



# FAITH matters

June 19, 2023

I became a minister when I was twenty-six years old... not a Presbyterian minister but a minister in the United Church of Christ. Between the two denominations there is not a great deal of difference... at least to me. I attended seminary in St. Louis. There was a women's dorm and a men's dorm. In the evening, we all ate dinner together in a beautiful Gothic dining hall.

Since I was not yet married, I lived in the men's dorm. Across the hall was a man named Jim. We had attended college together but never really become deeply acquainted. But in a men's dorm with only about twenty students in it, not getting to know one another became somewhat of an impossibility. Jim came to my room nearly every evening... to talk about classes or professors or any number of things. When he didn't come to my room, I stopped by to say hello to him. .

I will never forget the evening he shared with me something I was not at all expecting. He wanted me to know that he had very tender feelings for me. He didn't use the word "love" but I knew that wasn't too far away from where he was inside. I didn't know how to respond. I said, "Oh, thank you," then let myself out the door and walked back to my room.

For many days did I think about how to respond to his words. I knew how I felt inside. I liked Jim but in no romantic way did I love him. I understood my own sexuality and it moved in an entirely different direction. But I liked Jim and I wanted to help him. So building up my courage one evening, I asked him if we could look for a psychiatrist together and then schedule a visit for him. I was sure the right person could swing him back to where he needed to be. Surprisingly, he said, "yes." So we spent a bit of time finding someone who would be sympathetic and understanding... then Jim made the appointment and one afternoon he kept it. That evening, I was anxious to talk with him. Perhaps "anxious" is not the right word but I was very hopeful that Jim was on the right track of getting back to the place it was God made him to be.

This is what the psychiatrist said to Jim: “I am glad you have come to see me. Thank you for trusting me enough to share your feelings. But this I need to say to you: you are who you are. There is no way I can change you. No matter how many times we talk together, you will leave my office the same person you were when you came in. And that person is kind and compassionate and gracious... but with a sexuality that is attracted to men and not to women.”

Those are not the words Jim wanted to hear. He wanted to be “fixed.” He wanted to come out of that doctor’s office feeling he would no longer need to be ashamed of himself. He wanted to let go of the old Jim and embrace a new Jim. But that didn’t happen. It didn’t happen to Jim and it doesn’t happen to anybody who goes to a psychiatrist to change his/her sexual orientation.

What is wrong with being gay? What is wrong with men being attracted to men... and women being attracted to women? A person’s sexuality does not represent the essence of who they are. My friend Jim graduated from seminary and went on to become a very competent and faithful minister in the United Church of Christ. Whether he ever shared his “secret” with anyone other than me, I don’t know. But I do know that the last time I saw Jim, his sexuality was not even on the fringes of my mind.

But here is the question: where is Jesus Christ in all of this? Where is Jesus Christ when one political candidate after another smashes people for being gay? Where is Jesus Christ when so many evangelical churches in this country interpret Scripture to say that gayness is a step on the way to hell? I cannot answer these questions with certainty. I can only say that the Jesus Christ I know does not smash anyone. And the Jesus Christ I know does not place anyone in hell for behavioral characteristics over which they have no control. Churches that are about the business of condemning gay people to hell are not ones where I would want to be worshiping on a Sunday morning... and yet these are the very churches that seem to be prospering in our country today. Where is Jesus Christ in all of this? Within you, I do believe. And within me. Whenever we have the courage to place love for all people first and foremost in our lives. And to love them for who they are and not for we think they should be.

~Written by Fred Edmonds



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