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# WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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## **Proposition 8 and the Beloved Community**

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Last week, a U.S. District judge ruled that Proposition 8, a law passed in November of 2008 in California by the state's electorate that banned same-sex marriage, violated the U.S. Constitution's due process and equal protection clause under the Fourteenth Amendment. While undoubtedly much debate will ensue in the coming weeks, months, and even years over the validity of Judge Walker's decision, I can't help but wonder if his ruling is evidence of our society's movement, albeit leisurely, toward the concept of the "beloved community" incorporated into the public policy that governs the nation.

If, when discussing the idea of "beloved community," we are referring to a society that is structurally rooted in a philosophy and ethic of equality for everyone, undeniably Proposition 8 violates this concept as, in the words of Judge Walker, it "does nothing more than enshrine in the California Constitution the notion that opposite-sex couples are superior to same-sex couples." Therefore, this second class citizenship of same-gender loving individuals, created by Proposition 8's existence, is antithetical to the very principles upon which our country was founded, namely that, "WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all [People] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator (i.e. God) with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness*" (my emphasis). The words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed in the last speech of his life are strikingly applicable, "All we say to America is be true to what you said on paper."

Thus, it appears that the same-sex marriage "dilemma" (and this argument is not new) is not strictly a "gay issue" but rather is an issue of justice concerning one's civil rights. That said, how or why does this debate concern people of faith, and on what side of the spectrum should we lend our voice? I suppose the answer to this question depends on your understanding of your faith tradition. For me, my faith tradition teaches me that love is the greatest of all commandments. It teaches me that wherever love is present, God is also present. It teaches me that I am a part of the human community, and therefore I must be concerned not just with my own quality of

life, but with the quality of life of the entire community. And it teaches me that I have a responsibility to help liberate all those who are oppressed and are prevented from reaching their fullest God-given potential.

That teaching, combined with my understanding of Martin Luther King's philosophy of injustice anywhere being a threat to justice everywhere, compels me actively to be engaged in the struggle for justice in every aspect of human life, including one's right to marry whom one chooses. And what is clearer to me now than has ever been is the need to have these rights, this reflection of the notion of the "beloved community," incorporated into our public policy. Judge Walker's ruling is an encouraging step in that direction.

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