

## 1 Sermon, July 21, 2013

Texts: 1 Peter 3:7, 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Title: "More Than Our Parts"

Central idea: Our sexuality is integrated into the way we relate to others, not just something that can be a distraction, as Paul puts it.

1. Paul's view of sex and marriage as a distraction
2. We are each sexual beings – it's a part of us.
3. Avoid the pitfall of thinking sexuality is too important - hedonism
4. Avoid the pitfall of denying our sexuality – asceticism
5. I am going to be attracted to others – what do I do with it?
6. Turn that sexual energy around into appropriate channels
7. Rich tradition of sexual imagery in spirituality

### 1. Paul's view of sex and marriage as a distraction

There is a joke about a cloistered monk who is busy copying down holy writ, when he comes to the word celibate, and discovers it says "celebrate."

The problem is that the Bible never uses the word celibate. The apostle Paul hints at celibacy, but doesn't talk about it as a separate calling.

Instead, Paul writes that, since the Lord is coming again soon, don't weigh yourself down with the commitments and anxieties of sex and marriage.

It reminds me of an old "Odd Couple" episode on television many years ago, when Felix and Oscar decide that their life is too stressful, so they go to a monastery to spend some time in quiet. Oscar is driven bugged by the lack of anything to do, so he starts reading the ingredients on his toothpaste. A monk pops into their room and in a very friendly way tells them when the meals are, and says: "If there's anything else you want, abstain."

That is almost what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7: "If there's anything else you want, abstain."

It's a simple idea, and makes sense when you are waiting for Christ to return at any moment. But if you are not quite so sure that Christ is going to return immediately, then that may not be the best thing to do with your sexuality.

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### 2. We are each sexual beings – it's a part of us.

We are each sexual beings. If you have children, it's pretty obvious that you're a sexual being.

The biological advantages of sexual reproduction are that children have some of the characteristics of each parent, yet each child is different from his siblings. That leads to more variety and a greater adaptability for the species.

But sexuality is more than just the biological capacity for reproduction.

We may think of sexuality as having certain parts of ourselves that are more sexual than others, and we have to control those parts.

But we are more than our parts, and our sexuality is a part of all that we are.

My mother-in-law once told me that the biggest sex organ is the brain. It's a blunt way to put it, but it's true.

I would rather put it into more spiritual terms. God created us as sexual beings. God created us good. So our sexual urges are a God-given gift. They must be tempered by some other things, and I'll talk about that next week – but our sexuality is a good gift from God.

### 3. Avoid the pitfall of thinking sexuality is too important – hedonism

That said, there can be a tendency in the media to glorify sexuality. Often on Television, brief, random sexual encounters are portrayed as fun or exciting. The dangers of disease, abuse in such encounters are ignored or downplayed. Just as serious, much of television ignores how such momentary encounters can ruin the capacity of people to find true joy and intimacy.

Often, on television, sexuality is portrayed as a competition for the best-looking partner. This is destructive to the body image of the average person.

So, one of the greatest pitfalls to sexuality is that of hedonism. Looking for immediate pleasure at the expense of real joy.

When our most intimate, private and beautiful expression of ourselves is made public, it quickly becomes rather ugly and shameful.

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#### 4. Avoid the pitfall of denying our sexuality – asceticism

The opposite of hedonism is asceticism, where a person tries to deny all pleasure as a pathway to God.

Paul seems to urge this. He writes about being married as weighing you down, the same way possessions do. Paul seemed to think that marriage was a cause for anxiety.

While some marriages *are* full of anxiety, I've found the opposite to be true. My marriage reduces my anxiety. Rather than weighing me down and distracting me, my access to a kiss when Marianne comes home makes me more content and hopeful.

Asceticism can be a path to God for some people, but for the vast majority of us who cannot join a monastery, it is not really an option.

#### 5. I am going to be attracted to others – what do I do with it?

Instead of trying to deny our sexuality, the question that most of us need to ask is "what do I do with my sexuality?" How do I conduct my life in a Christian way with the body I've got?

I am going to be attracted to others. What do I do with that? How do I set boundaries to my behavior so that any attraction I may feel does not come out in inappropriate ways?

So, for me, it is easier to hug an eighty-year-old woman than a twenty-five-year-old woman. It is less likely to be misunderstood. It is generally easier for women to be huggers than men, because it is less likely to be misunderstood.

Not only do I want to avoid sexual harassment, I want to avoid making someone uncomfortable with any words I may say. So it is fairly safe for me to say to a woman: "You wear red well," or "Woah! Purple fingernails!" It is not appropriate for me to say, "You look especially beautiful today" – unless it's my wife, or mother or granddaughter.

#### 6. Turn that sexual energy around into appropriate channels

Our sexuality is also more than who we're attracted to. It's the way we use our bodies, our eyes, the way we walk and dance, the way we speak.

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Women can express their sexuality through their makeup, and the way they dress, and the space they leave between themselves and others when talking. But women also express their sexuality when they are accomplishing something, or when they are making a statement of what's important to them.

Men can express their sexuality through their posture, their use of power, and their physical labor. Men can also express their sexuality through paying attention and listening. They can express it by how they care for children.

Although 1 Peter calls women the "weaker sex," it is precisely when men use the virtues usually thought of as feminine that they are strongest. And women are the strongest when they are not only nurturing but accomplishing.

I have also discovered that, as I age, the way I express my sexuality changes. I am still just as male as ever, but my shape has changed, my intensity has changed, my desires have changed. I can no longer ride the Tilt-a-Whirl at the county fair. Simple things please me more.

#### 7. Rich tradition of sexual imagery in spirituality

I used to think that, as one ages, some of the physical urges give way to spiritual urges. I'm not sure about that anymore, because I certainly don't feel any more spiritual than I used to.

But one thing I am sure about: there is not as great a divide between the sexual and the spiritual as many people think.

If spirituality is a desire for union with God, it is not that different than the desire for union with another human being – the desire to become one flesh.

If spirituality is the desire to love God, it is not that different from the desire to love people.

Many Christian writers over the last 2,000 years have compared the desire to love God and the longing for a human lover.

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My hope and prayer is that we may each find a way to celebrate all that God has made us to be; spiritual and sexual, loving others and loving God.

Amen.

"Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life--so that nothing may hinder your prayers." 1 Peter 3:7, NRSV.

"Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that. I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord. If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée, if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry. But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own desire under control, and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée, he will do well. So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better. A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my judgment she is more blessed if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God." 1 Corinthians 7:25-40, NRSV.