

RECTOR'S PINT

I have been here for over seven years as the Rector, and I admit to having been cautious about being drawn into debate about the marriage of people of the same sex.

Some of you will be aware that the Bishops of the Church of England have finally recommended that there should be prayers of blessing for same sex couples following a civil marriage. The proposal was accepted by the February General Synod meeting of the Church of England after a long debate.

I am aware in our churches of a range of opinions. There are those who really don't see this as an issue at all, who are increasingly frustrated by the church's position which they view as unjust and out of step with society. There are others though, who are troubled by this as something dear to them, the traditional view of marriage, is being tampered with. Locally, I have heard both views expressed.

I have tried to understand both sides. For all Christians, the Bible must be a serious and central part of the debate, and I have heard Christians of differing persuasions use the Bible to justify their own positions! There is no doubt that overall, the Church has much to reflect upon. Unquestionably, same sex couples have felt excluded and hurt. On the other hand, I do not believe it is right to automatically brand everyone who continues to hold to a traditional view of marriage as homophobic, and that has certainly happened. This debate has resulted in painful polarities.

I have really wrestled with this. A recent conversation with a clergy friend helped me, as we both realised that we wanted to emphasise the grace of God, open to all, rather than persist with increasing discomfort in a view that continues to perpetuate what will only be seen as a cruel judgement.

This has taken me a long time, but I now believe the way forward should be along the lines of what happened with the marriage of divorced people. It must be left to the individual clergy concerned, whether he or she, with integrity and in good conscience, can take a full and proper marriage ceremony. The present solution is simply kicking the can down the road, leaving just about everyone upset. It is too far for some, while for others, it legitimises a first and second-class status of marriage in the Church. I believe that it is inevitable that a ceremony celebrating the marriage of people of the same sex will eventually be offered. It is complicated, and people will have to decide what their relationship with the Church will be when that happens, but trying to find a halfway solution, with the offering of prayers of blessing is simply prolonging the pain. If I were a member of the General Synod of the Church of England, I now know that I would vote for change.

Simon