

Being a Voice for the Voiceless

Rise & Shine, June 16th

“When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful.” – Malala Yousafzai

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Questions:

- When have you felt under represented? How did that affect what you thought about yourself?
- Have you ever had to be the voice for a group? How did that pressure affect what you had to say and how you said it?
- How has your experience with an individual changed the way you view a group as a whole? Has this ever worked negatively in your life?

In the News

Pete Buttigieg's unlikely rise as a symbol of LGBTQ+ progress

In the months since beginning his Presidential campaign, Pete Buttigieg went from the obscure mayor of a small city to a standout contender within the Democratic field of candidates looking to take on President Donald Trump next year. And being gay, while not the entirety of Buttigieg's story, is a key aspect of his identity, something that voters say sets him apart from the other candidates and something that Buttigieg has highlighted more as he began to rise in prominence.

His swift rise as the only member of the LGBT community in the race has also prompted a broader conversation about the importance of his identity and the progress made on LGBT rights in the course of just a decade.

"The fact that his sexual orientation is not the headline, that he is being received as a credible qualified candidate for president, just as all the others are, is without question is a profound sign of our progress," said Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign, the largest LGBT advocacy group in the United States.

All of it is a bit of an adjustment for the mayor. In "Shortest Way Home," the mayor's pre-campaign memoir, Buttigieg writes that he worried his coming out would turn into something he is not. "I had strongly supported the causes from the beginning, but did not want to be defined by them," he wrote.

Speaking at the Victory Fund National Champagne Brunch in Washington, DC, an event that is meant to raise money for LGBTQ candidates across the country, Buttigieg took that a step further and told attendees that dealing with his sexual orientation was "a kind of war."

"If you could have offered me a pill that could make me straight, I would have swallowed it before you could give me a swig of water," Buttigieg said. "It's a hard thing to think about now. If you had shown me exactly what it was that made me gay, I would have cut it out with a knife." He added later: "Thank God there was no pill. Thank God there was no knife."

Even if Buttigieg wasn't looking to draw attention to his sexuality, it has found him during the presidential campaign. And that he is gay, in the eyes of gay rights advocates and political operatives, could be an asset.

Polling bears this out -- a recent NBC/Wall Street Journal poll found nearly 70% of Americans are either enthusiastic or comfortable with a candidate who is gay or lesbian -- but it is still remarkable to those gay lawmakers who paved the way for a Buttigieg campaign.

For those LGBTQ voters who have come to Buttigieg events, some because they support him and others because they are curious about a gay man running for president, the symbolism in Buttigieg's rise is powerful.

"I think it matters because symbolism is important. I think having that reflected in your leaders is important," said Adi Dubash, 37, who attended a Buttigieg event in South Carolina last month with his husband, Michael Upshaw, 34, and their 16-month-old son Finnick. "But I think he has got the right idea because he embraces his identity and he wants people to know his identity but it is not all who he is."

For Upshaw, Buttigieg's presidential bid is about representation, he said, and being able to tell their young son that "your dads are represented" and "you are growing up in a world that accepts people and families like you are growing up in."

One area in which gay rights activists are most pleased by Buttigieg's campaign is the way that his marriage to Chasten Buttigieg, a now ever-present figure on the campaign trail, has given increased visibility to the normalcy of same-sex marriage.

The mere fact that the two are living their lives so openly on the political stage is a moment in the eyes of Parker, the head of Victory Fund and the former mayor of Houston. But it's the rise of Chasten Buttigieg's popularity that has really marveled men and women in the LGBTQ community, a rise that was recently cemented by the fact that the political spouse headlined the Human Rights Campaign annual gala in Houston on Saturday, hours before his husband headlined the Victory Fund event in Washington, DC.

For Christians in particular, Buttigieg's presence on the national stage carries a special poignancy. Recently, he was interrupted by hecklers at an Iowa rally who chanted "Sodom and Gomorrah!" and "You betray your holy baptism!" Social media is filled with endless discussion of Buttigieg's "depravity," "perversion," and so on. At another event Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry showed up dressed as Buttigieg and whipped a man dressed as Christ while someone in a Satan costume shouted "Yes, more blood, Peter!" among other taunts. Terry told the Associated Press he was doing it because Buttigieg "glorifies and normalizes a sinful behavior." Protesters yelled "Repent!" and "Marriage is between a man and a woman!" while the candidate tried to address a packed audience in Dallas last Friday.

The questioning and outright slandering of Buttigieg's faith is a source of power for some in the community. Silas House, a gay, Christian writer for the website salon.com, wrote in a recent piece: "The thing that none of them realize is that every time they allow their judgement to rear its head, support for Buttigieg grows even stronger among many potential voters. And every time his sincerity as a gay Christian is questioned I feel as if my own faith is strengthened. Whenever they attack the Episcopal church I'm prouder to be a member. Each time his marriage is held up as an act of depravity I cherish my own marriage even more."

Buttigieg's representation of the LGBT community has affected people across the globe, including in China, where experts and activists say sexual minorities face persistent discrimination as well as periodic government crackdowns.

There has been no coverage of Buttigieg on China's strictly controlled state media, but some LGBT community leaders are following the Democratic hopeful, whose unexpected rise in the past weeks has dominated US political news, in overseas media.

"I know he's 37 years old, once the youngest mayor in America, an Afghanistan war veteran and a Harvard graduate," said Xiaogang Wei, a leading LGBT rights advocate in China who heads the Beijing Gender Health Education Institute.

"Any openly gay world leader is good news in terms of raising LGBT visibility," he added. "But a gay US President would bring so much global visibility and that would be a very positive development for LGBT communities around the world."

Here are some Bible verses and a question outline to guide our discussion:

Isaiah 1:17

*learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.*

Proverbs 31:8-9

*Open your mouth for the mute,
for the rights of all who are destitute.^l
Open your mouth, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

Prayer for the Human Family (BCP p.815)

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*