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Genesis 2:18-24

**Intimacy**

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This morning I am concluding a series of sermons on Creation. The thesis of this series is that everything God created was given as a means of communion with him. Three weeks ago we noticed how creation itself reveals the goodness of God. Two weeks ago we looked at the rhythm of work and Sabbath rest as a means of worshiping God. Last week I asserted that even food is given as a means of holy communion through the ordinary. Today we come to the topic of our created desire for sexual intimacy.

Now some of you are already nervous. You are wondering if this is really something you want your preacher talking about. As I prepared the sermon this week, I know I was wondering the same thing. And let's face it. This isn't something the churches have always handled well or carefully. But perhaps our greatest mistake has been not to talk about it enough.

Recently, the chaplains at the University of Nebraska took a survey of incoming freshmen to find out what influence the church had on their sexuality. Only two percent said the church had any influence on them when it came to sex. Some of the students' comments on the questionnaire were also revealing: "Our church is very boring. They don't talk about sex. It's probably just as well; they would make that boring, too." "In our youth group we talked about sex some, but avoided the juicy stuff." "People in my church don't believe in sex." Actually, the church does believe in sex, but you would never know that from the conversations in the parishes. Our denomination seems addicted to the conversation, but not the parishes. Why is that?

We avoid this topic in church circles because we think it is too personal and private a topic and public discourse on it seems invasive. We avoid it also because we have such conflicting feelings between our great longing and our great guilt. We fear the church will judge us for our guilt and tell us just to stuff our longing. But most of all we avoid this topic because there is an awful lot of hurt associated with the topic of sex. Some of the hurt we would rather not remember, or talk about. In the congregation today there are people who have been abused sexually, and married people who have not touched each other for years, and single people who thought sex would make them feel better only to discover that it made them feel worse.

If it is true that churches don't talk that much about sex, then we are the only ones. I defy you to make it through a night of television without watching people in bed, or to listen to conversations at the office without an off-colored joke emerging, or to read the newspaper without finding a sexually explicit advertisement. According to the latest Janus report on sexuality in America, 21% of our boys and 15% of our girls have had intercourse by the time they were fourteen. Eighty-two percent have had sex by the time they are nineteen. Of equal interest, according to the report, people in upper income brackets have casual sex more frequently than those in the lower brackets.

Now in spite of these statistics, I do not believe that most of us are as obsessed with sex as our sitcoms, movies, and commercials think we are. Clearly we are sexually active, but that doesn't mean that we think a lot about it. We struggle with a lot of issues in life and the paramount ones are usually not sex. We worry much more about health and our families, finding good work and a sense of fulfillment, our fears about the future and our children. Actually, I think we even worry more about finding good friends than we do about finding good sex. But the Bible makes it clear that, while we are not consumed by sexuality, we are created as sexual people. And that is why the parishes need to be talking about this topic.

God did not create you as a soul and then wrap a disposable body around it. He created you as a body and then brought that body to life with a soul. This means that the soul and the body are intricately related. The bodily impulses you have, including your sexual ones, are a part of the good creation. And what the body yearns for is symptomatic of the yearnings of your soul.

Most of us live with two bodies: the one we want and the one we have. I have yet to meet a person who is completely satisfied with the body he or she has. We diet and exercise and use make up as a way of getting closer to the body we think we should have. Now exercise can be healthy, but when we get preoccupied with the body we should have, we are in essence saying our soul is more committed to the body we want than the body we have. But according to Genesis, your soul is tied to the body you have—the one God created and called good.

So you may want to stop thinking about changes you've got to make to be sexually attractive. One of the most dangerous lies of contemporary society is that you have to be different to be sexual. Young girls are literally starving themselves to death trying to do this. The supermodels who show up in magazines like *GQ* and *Vogue* judge us as being inadequate with their examples of the beautiful body we ought to have to be attractive. (Who are those people? I've never seen anyone who really looks like that.)

You are the good creation of God. You are a sexual creation no matter what shape your body is in and no matter how old your body may be. That's the body that has the soul. The mythical body you want has no soul. The soul is found only in the body you have and that is the one that yearns for a partner. But since this yearning for a partner is actually a yearning of the soul, you can choose to see your sexual longing as a longing for God. Making that choice turns the sexual act of becoming one flesh with another person into something of a sacrament.

Sacraments are visible signs of eternal realities. In the Protestant church we actually only have two sacraments which are Baptism and Communion. But there are other things that are like sacraments, or sacramental, in that they are physical acts which point to our yearning for God who is the partner we really want. In becoming one flesh with another person, we make a holy covenant that unites not only our bodies, but our souls in a way that expresses God's covenantal union with us.

That is why this holy act can never be reduced to "doing it," or just fulfilling bodily needs, or even to just taking away the loneliness for a night. I find that most of the people who make mistakes with sex are not promiscuous. They are just lonely. But sex without love does nothing for loneliness, except make it worse. When you engage in sex, you are not just touching someone's body. You are touching the soul. That is why there is so much hurt and guilt tied up with sex. It is because we have lost the holiness of the act, and because we didn't realize people were putting their hands on our soul.

In every religious culture there is some sense of veiling holy things. You don't use holy things casually. You would be horrified to hear that someone had taken our communion cup and used it for a rootbeer float. Even an atheist would be bothered by that, since we all know that holy things deserve holy respect. This is why the Hebrews hung a curtain around the altar in the Holy of Holies. Anyone who violated it got burned, literally. According to the Apostle Paul, your body is now the temple of holiness because it is wrapped up with the soul. So you have to control access to it or the holiness will be profaned. Those who allow their souls to be touched casually, without a covenant, get burned. It is why they feel so lousy in the morning.

While sexuality is essential to your created nature, sexual activity is not. Your sexual identity is a created gift. You always have it, it cannot be taken away, but you don't have to use it. You are the steward of it. It does not control you; you control it. You still can enjoy being a sexual creature without wrapping your soul around another person. Because, again, the soul's great desire is to move beyond the veil into

intimacy with God who in Christ you can know even without sexual activity. But you will never understand sexual intimacy with another person as Adam and Eve enjoyed, who were naked and not ashamed, until you first know what it means to be naked and unashamed before God.

Ah, but now we have come to the real reason we are made nervous by discussions of sexuality. In our souls, we know that being naked to the soul demands more intimacy than we can bear. We are frightened to see the naked truth about ourselves and we are terrified to show it to someone else. Like Adam and Eve we grow ashamed of our nakedness and hide in the bushes. We hide from intimacy with others, even friends. Most of all, we are hiding from God. But hiding is a sin because it separates us from God, and the soul cannot survive in such a state.

In the third chapter of Genesis we are given the incredible portrayal of God leaving heaven to walk through the garden in search of restoring his creatures to relationship, and thus to life. According to the text, he calls out to them, "Where are you?" It is an introductory glimpse in the biblical drama of God's later arrival in Jesus Christ who was essentially asking the same question—"Where are you?"

We all have to hear that same question today. You are hiding in fear of being rejected, you are hiding in sexual hurts of the past, you are hiding in relationships that are familiar but not intimate, you are hiding in sex without communion—Where are you?

You have to come out of hiding to face the Savior who has come looking for you. He is looking not to condemn you but to restore your soul with his own love. That's because he really knows you, and he really loves you. But until you are clear about the sufficiency of that sacred love, you will never be free to enter naked intimacy with another. Amen.