



### **Love Makes A Way**

Last Saturday, I had the joy and the privilege of presiding at the wedding of a lovely couple named Jesse and Stuie. I first met Jesse and Stuie some years ago, when I was the Minister in placement at Mountview. They were part of the group of younger adults who were associated with the Mountview congregation at that time, albeit somewhat on the fringe. Although they were close to the other members of the younger adults group, they only attended services irregularly; and Stuie in particular was very sensitive and nervous about any public acknowledgement of his sexuality.

In 2015, I had the joy and the privilege of presiding at the wedding of another lovely couple, Darren and Amy. Again, both were members of the younger adults group at Mountview. But Darren was also Stuie's brother. And as I worked with Darren and Amy in preparation for their wedding, we crafted together a statement about marriage which Darren and Amy asked me to read on their behalf.

Now, before I tell you about that statement, let me give you a bit of background. In 2015, the Commonwealth Marriage Act, with bipartisan support, had been changed so that marriage was defined exclusively as the union of a man and a woman. Moreover, marriage celebrants such as myself were required by the Act to make this statement during the course of the wedding - regardless of our own feelings on and views about the matter. In other words, I was personally

required by law to make a statement about marriage that I personally found repugnant and contrary to my conscientiously held views about marriage, faith and sexuality.

It was in this context that Darren and Amy asked me to read the statement on their behalf, a statement which, while it acknowledged the law as it then stood, expressed their belief that marriage was not the sole preserve of heterosexual couples, as well as their hope that one day the law would be changed so that same sex couples could express their loving commitment to one another in the same way that they - Darren and Amy - had been able to.

Flash forward to 2024. The painful and wounding "marriage debate" and plebiscite was held and demonstrated overwhelming public support for a change to the Marriage Act. That change was duly enacted under the aegis of the Turnbull Coalition government, so that marriage was defined as the union of two people. Within a year, after much soul-searching and debate, the Uniting Church Assembly granted its Ministers the right to preside at the weddings of same sex couples. The Assembly also gave Ministers (and congregations) the freedom of their conscience to not preside at, or not host, same sex weddings.

In other words, no-one who disagrees with same sex marriage is required to do or say anything they find personally repugnant or contrary to their conscientiously held beliefs. No-one can force any marriage celebrant to preside at a same-sex wedding; no-one can force a venue or community to host a same-sex wedding. And this freedom of conscience has been extended by the Uniting Church to its Ministers and congregations.

And so it was that, last Saturday, I presided at Jesse and Stuie's wedding - and Darren and Amy were able to stand with them and share the joy of the occasion.

But it was not until more recent days that I have realised that, not only have same sex couples been given the right to marry, I, too have been given something - the freedom of my conscience. There is nothing in the Marriage Act as it now stands that requires me to say anything I disagree with or find personally offensive. In just the same way that those who disagree with same sex marriage are free to continue to hold and practice their beliefs, so marriage celebrants like myself - who believe that marriage is not the exclusive possession of heterosexual couples and that love is a universal human reality - are free from the legal requirement to make a statement contrary to that belief.

Jesus' public ministry was all about setting people free. The miracle narratives, the clashes with the religious leaders, the parables told to the disciples and to the crowds who came to see Jesus: all these were part of the message that the Gospel has come to set us free. Free from all the oppressive, destructive, burdensome guilt-trips, prescriptions, and cultural and social assumptions that divide us from one another and God, that make relationship and relational co-existence impossible, that degrade and humiliate and blind us to the fact that we are all of us loved by God - and, more to the point, have already been deemed worthy of love by God. Jesus came to set us free from all the structures of power and injustice that bind us in suffering and pain, instead making a way for us to access the love of God.

Love makes a way. It makes a way, not just for the recognition of the basic human dignity of LGBTQIA+ people, it also makes a way toward freedom of conscience and practice for marriage celebrants like myself. And so a moment of liberation and release for Jesse and Stuiie has become a moment of liberation and release for me also. Oh happy day indeed!

### **Pikelet Day**

The early Easter date means that Shrove Tuesday will be on 13th February this

year. Consequently, there will be a Pikelet Community Time on Sunday 11th February to conclude the Coffee Cup Challenge which has been running since November last year. Sorry it's not pancakes but there is a lot of work that goes into the preparation and cooking and cleaning up with pancakes. There will be a charge of \$5 on Pikelet Day which is essentially the average cost of a cup of coffee. Thank you to those who have regularly given during this time or have donated directly through the Uniting VicTas website, your donations at Church will be included with the money raised on Sunday 11th February. The money raised will be used to provide help for those who are less fortunate than ourselves so dig deep and join the pikelet party.

- Glenis McDonald

#### **4U News**

Now in its 65th year, 4U is kicking off again in 2024. The first meeting will take place in the Fellowship Room at HUC on Monday February 12th at 2pm. For full details [click this link](#).

#### **Presbytery Newsletter**

The latest edition of the Presbytery of Yarra Yarra newsletter is now available. To read, please [click this link](#).

Blessings,

Brendan





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