

Joel Osteen blesses Houston's new (gay) mayor Annise Parker

By Cathy Lynn Grossman, USA TODAY



Annise Parker, the newly-elected happens-to-be-lesbian mayor of Houston was sworn in Monday and the opening prayer was given by ... Rev. Joel Osteen.

Is your head spinning? Osteen heads the nation's most mega of evangelical non-denominational megachurches, Lakewood Church in Houston where about 45,000 people cycle through a revamped sports stadium for services every weekend.

Osteen has been all over telling folks (Larry King, Whoopi Goldberg) for years that homosexuality is not "God's best." I presume he means "God's best choice" because otherwise I'm lost in the dropped or implied rest of the sentence. But "God's best" is phrase Osteen never finishes so I'm just guessing.

Yet, Osteen hasn't joined the more strident wing of the religious right in damning gays. Indeed, Osteen takes heat from other evangelicals who condemn him for not laying down a line of fire about sin of any kind. That's not his style, says the preacher known for his broad smile and sermons that God wants you to be happy. Osteen's best seller was titled, *Your Best Life Now*.



Now (hat tip to Mark Silk for pointing me to the Box Turtle Bulletin) writer Timothy Kincaid suggests to his gay readership that they look at Osteen more fully and fairly. Kincaid's post (which carries a disclaimer that others on the staff of the webzine don't necessarily agreed) says:

I think it would be useful for our community to adopt a more nuanced view of religious leaders. By doing so, we might find ourselves with unexpected allies.

Joel Osteen does not agree with my understanding of Scripture; but his disagreement does not make him a hater or a bigot. And I recognize the value in having a lesbian politician -- elected despite her opponent's religion-based homophobic campaign -- being given blessing by the pastor of the largest congregation in the nation.