

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

O-N-A

Acts 2:42-47 May 15, 2011 7th ONA

- I. It was 1967 when Aretha Franklin let men everywhere know that what women wanted was a little respect.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T.

A. Respect.

B. In June of 1969 in New York City the Stonewall riots in response to persecution of gays demanded the same thing; for Gays and Lesbians.

C. In 1970 it was beginning to look like it might actually happen as the first Gay Liberation Day March was held in New York City and the first LGBT Pride Parade was held in Los Angeles.

D. On June, 25th 1972, Rev. Bill Johnson, was ordained into the UCC, becoming “the first openly avowed homosexual person in modern times to be ordained to Christian ministry.”

E. In 1985 the United Church of Christ's General Synod adopted the Open and Affirming (ONA) resolution, encouraging UCC congregations to welcome (or consider welcoming) gay, lesbian, and bisexual

members into their life and programs.

New York City's Riverside Church, under the pastoral leadership of the late Rev. William Sloane Coffin, was the first in the UCC to be listed as ONA.

- F. In March, I had the privilege and honor of installing Malcom Himschoot, a transgendered minister, as the Pastor and Teacher of Parker UCC.
- G. In June, the Metro Denver Association, will be voting to expand its ONA statement to include not only persons of differing sexual orientations, but also to include people with different ***gender identities and gender expressions***.
This shall serve as a model and a gentle inspiration to churches in the Association, to follow suit.
- H. This little respect should not have taken so long if we were all just paying attention.
- I. In the book of Acts we read this morning that in the earliest church,
“All who believed were together and had **all things in common**; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any

had need.”

That line about ‘having all things in common’ certainly would have included respect.

Ya think?

J. Just a little bit of respect can go a long way.

II. Respect

- A. It means to admire someone deeply, as a result of their abilities, qualities, or achievements.
- B. For centuries the church has not only failed to respect all of God’s children; the church found it necessary to disrespect some of them.
Dissin’ the kids.
- C. We have progressed to being open and affirming, but we need to recognize that to be truly affirming we must go beyond just recognizing that all people are loved by God as valuable and loveable individuals – we also need to respect them, to admire them deeply for the kind of courage and integrity it takes be who you really are when all the world seems to be telling you **to be a lie**.

III. That respect, that deep admiration was what I had for the Rev. Malcolm Himschoot when I installed him back in March.

A. Some of you may remember Malcolm who filled the pulpit here for me many years ago.

B. In 2005, Malcom was the star of his own award winning documentary movie, produced by the UCC, called "Call Me Malcolm," of which there is now a copy in the church library.

1. You see Malcolm was born as Miriam, which was rather unfortunate for Malcolm.
2. He was raised in a rural area as Miriam for most of his life, but on reaching puberty he knew there was something not quite right about his persona.

3. Malcolm describes his childhood like this:
'I always thought of myself as one of the brothers.

I have two brothers so that would have made me the third brother.

But other people perceived me as a girl and I couldn't really correct them.

It made me feel like I wasn't there.'

This reality led to years of self-doubt and

confusion as he wondered why his perception of himself did not match that of the people around him.

Additionally, all the messages in his church community seemed to indicate that God hated him.

He became estranged from his family, his friends, his church and even himself.

All roads toward claiming an identity seemed to have dead ends.

Eventually, Malcolm, while still under the name Miriam, ended up at seminary.

Initially, he enrolled to see if he could reconcile the conflict between his heart and the things being taught in his home church.

It was around that time that he first learned the word 'Transgender' and began to investigate the necessary steps for his own self-actualization.

Much to his surprise, Malcolm found his greatest support in his new Christian community at Iliff Theological Seminary and began the process of gender transition.

The first- and in some ways biggest- of these steps was taking on his new name and repeatedly saying to people,

'From now on, call me Malcolm.'

As the film begins, so does Malcolm's final year of seminary. It is a time filled with great concern and apprehension.

He is, by all accounts, unemployed, uncertain about his future as a minister, unrecognized as

'Malcolm' by his parents and without a love in his life. {from Amazon.com review}

4. It's safe to say, respect did not characterize the early reception Malcolm received from most people.
5. Luckily, or by God's blessing, there were enough people, enough Christians, at Iliff and in the UCC, who not only affirmed Malcolm, but respected him for who he was and what he was doing.
6. A little respect goes a long way.

IV. For those folks that are physically challenged, mentally and emotionally challenged, economically challenged, and for all those who, like Malcolm, have been historically placed in the margins by the church; it was for all these folks that seven years ago we proclaimed that we were open and affirming.

- A. It is to these folks that we must offer some respect for, in some cases, for just getting up each morning and pushing forward.
- B. Respect is due for not giving up hope.

- C. Respect is due for not living a lie, but claiming themselves, just as they are, to be valuable and loveable.
 - D. Respect is due for helping to teach us all how to better love one another.
 - E. A little respect can go a long way.
 - F. The hemorrhaging woman, the cripple at the baths, the woman at the well, the blind, the poor, the prostitutes and sinners were all people Jesus healed, but the first step in the healing was respect.
He didn't just pity them – he respected them.
- V. Last week at Garret's graduation they had this power point presentation of the graduates and what they had done and what they planned to do.
- A. Some of them already had incredible academic careers and resumes with research and charitable service and published papers and plans to go save the world.
 - B. It was a little intimidating for me, just a mere mortal, but it was also very easy to respect them for all they had accomplished.

- C. But what about respecting the illiterate Mexican family, without documentation, that is in this country in an attempt to provide a food and shelter and hope for their kids; can we respect them?
 - D. What about the homeless man who has lost everything and daily struggles with the demons that haunt him; can we respect him?
 - E. Remember the first step in Jesus' healing was respect.
 - F. Maybe the respect was the actual healing and the rest was just the symptom.
 - G. A little respect can go a long way.
- VI. It is really hard to love someone if you don't first respect them.

R.E.S.P.E.C.T

A. M. E. N.

Let us join now in the Unison Affirmation of our Being Open & Affirming.

We celebrate the image of God in every person,
we rejoice in the sacredness of life, and
we affirm all relationships of support
that are founded on the principles
of love and justice.

As Christians, we are many members,
but we are one body in Christ.

We accept Jesus' call to love our neighbors
as we love ourselves
without being judgmental or disparaging of others.

Amen.