

The following letter to the editor ran in the Brodhead Free Press on February 26.

There was a letter to the editor last week with a call upon clergy to wake up and speak out in the debate over same-sex marriage in the state of Wisconsin. The biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (and their demise) were invoked, science was refuted, and Pope Francis was chastised for his humility and concern for a long-oppressed segment of society (specifically, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Questioning persons).

I am a member of the clergy, and I want to convey to members in this community – especially those who feel put off and put out by the Church – that rejecting homosexuality (and therefore LGBTQ persons), science, and social justice are not prerequisites for being a child of God and follower of Jesus. I could argue that faith actually compels the Church to embrace all those things, but that is for a longer conversation.

I will, however, say a few words about Sodom and Gomorrah, because their story has been so grossly and perpetually misrepresented in modern society. While these biblical cities and their destruction have been held up to justify anti-gay hatred and bigotry since the late 19th century, their story has absolutely nothing to do with sexual orientation. This is not my opinion, but an historical and literary fact. A careful reading of Genesis 18-19 reveals nothing of sexuality, but rather, reveals that their destruction was for their violence. It was for their mistreatment of foreign immigrants, outsiders, and so-called enemies. The reference to men of the city wanting to “know” the strangers, (assuming this even refers to sex) was certainly not about love...or even lust. It was about rape and violence with the intent to shame, humiliate, and punish. That was their sin. That was the “lifestyle” that so repulsed God.

I find it ironic and offensive that our culture would use such a cautionary tale about the dangers of the social acceptance/insistence of violence, oppression, hatred, and fear of others to wage those very things against the LGBTQ community. I hope we can be better than that as we move into the future.

There are Christians who may find this letter to be offensive. Some may even rebuke my words publicly; using scripture like a weapon and calling into question my authority and motives. That, unfortunately, cannot be helped. The truth is, we as human beings are imperfect and we disagree a lot. The Christian religion as an institution is also imperfect and disagrees a lot, and sometimes we present attitudes in the name of Christ that exclude others and send a message that you do not belong in God’s family unless you love a certain way, vote a certain way, or think a certain way.

I am writing this letter so that you will hear from this pastor that there is indeed a place for you in God’s family – regardless of your sexual orientation, gender, age, or politics. In a world with too much hate, pain, and fear to bear, it is my hope and prayer that you each be filled with God’s Spirit of love and mercy, and know a life of dignity and peace.