

If a Bible Story Could End a Culture War: John 8 and Prop 8

By Ched Myers

1. Ched Myers believes the movement to limit the right to marry to heterosexual couples is misguided. “Prop 8 was driven largely by the conservative religious community, which pumped up the issue into an epic battle to save the institution of marriage, if not western civilization itself. Not only did these churchly proponents miss the point of democracy, in my opinion; they also missed the point of the gospel. That point is perhaps best made by an old story in scripture, which I counter-pose as the “proposition” of John 8.”

Read John 8 together aloud. What do you think is the point of John 8? How does it apply to the controversial discussion about marriage in the United States?

2. Myers recaps the story of the woman caught in adultery. When the scribes and the Pharisees want Jesus to condemn her, he says, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” They drift away and Jesus is alone with the woman. He asks her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” The story sets us up to hope that Jesus is going to give her a dressing down. Myers says, “Here at last is Jesus’ unequivocal guidance on the issue that the Prop 8 folk deem to be our moral watershed; it’s God’s own edict concerning the boundaries of marriage law, free of cultural static. Let’s settle this hash once and for all.” But Jesus’ only response is “Neither do I condemn you.”

What does John 8 tell us about marriage or sexual behavior? What does it tell us about judging? Who are our adversaries—people who violate biblical ethics, like the woman caught in adultery, or people who interpret biblical ethics differently? What does this story have to say in either case? What do you think is the crux of the story?

3. Myers sees this passage and other passages, such as Romans 1 - 2, as teachings on sin and grace more than a particular teaching on human sexuality and sexual behavior. He says, “The point is, none of us is without sin. And the counterpoint, thankfully, is that none of us is without grace.” How, in our congregations and church practices, do we practice self-examination and show grace to one another, especially on issues of human sexuality?

4. Myers challenges us to understand what it means to “sin no more.” Does Jesus refer in this passage to those who judge? Those who violate biblical ethics? Those who fail to take the Bible seriously? Who exactly?