman would not be broken. She would not believe that her worth was non-existent or minimal at best. And so she slowly pushed her way through the crowds, edging her body past artisans and nobility alike, until she found herself right behind the man they called Jesus the Messiah. And with one fateful reach, she extended and touched the hem of his garment and all time came to a stop.... What had she just done? She was unclean! By law, whomever she touched would also be rendered unclean. Did she really then just defile this man -- this Incarnate Word of God; her potential remedy, indeed her Lord and Savior? And for what, she must have thought? A 30:1 chance of this even working? What silly, stupid chain of thoughts convinced her that her long night would finally come to an end; that a new day would suddenly dawn upon her? And so with fear and trembling she came forward and answered Jesus, saying, it was I Lord, it was me. I, who have no rights... I reached out for your garment.

Now what do you suspect Jesus did? Did he resist her? Did he punish her? Did he waste his remaining energy, quoting some obscure, antiquated, scriptural law and rebuke her? Did he say that love has limits, and that she was not worthy of it?

No... "Daughter" ... "Daughter" is what he said; "Daughter" is what he called her, and immediately she became one of Christ's family. Immediately she became an inheritor of the Kingdom of God. Immediately she was issued an invitation, better yet, a membership to the table of tables, to the celebration of celebrations, to the banquet of banquets.

It was so ordered.

And so shall it be!

My friends, in Christ we are not only forgiven. But we are loved. We are so loved. By God's great mercy and faithfulness, God's love -- the love that knows no bounds -- marches around every fortification that seeks to guard itself from it. And by God, this unyielding love has conquered and reigns now and we hope forevermore.

Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessings all mine with ten thousand beside. Thanks be to God and praise be to Christ for morning by morning new mercies I see!

Allelujah! Amen.