When I was twelve years old, my parents bought a used freezer from Debbie Draper’s grandma and bought half a cow from a farmer west of town. I was building something down in the basement and unplugged the freezer to plug in a drill. I forgot to plug the freezer back in and we went on vacation for a week, fishing in Canada. When we got home, it smelled like someone had died. My father traced the odor to the freezer, assembled us upstairs, and asked, “Who unplugged the freezer?”

I had a deeply spiritual bent even then, so decided to be like Jesus and remain silent before my accusers, which was my undoing. While everyone else was denying their involvement, I didn’t say a word. It didn’t take Sherlock Holmes to finger the culprit. Sometimes silence speaks volumes.

Silence spoke volumes last week, when the Supreme Court, in their great, marbled hall, remained silent on the issue of marriage equality, thereby letting stand a lower court ruling that in a free America all people ought to be free to marry the person they love. It was, on the face of it, an obvious decision, and yet one not easily reached, for our traditions run deep, like rooted tree stumps, which do not easily surrender, despite our most diligent and persistent efforts.
The silence of the Supreme Court left others silent. I phoned the yearly meeting to ask if the minute against same gender marriage still stood, and was told, after a lengthy pause, “I’m not sure.” There are many people who aren’t sure. I’m unsure about many things, but not this. When I learned my little brother was gay, I wanted him to enjoy the same rights as me, no more, no less. No special rights, but no lessening of rights. I wanted him to enjoy what our Constitution promised—equal rights under the law. I wanted Lady Justice to be blindfolded, seeing neither his gender nor his orientation, just his humanity. And weighing my brother on her scales of justice, to find him equal in stature before the law. And last week, she did just that.

I am clear of a brother’s role in this. I phoned him my congratulations and asked to be invited to his wedding. My brother and his partner have been together nearly as long as Joan and I have been married. He danced at my wedding, and I will dance at his. Albeit poorly, stepping on Joan’s feet. And I am clear of a pastor’s role in this, knowing I am a pastor to those who welcome this change and also a pastor to those who fear it, who fear it not from any sense of malice, but from confusion and uncertainty. There has been a seismic shift in our nation’s understanding of marriage, and it will take wisdom and grace to find our way forward, having to imagine that which, even a decade ago, most of us couldn’t imagine. A pastor’s role is to be clear and to be kind, to speak with clarity and to listen with charity.
These seismic shifts are not without precedent. Early in its history, the church debated whether to invite Gentiles into what had been a Jewish movement. Paul said to let the Gentiles in, to not insist they embrace the Jewish practice of circumcision, that God was doing a new thing. Others in the church insisted the Law of Moses must still be obeyed. The Church assembled to worship, Peter told the story of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit not only filled the Jewish people, it also filled the Gentiles. The book of Acts says, “When Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers, (that is, the Jewish believers) were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.” (Acts 10:44-45)

Have we not also seen God’s Spirit poured out on gay people? Have we not also seen God speak, act, and love through them? Even if the Supreme Court had said, “Gay people do not deserve the same rights straight people enjoy.” Even if the civil law had said that, we in the church could rightly say, “The same spirit which has been poured out on straight people, has also been poured out on gay people.”

With the Apostle Peter, we could rightly say, “God is no respecter of persons.”

With the Apostle Paul, we could rightly say, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”
Now here is what Jesus teaches us. Jesus teaches us that we must always be adding to Paul’s list, just as he himself added to it. His entire life, Jesus was adding the excluded to the list of the included—Samaritans, lepers, women, children, the poor, the crippled, the blind, the tax collector, the soldier, the troubled, the rejected, the demoniac, the broken, the widow, the divorced, the doubter, the prisoner. His whole life, Jesus subtracted from the list of the excluded and added to the list of the included. Whenever the world excluded, Jesus included.

This sin of exclusion, this singling out of people for contempt and condemnation, is utterly contrary to the spirit and example of Jesus. The church’s complicity in exclusion has tarnished both our souls and our witness. The church’s complicity in exclusion has caused evil to go unchallenged and good to be discouraged. So finally, because God can work just as ably through the courts as through the church, the Supreme Court last week, with its silence that spoke volumes, did our job, subtracting one more group from our nation’s list of excluded and adding to our nation’s list of included.

America will be the better for it. Indiana will be the better for it. Indianapolis, Camby, Greenwood, Plainfield, Mooresville, Martinsville, Danville and Avon will be the better for it. Our families will be the better for it. Our children and teens, especially those who are gay, no longer feeling the cruel lash of rejection, will be the better for it. Our churches will be the better for it.
It is a seismic shift in our understanding of marriage. An earthquake, if you will. But it is the earthquake that has broken the logjam of inequality, so justice might roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.