

## 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

After writing it, I wondered if today's sermon was appropriate for Kid's Sunday.

But marriage is under attack today, not from outside forces, but from within.

And those of us who love marriage,

and want to save it for future generations, need to speak up.

I once asked my Sunday School parents,

"When was the last time you told your kids how wonderful it is to be married?"

Then I asked my confirmation students, "When was the last time...

your parents told you how wonderful it is to be married?"

Neither group could answer.

How about the rest of you: "When was the last time you told your grandkids, nieces/nephews, neighborhood kids how wonderful it is to be married?"

Let's stop the jokes and petty criticisms and start supporting holy matrimony...

before it goes the way of the rumble seat.

The ELCA uses the Revised Common Lectionary,

a series of readings that repeats every 3 years.

This week I could have preached on the OT story of God's calling of Samuel and...

the Gospel Lesson of Jesus' calling of Philip & Philip's calling of Nathanael.

This would have no doubt been a wonderful sermon on 3 Types of Call:

by the spirit, by leaders, and among the followers.

Instead, I'm probably the only ELCA pastor in the country...

who chose to preach on fornication today!

I don't know, call/fornication...which one sounds more fun to you?

Let's look at today's second reading (*1 Corinthians 6:12-20*).

Paul begins with some of his own quotes that the Greek Christians in Corinth...

were apparently using to justify evil deeds: "*All things are lawful for me,*"

Paul taught that it wasn't necessary to avoid certain foods, get circumcised,

make animal sacrifices b/c Christians were not under Jewish law:

to Paul human works don't save; God's grace does.

Corinthians: "If all things are lawful, then I can do anything I want, right?"  
*...but not all things are beneficial.*

We are freed by the Gospel but not all actions are good for us:

sins are like Oreo cookies: seem great but they hurt us in the long run.

"All things are lawful for me," *but I will not be dominated by anything.*

Including my base desires, my weaknesses of the flesh.

Buddhists: our senses like wild beasts chained to us, dragging us around  
*"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,"*

The Corinthians perverted Paul's argument against dietary restrictions by saying:

"If I can eat what I want, then why not indulge any/my hungers (incl. sex)?

"If my stomach's meant for food, isn't my body's meant for loving?"

*...And God will destroy both one and the other.*

Food/stomach/body are meant for God:

everything *c.f.* God and is meant for the glory of God.

All things are to be permitted if they do honor to God.

*The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*

Fornication = any sexual activity outside of marriage.

Obviously, Corinthians were taking Paul's loosening of Jewish law...

to mean that everything was now permitted.

And, as always happens, sexual promiscuity was the 1<sup>st</sup> thing they thought of

"We're free? Let's have sex!" Sounds like 60's: all that glorious liberation of...

gender roles, racial stereotypes, art, literature, thought, expression,

and all the press wanted to talk about was burning bras and free love.

We were told in seminary that if we stood in our pulpits/told our congregations...

that we were sinners, they'd wonder who we were sleeping with!

We are obsessed with hearing about, thinking about, watching for sex.

Against what the Corinthians were doing, Paul makes it very clear that...

our bodies are meant for the Lord, not for indulging our sexual appetites.

Here's his proof: *God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power.*

God raised Jesus bodily: there's no talk here of an immortal soul (*c.f.* Plato).

Jesus was physically raised, and so will we be:

our bodies are therefore both important and eternal.

Paul asks: *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?*

Our bodies are Christ's arms, Christ's legs, and so on.

*Should I therefore take the members/X & make them members/prostitute? Never!*

Should I join what is part/X's body to someone else in an unholy union? No.

What does it say in Genesis about sexual union? *"The two shall be one flesh."*

Thus, Paul says, *Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute...*

*becomes one body with her?*

*But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.*

The decision is simple: do I want to be one with God or one with the world?  
Was Paul obsessed with sex?

Paul felt: degrading ourselves through the way we use sex is especially damaging...  
b/c while every other *sin that a person commits is outside the body...*  
*the fornicator sins against the body itself.*

*Or do you not know that your body is a temple/HS within you, which you have from God.*

Now, if the body is a temple, what does that mean?

1<sup>st</sup>, it doesn't mean that we worship the body (as some do in our culture).

After all, you don't worship the church building: you worship what's inside.

In Moses' tent of meeting or tabernacle and Solomon's temple in Jerusalem,  
what was inside was the Holy of Holies containing the Ark of the Covenant,  
the very throne of God.

In our bodies, it's the Holy Spirit: the form God takes to reach us now.

Today's lesson tells us that the HS is contained in our whole bodies, making us holy,  
as holy as the temple of Jerusalem at the time it contained the Ark/Covenant.

Everything about us is holy, including our sexuality—

so long as we keep ourselves one with God.

As Paul says, *...anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.*

We stay one with God as long as we follow God's will for our lives.

One thing God favors is marriage. Why?

Marriage connects families, promotes social stability by providing for children,  
and satisfies our need for physical intimacy in a safe, stable environment...

so that we can put our energies into something other than pursuit of a mate.

Here is what the ELCA's 2009 sexuality study says about marriage:

*This church believes...that the deepest human longings for a sense of personal worth, long-term companionship, and profound security, especially given the human propensity to sin, are best served through binding commitment, legal protections, and the public accountability of marriage, especially where the couple is surrounded by the prayers of the congregational community and the promises of God.*

Marriage also reminds us that we are not our own: we belong to others.

*Or do you not know...that you are not your own?*

*For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.*

God paid the ultimate price so that our bodies would not perish but be reborn,  
so it is fitting that we should at all times glorify God with our bodies.

Now, I can't end here b/c...

we all know decent, moral people who choose not to marry for many reasons.

Are we to condemn them on the basis of today's lesson? Of course not.

Beyond our awareness that as fellow sinners we're in no position to condemn anyone,  
we also have to note that...

1) Paul is mostly concerned about prostitution in this passage.

2) He was writing at/time when marriages were arranged at child-bearing age, ~12; thus, sex outside of marriage (fornication) in those days was always adultery.

In such circumstances, premarital sex was impossible.

Paul couldn't conceive of people choosing mates for themselves...

on the basis of love, or waiting until their 30's to get married.

We have to be careful about applying Biblical teachings directly to our lives..

without considering the context in which they were written.

But whether you agree with the ELCA's endorsement of marriage or not,

what we can say for sure is that, like the people in Paul's time,

we are to do what is honorable and healthy with our bodies,

with these living temples that contain within them God's very Spirit.