Life

Faith and values: Recognize sacredness of life, love

Gazette Staff

"God is love. Those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them."
- 1 John 4:16

As a minister I have the honor to be present at the most sacred moments in people's lives.

In addition to Sunday worship, I preside at weddings, funerals, baptisms and other special occasions that mark transitions.

Some of these transitions are sad, others joyful, but all are sacred. All of these moments are holy, hallowed and touched by grace.

That is my job, really. I am there to announce, through ritual and prayer, the presence of God.

Through my role as minister, I simply state on behalf of the community what already is:

This moment is holy.
This life is sacred.
This relationship is blessed.

Some have referred to worship as "holy play" in which we enact through ritual, song, prayer, and emotion what God has done. In so doing, we recognize the sacredness of our lives.

In 1863, Abraham Lincoln said at the consecration of the Gettysburg cemetery:

"But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground, brave men, living and dead who struggled here have hallowed it far above our poor power to detract."

This summer, in addition to all the myriad ways I am called to declare the experience of human and sacred, I have the honor to preside at a commitment ceremony for two members of my congregation.

They have never had their relationship publicly acknowledged. I am blessed and humbled to the joyful task of declaring what love has hallowed between these two men. This summer the their 15th anniversary.

I am proud of this couple.

Their relationship is indeed sacred and a light to the world.

In the midst of a summer in which attempts are made to harden state constitutions and even constitution in regards to what is "sacred and holy," I think it is important to share what my co
is doing.

We went through a process of discernment. Not all agreed with the decision. We do not all agree on what this decision means.

But, after dialogue, education, prayer and hearing the witness of this couple, the heart of the congregation said, "Yes. We are to be a place of blessing."

Mel White, author of "Stranger at the Gate," wrote: "Like our heterosexual friends and neighbors, gay people have the God-given right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; the right to live together, to develop long-term loving relationships, and to have those relationships honored and officially recognized by our community."

This is what the church is about.

We are to be a blessing.

We are to declare as sacred and holy what God has already blessed.

I am proud to serve a congregation that knows this.

The Rev. John Shuck is pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Billings.

The Faith & Values column appears regularly in the Saturday Life section of The Billings Gazette.

Pastors, ethicists, educators or other experts who would like to write a column about faith, ethical values for the section, should contact: Susan Olp; Billings Gazette; 401 N. Broadway; Billings, MT 59101.

Or call her at 657-1281; fax to her attention at 657-1208; or e-mail to solp@billingsgazette.com.

Copyright © The Billings Gazette, a division of Lee Enterprises.
Homosexuality wrong according to Bible

I am writing in response to the Rev. John Shuck's Aug. 7 column. First, I would like to point out that unlike Shuck, I did not attend the seminary nor have I studied theology. But, also unlike the reverend, I can read and understand the Bible.

Leviticus says, "If a man lies with a male, as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them..."

The Lord has no tolerance for homosexual behavior. This is not to mean that we hate them, with our "homophobe" intolerance, for there's a better way.

As God-fearing Americans, it is our duty not to embrace their chosen lifestyle but to point out how disillusioned it is to their soul and to help them change that lifestyle. Dr. James Dobson has a program to assist homosexuals in changing their lifestyle and saving their soul.

Two former homosexuals operate Dobson's highly acclaimed program, so they know from personal experience that a person may be going through. More information can be found on their Web site, it is www.dobson.org.

Persons who embrace this lifestyle, in my mind, are no better or maybe worse than a murderer. When a person is murdered, only their body dies. By encouraging behavior forbidden by God, you are playing a large part in the eternal damnation of their very soul. Now, that's dangerous.

Leon B. Hammond
Elkhart, Ind.

Dangers in following every Biblical phrase

I am writing in response to Leon B. Hammond's letter from Aug. 22.

Apparently he has read the Bible, but apparently he's very selective of which passages he likes (never mind that the passage he cites clearly states to kill all homosexuals and then he turns around saying we shouldn't, thereby disobeying the Word of God).

Did he forget Leviticus 11:23-29 which states that bats are birds? Did he forget Leviticus 11:36 which states that rabbits chew cud? Did he forget 1 Kings 7:23 which states that the number pi equals exactly 3? Did he forget Exodus 35:2 which states that anyone who works on the Sabbath should be put to death? And did he forget Deuteronomy 22:28-29 which states that if an unchaste virgin is raped, then she must marry her rapist?

The point is, it's not clear why is that the Bible says a lot of things, but that doesn't mean we should always follow them (especially when they come from the Old Testament). Biologists aren't going to reclassify bats as birds because the Bible says so; engineers aren't going to punch three in their calculators in place of pi because the Bible says so; and the courts aren't going to force little girls to marry their rapists because the Bible says so. Doing so now that would be dangerous.

B. Loretta Sunday
August 29, 2004

Christian salvation offered to all people

Regarding Mr. Hammond's letter in the Aug. 22 Gazette, neither am I a Biblical scholar, but I do seem to recall that, according to the Old Testament:

You shall not eat pork or shellfish.

You shall not wear clothing made of two different fibers.

If your wives (yes, concubine wives) weren't virgins at marriage, they should be inquired about.

No tattooing, along with a bunch of other stuff.

Sunday Greg Theisen

Bible Gateway August 29, 2004

Sure, the homosexuality debate is hot, but it is not also covered by Old Testament law. Revenge is mine, saith the Lord.