A reflection from the memorial for Bishop Jerry Lamb

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I did not know Bishop Jerry Lamb. He retired long before I moved into the Diocese of Northern California and long before I became an Episcopalian.

You see, my wife and I – ex-evangelicals who wanted to move past the battles over the ordination of women and the LGBTQIA+ community – found a home where those battles had been fought and were over when we arrived in 2019 and were welcomed into the church.

As I sat in the pew for the bishop's memorial service at Trinity Cathedral last week, I was taken by the beauty of the high church liturgy around our shared funeral practices. Some longtime Episcopalians have shared with me how kind Bishop Jerry was, how he listened to them, how pastoral he was, and how he bore witness and kindness to so many priests. But what struck me on this day were the number of priests and clergy who thanked him for their ministry.

It struck me that, in 2003, it wasn't certain that LGBTQIA+ clergy would be allowed to practice and sit in our parishes as easily as they have been able to over the last several years, as part of our church.

It also caused me to reflect on the loss that the consent for the appointment of Bishop Gene Robinson caused countless parishioners. Schisms are a bad word in churches. Thought of as a moderate conservative, Bishop Lamb apparently surprised many at the national convention in 2003 when he voted to consent to Bishop Robinson's selection as the first openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church.

I thought to myself, how difficult that must have been to be in the House of Bishops and to discern how to act with so much at stake: friendships, relationships built over decades, parishioners both passionately for and against, to the point of making death threats. It must have been a small act of courage, knowing very much the proverb, "Whoever troubles his own household will inherit the wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart." (Proverbs 11:29) But who is the fool, and who is wise?

In the years subsequent to the consent vote, the church has in places split, with a couple of dioceses leaving, taking parishioners with them. The pain of that still lingers with us today in many places.

But I also see something, and am part of something, quite remarkable. In 2015, the Supreme Court's landmark Obergefell decision granted the right of marriage to the LGBTQIA+ community, and soon thereafter the Episcopal church blessed same-sex unions. The value of affirming the very humanity of people of all sexes and sexuality is incalculable. They, too, are worthy of love and warmth. Bishop Lamb recognized that in the moment – that God was bigger than all of us. The proof was in the memorial ceremony and the countless clergy like Dean Matthew Woodard of Trinity Cathedral who said, "I have him to thank for my ministry."

I, too, have Bishop Lamb to thank for why I am Episcopalian, and why I'm at Epiphany.