

A Reflection on Pride and Changing My Mind

Luke Bushman June 22nd^h, 2025

Good morning. Today, several Mennonite groups will be marching in the Pride Parade. It starts at noon, but since the staging happens earlier, and parking is hard to find, I am going to be racing out of here after I finish preaching to be in the parade. This morning, I would like to share a bit of my theological journey, that has led to a place where I am a Mennonite pastor, that is looking at their watch to try and make it to the pride parade. In biblical studies you can often designate different texts in the Bible as descriptive or prescriptive. Descriptive texts are texts that simply tell you about something that happened, or give background to a situation at the time. Prescriptive are the texts that instruct us about how we are to live in the world. One might designate the atrocities committed by the judges in the book of Judges as descriptive, and the teachings of Jesus as prescriptive. This morning please feel free to view my words as descriptive. While I might feel strongly about a topic, and I think we all sometimes feel “Wouldn’t it be easier if we all agreed”. That isn’t reality, and that isn’t life. So, this morning my goal isn’t to change minds or to sway hearts, but through my journey, answer the question “How did a conservative Christian

wind up as a pastor, who is LGBTQ+ affirming?” Maybe that story will get you thinking, and maybe it won’t.

I was born and raised in Hepburn Saskatchewan, and grew up going to Hepburn MB church. No place is perfect, but I want to make it clear I have generally positive things to say about my upbringing. While looking back there may be things I disagreed with, I also was always loved, particularly by my family and my church community. Our church had a tradition of giving all of the children leaving 2nd Grade their first “real Bible”. Not a children’s Bible, but a regular one. I still have my NLT Bible, and it still has the date I received it written on the first page.

As you likely know, reading the Bible as a young kid can be really confusing. Early in my faith formation, I started to have questions. While back then I could explain away most of the Old Testament stuff by saying “It is old” or “It is different because of Jesus now”, I could not explain away the words of Paul. I was in about the seventh grade when I started wondering “Why doesn’t Paul want women to speak” and “What is Paul’s problem with gay people”. Those questions stuck with me, and I think those early experiences of asking those questions greatly shaped how I view the world. I remember asking my parents, and they encouraged me to think more about it, which I am very grateful for.

When I started asking these questions, the Christianity around me often had answers. The answer was simple. Women weren't supposed to preach, because it is wrong. Homosexuality is condemned by Paul because it is also wrong. For a long period of time these answers gave me clarity and confidence that I had the right answers... that confidence made me arrogant and dismissive a lot of times. I cringe when I consider the ideas that I regurgitated and said out loud during this time of my life:

“Gay men are just gay because they can't get girls to like them”

“Gay people can't raise a person, you need both genders”

“If we start accepting gay people, what next? Bestiality?”

All of these things make me sad to look back on. I was unkind to those in the LGBTQ+ community in my rhetoric and attitude. Things changed when I started to meet people. To talk to people who had loved ones who were gay. Around this time my aunt started dating a woman. I softened a little. I started thinking deeply about love, and how my previous claims lacked any of it. I worked at a Bible camp in the summers, and often times, kids would return year after year. One of these regulars at camp was being raised by his two mothers. He asked me one day if we could talk, because he wanted to do the leadership training program at camp the

following year, so he could also be a camp counsellor. I knew him pretty well at this point, so I had an idea that the conversation would be regarding his parents and how welcome he would be as a staff member, given the camp wouldn't approve of his family situation.

I will never forget that conversation. It was a turning point in how I see the world. He asked me if God hated his parents, and I said no, even if someone said that, they are wrong. We talked for about an hour. He told me he was proud of his moms for being brave by coming out and loving each other. I told him a lot of people think different than that, but that having a different experience than most of the other people at camp was good, and would be helpful.

The main thing I remember about that conversation was feeling torn. Feeling like I wasn't able to say how actually felt about the situation, and feeling guilty that I hadn't said what I was supposed to say. I wish I wouldn't have given a watered-down answer. I wished I would have been more affirming and loving. And then I felt guilty. Because wasn't I supposed to say something, like "your mothers are living in sin" or "you can work here but only if you view things the way the camp does". This torn feeling helped me realize that black and white answers did not work for me when faced with the nuance of relationship. I am sure many folks in this room have

encountered this crisis of understanding when our dogma meets our experiences.

Bible college was a major turning point for me in how I saw myself, the Bible, and the world around me. I was given a lot of space to ask questions, and to truly wrestle with different ideas for the first time in my life. I had a lot of professors who were patient, and understanding, who asked difficult questions and invited students to do the same. To illustrate how much I changed during Bible college, I can simply point to one of my first papers, and one of my last papers.

In my first year Introduction to Theology class, we were asked to research two viewpoints, and conclude which view we were in favor in. I actually found it on my computer recently. I wrote a paper about Egalitarian vs Complementarian understandings of scripture. After working with Patty it feels ironic that I advocated in favor of a complementarian view of church leadership (that is that only men can be church leaders and household leaders). In my final year of college, for my issues in hermeneutics course, I wrote a paper looking at the issues that arise when we try to transfer a 1st Century understanding of homosexuality into a 21st Century context. Here are a few quotations from my conclusion- I apologize if some of the

language is outdate, (I was still learning), or pretentious (I was trying to get a good grade).

I conclude based on this research, and in light of my hermeneutic convictions, that today we are wrong to condemn loving, homosexual acts from our church.

Today homosexual acts involve marriage, and adoption, and are about a true respectful love for the other partner.

I have no idea where this leaves the church, but it certainly means we need to start asking the big questions, being more accepting, and stop kidding ourselves that Paul and us are witnessing the same thing.

My main shift in understanding was that sexuality and gender identity today are topics that look drastically different to what authors like the Apostle Paul was speaking about. As you can see by these two papers I wrote, how I looked at the world changed a lot over my four years in college. I still felt torn a lot of the time, between what I grew up believing and the things I was starting to think about. In regards to LGBTQ+ inclusion

in the Christian faith, I was still indecisive about my theology in a lot of ways. That all changed when Mama Ruthy came into my life.

I won't say too much, because it is not my story to tell, but my mother-in-law, (who I call Mama Potvin) had a tumultuous couple of years. At around the time I was joining the family, Mama Potvin came out, and started dating a woman named Ruth. Mama Ruthy. If we are supposed to judge a tree by the fruit it bears, then the tree of Mama Potvin, and Mama Ruthy's relationship bore nothing but good fruit in my eyes. Mama Ruthy once told me that she has always known she was gay, and also always known that Jesus loves her. The two of them not only uplift each other in their beautiful relationship, but they also uplift those around them. From the second I joined the family they have always been there for me. Countless times the two of them listened to me and gave me a shoulder to cry on while I navigated homesickness, difficulties at work, and mental health problems. Even though Mama Ruthy is a Manchester United fan, I could not be happier that when I married Becca, I gained two mothers, instead of just one.

I believe in life we have moments where everything comes together, and all we can do is pause and say "I got it wrong". I recently wrote in the monthly newsletter about having one of these moments when I attended a

church where a woman served as a lead pastor. Included in our scripture reading today was a moment when Peter realized that Gentiles were also included in God's plan. Getting to know Mama Potvin and Mama Ruthy was that moment for me. For years I had been thinking about how the church mistreated gay people. For years I had desired for more nuance and love to radiate through important conversations. Or you might say for years I was sitting on the fence, afraid of what would happen if I leaned into my convictions. Regardless, I realized that I believe you can be a Christian, and be a 2 Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender person as well.

At this point it became harder and harder to work at a church where I wouldn't feel safe bringing two people who had a major impact on my life and my faith. Mama Ruthy and Mama Potvin were often my support system when things got lonely on the island, and it made me sad that I couldn't bring them to church. While I felt content for a while keeping things to myself, I ultimately felt like I was living a lie. I moved out of church ministry for a lot of reasons, but one of the main ones was a question that haunted me. "What am I supposed to say if one of the youths I am working with comes out". I knew what the denomination would want me to say or think in that moment. I also knew that the only response I would give was "That is wonderful, thank you for telling me. How can I support you".

I quit my job at the church, and tried to be a plumber. If you know me, you have an idea of how that went- I tried really hard but I am not a very handy person. We decided to move back to Saskatchewan, and had been attending the local United Church sporadically. While we were at a wedding we lamented to our friend that there wasn't a place for Anabaptists with similar ideas about LGBTQ+ inclusion. He told us that there were some churches in Saskatchewan that were exactly that. He mentioned Nutana Park, Wildwood, and Osler Mennonite. When we got home Becca looked up those churches, and found the job listing for my current position. For years I thought my beliefs and my interest in pastoral ministry were incompatible. It has been healing and exciting to feel safe about my beliefs, and to participate in pastoral work related to the inclusion of previously excluded people. Whether that is marching with other Mennonites in the Pride Parade, or helping out with Fruits of the Spirit, a multi-denominational LGBTQ+ spiritual gathering that happens on Sunday afternoons. I am so lucky I found the church communities I am involved in, and I am so blessed that I get to do the work I do.

I haven't shared this in an attempt to coerce others into thinking the same way as me. I know how that feels, and it isn't fun. I wanted to share my story of how my views have changed for a few reasons though.

First, so that you know this doesn't come about flippantly, or without regard for scripture and tradition. I landed on a stance that had me racing off to pride after years of not only thinking and studying, but also meeting and loving. It is an intersection of a lot of thought and a lot of experience. I have mainly shared experience this morning, but I can share some thoughts with you sometime if you like. Often on big topics we can typecast those with opposing views. To write off my views someone might say that I don't care about the Bible, that I just want to take the easy route, or that I am just conforming to culture. I could be guilty of the same. Writing off the views of others as homophobic, hateful, or outdated. I know a lot of good people who don't see things the same way as me. I don't think it is fair to use assumptions to dismiss others. As long as we all agree that love is the most important.

Second, I wanted to share my story so you know that you can change your mind, and other people can change their mind. You don't have to think the same way forever. In the same way you don't need to put people in a box and assume they will never change. I assume based on how confidently I said things like "Women can't be pastors" and "Gay people can't be Christians" in the past, a lot of people would be surprised to see

that I have changed my mind. Have hope in others, and follow your convictions even if it is scary.

Third, I wanted to share this story for the sake of anyone who might be wrestling with their sexuality or gender identity. To hopefully let you know that you are loved, and there are safe places for you to explore your faith even if your sexuality or gender identity seems a bit different to some people. God has made the world full of diversity and beauty, and every person is part of that. Thank you for listening to my story, it can be scary to get personal, and I am thankful for this kind community.