

## **All I Want for the Holidays by Jonathan Bannon Maher**

When trade smiths, farmers, teachers and clergy sailed west on boats from Europe with their families in the early 1600s, they sought to leave behind oppression in favor of opportunity and freedom. A century and a half later this vision was recorded in a document, The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America, perhaps best epitomized by the idea captured in the phrase “all men are created equal”. Though imperfectly gender specific, it was the first time in the history of humanity that had ever been declared by a governing body. On November 4<sup>th</sup> of this year, we saw our founders’ vision affirmed in the first election of an African American to the highest office of the land, but on the same day, that founding vision fell short in the passage of a law in California to prohibit marriage between loving consenting adults of the same sex.

I am gay, but at 27, marriage is not necessarily the first thing on my mind as I write this. Here is what is on my mind: discriminating between heterosexuals and homosexuals in the law—be it in opportunities for marriage, military service, or through the intentional omission of protections in employment, housing and education—creates a stigma that carries over to the workplace and our public schools, sometimes with devastating consequences.

On February 13<sup>th</sup> of this year, a 15 year old in Ventura County California, Lawrence King, was shot twice in the head as he sat in his middle school classroom. He was killed by a 14 year old male classmate. According to students in a Newsweek article, he had recently asked that same male classmate to be his valentine.

This is a problem that affects everyone: when a significant percent of the population faces artificial hurdles in achieving their full potential to contribute to society, it works to hold this country back at a time when it faces increasing global competition and challenges to its leadership status.

There are, to my knowledge, three primary reasons that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender equality has not been fully supported in the past:

- 1) Family. Some believe gay marriage weakens families. In opposing the legalization of gay marriage in California in 2008, reportedly more than 30 million dollars were

spent. If the money spent to oppose gay marriage had instead been contributed to family counseling services, it could have provided monthly counseling services to more than 25 thousand at risk families if the cost of a counselor were 100 dollars per hour. Strong families provide stability and resources for children to become the leaders of tomorrow. Strong families are extremely important, but denying equality to gays is not the answer. If the goal of opponents really is strong families, then opposing gay marriage is a misallocation of resources, and let us instead come together, and put resources towards social programs and counseling services that will support and strengthen families.

In addition, there are more than 1 million American children who do not have homes, who do not regularly attend school or receive proper healthcare, and who would be better able to develop into productive members of society if they had homes—even if those homes are non-traditional.

2) Nature. Some believe that homosexuality is unnatural. Around the world, in independent populations, researchers have found a substantially consistent percentage to be same-sex oriented. Over time, homosexuals have been among those who have had the most profound impact on humanity from Socrates to Alexander the Great to Shakespeare. Please remember that the next time you see a copy of Romeo and Juliet or use the Socratic Method. Opposing gays based on nature is like opposing the wind or the sun. You can put up walls but you would be better off putting up wind turbines and solar panels.

3) Religion. Some oppose homosexuality based on religion. “For a man to lie with another man as he would a woman is ‘toevah’” (Leviticus 20:13), where toevah is commonly translated as “abomination” or “sin”. In that same passage it is also declared toevah to eat shrimp. Toevah literally translates as “against ritual”. At the time the Bible was written, people needed to reproduce for the strength of the community – today we have the opposite problem globally, a Malthusian state, where population growth outpaces natural resource replenishment. (Disclosure: the following segment is Jed Bartlet inspired) We are also told that to touch pig skin makes one unclean, that a father may sell his daughter into slavery, and that a person should be put to death for working on the Sabbath (Sabbath is literally translated as “Saturday”). Next time you’re watching football on a Sunday, ask yourself if on moral grounds, you should be supporting people who touch pig skin (Leviticus 11:8). If you’re someone’s daughter, next time you think to oppose homosexuals based on religion, please, ask yourself, “what would a fair price for me be?” (Exodus 21:7). If you answer a work

related email on your Blackberry on the Sabbath, ask yourself if law enforcement officials should be legally obligated to stone you to death (Leviticus 23:3).

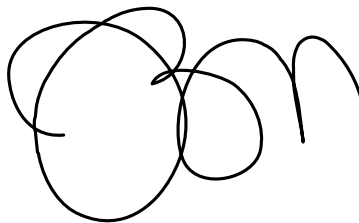
To those reading this who are heterosexual, in addition to full and equal treatment in every area, including workplace compensation, opportunity and responsibility commensurate with ability, I ask that if you see discrimination in school or in the workplace, remember how discrimination works: they go after you for something else, and if there is nothing else, they'll make something up. If you see this, speak up and out. Please. While you may be alone in your courage you are not alone in your thinking. Others will be with you when you stand on the right side of history. And please redistribute this document.

If you are a heterosexual parent of a homosexual child, please visit your local P-FLAG meeting for support services. You are not alone.

To those reading this who are homosexual, please come out to your friends, then to your family and your employer. There can not be acceptance without understanding. And please redistribute this document.

Henry David Thoreau once wrote, "I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life through a conscious endeavor." John Kennedy once said "Our problems are man-made, therefore they may be solved by man." If there is anything history has shown, it is that we can progress. That humanity, can progress. That there will be a better tomorrow. One where to the vision this country was founded upon is fully realized; where we, together as a country, once more sail west and leave behind oppression in favor of opportunity and freedom.

Thank you for reading.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a trailing flourish, likely belonging to Jonathan.

Jonathan is an author, musician and entrepreneur. This document was sent on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008 through postal mail to 535 members of Congress, 9 Supreme Court Justices, 50 governors, the President, and the President-Elect. Please redistribute, republish, and reference without permission but with credit.