**Overview of Gender Identity & Expression in Scripture & Church**

In the beginning, God created and then realized people would go loopy if left to talk to the animals without a partner that could relate to them. So, God created a partner and since God hoped there would be more people, they were given the ability to pro-create (have sex and make babies). Eventually all those babies grew up and found themselves wandering through the wilderness looking for a home. They made up some great guidelines for how 1 million people and their animals can survive that setting without being wiped out by disease. Part of the plan included having more births than funerals (have sex and make babies).

Over the years, people started judging each other, a tradition we still uphold today. They judged where people came from, what they looked like, what they ate, what they didn’t eat and who they wanted to have sex with. Because of the whole wandering through the wilderness experience, they had one important rule about “hospitality.” It didn’t matter how much you judged someone, if they needed a place to stay for the night then you were expected to give them shelter. In one city (called Sodom) people judged others for giving hospitality to strangers. Being big bullies, they demanded that strangers be turned over to them and threatened those who cared for strangers. They said, “bring them out so that we may know them.” Many years later people who heard the story decided their understanding of 3,000-year-old inuendo was more authoritative than logic and claiming this was about homosexuality.

Along the way, God sent Jesus who said nothing about homosexuality, but did take issue with the whole judging thing. Jesus said it was not a good idea. Luckily, Jesus said that God loved all people, even the ones who judged others.

Paul later tried to answer everyone’s questions about Jesus. People had some very specific questions but sometimes Paul went on and on. Paul talked about males “laying” with men like they would with a woman (he didn’t specify whether this sex was the baby making kind, the power kind or the pleasure kind). Unfortunately, no one who is alive today knows which specific issue Paul was talking about because the word Paul used was a brand-new compound word and he left no notes. It seems that there were young boys being used to replace women’s roles for soldiers on the battlefield who were away from home for long campaigns. It seems there were young boys being used in pagan temples to make men feel good (clearly not to make babies!). In the ancient Church, this Paul’s new word was used to describe men who forced their wives to have sex, even if they didn’t want to. Kind of sounds like that sex for power thing again, right? Many years later, people who read and translated these, very long, inspiring letters expressed their own judgmental side by using the word homosexuality to explain what Paul was trying to say.

Over time, people who only wanted to have sex with the opposite sex upheld the tradition of judging people who are different (statistically, there are more people who are attracted to the opposite sex) and started asserting power over them by excluding those they called homosexuals from community. One man named Hitler even imprisoned and killed them along with the other people he hated. He was very good at the judging tradition.

In America in the 1980s, some churches decided that homosexuality was a bigger sin than the judging sin that Jesus preached about. They started targeting homosexuals above other sinners and discovered that picking on those who are different is a good approach to fund-raising. Luckily, they had the judgmental translations of past generations preserved in the Bible. This allowed them to convince good hearted people that God agreed with them (they must have skipped the Jesus comments on judging) and supported the division. So, today we have lots of well-meaning people who have been convinced to follow their own fears and judge those who are different, especially those who experience gender and attraction differently than the majority.

Somewhere along the way, others suggested that judging is wrong. People started advocating for their own rites as human beings rather than some cold, scientific categorization of hate invented to exclude. They reclaimed words thrown at them in hate and judgment as words of love and affirmation. Others started advocating for their rites too. A battle began in the court of public opinion. Some claimed that God created and called all people good. These people claimed that caring for others was more important that judging. On the other side of the argument are those who believe God is more worried about us believing the correct thing and that churches are called to judge those who are living the wrong way. There are also a lot of others who just use God and the Bible to justify their position but don’t really believe any of it.

Of course, this quick overview is completely bias because all humans have a hard time setting aside their own biases and we all are quicker to judge than Jesus wanted. Maybe it is that struggle to set aside our fears and not judge that makes issue like this so difficult to navigate. Of course, religious and societal repression of sexuality doesn’t help either. We have to be able to talk about things to change them – talk with each other, and with God.