

Good morning, Redeemer.

Pastor Karen asked me to talk about why being a part of a reconciling church is important to me.

There are a lot of words I wish I had learned earlier when I was a child, and most of them had to do with sexuality. I was hurt when I experienced things for which I had no vocabulary.

I learned the word lesbian when I was thirteen and kids in my new middle school started calling me a lezzy. I reacted by wearing pearly blue eye-shadow, girly clothes, and by acting boy-crazy. A boy-crazy 13 or 14 year old girl will almost inevitably get into trouble. Once that happened, I sat in church filled with shame and self-hate, and I didn't talk about it with anyone. I blamed myself for my stupidity, and later, I blamed society and religion for the dirtiness I felt inside.

In college, I took up feminism and I put down religion. But even when I tried to free myself from shame and embrace my sexuality, I was still confused. I called myself bisexual because I claimed the right to love anyone I chose. I had more theory than practice. Theory was easy. Theory doesn't challenge the deepest levels of our psychological status quo.

Eventually I met Joe, and where the two roads diverged, I took the road more traveled by.

The Bible says a lot of things I don't agree with. I think it's been used as much to hurt people as it has to help them. There are Bible verses that seem to support slavery, that support inequality between men and women, and that condemn men

and women who don't conform to the norms. And there's Paul, who said it would be better to deny all sexual desire, but if you cannot, it is better to marry than to burn.

I feel like I am burning—more like smoldering--all the time, and I bet Paul did too. I am burning to break out of the cage of self-hate. I am burning to let the idea of ugliness go and to love my body and other people's bodies. I sit in church for the music and community, and I consider my life, and I still have to shout at myself in my mind-- to remind myself that God made us the way we are, including our bodies and our passions and our loves--to remind myself that our bodies are good, and that loving our bodies and each other's bodies must be part of the plan of creation and must, therefore, be good.

So you see, the fact that Redeemer is a reconciling church is essential to me—it means that people in this church have struggled to accept ideas and people who challenge our shame and discomfort with our bodies and each others' bodies. It means that the God I believe in, the God that is Love, is present in this church. It means that the Song of Solomon wasn't a mistake but a sign that we should accept our nature. And I hope it means that not only do we all work at loving each other, but that we will also learn to love ourselves **as well as** we love our neighbors.

I am so glad that my son and daughter will grow up knowing that their mother's church welcomes gay men and lesbians, people of different hues and persuasions, because they are all the children of God.