

Sex, Sex, Sex

Year B, 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany – 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, January 18, 2015

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Let me just get it out of the way: Sex, sex, sex! A couple of months ago as we began a new Church Year, I pledged to focus on the Epistle readings for this run through the Lectionary cycle. In making that decision I was remembering all the times over the years that, having spent the whole week preparing a sermon based on the Gospel reading for that morning, I have sat listening to one of Paul's thoughtful pastoral statements of the Good News of Christ, thinking, "Hey, that would have made a good sermon." I forgot that sometimes, like this morning, the Epistle reading is all about sex, and that I have managed to avoid talking about it for going on twenty years.

I don't think anyone is likely to argue the proposition that we live in a sex obsessed culture. The advertising industry uses sex to sell *everything* these days, from fashion to fragrances, from music to movies, from food to *cars*, for pity's sake. You know the commercials I mean, though we're so used to it, that we've almost become blind to it. Just this past week, Calvin-Klein released a new ad campaign featuring pop-singer Justin Bieber modeling their underwear. But the issue that caught the attention of everybody from Facebook to the mainstream news outlets, wasn't whether a barely-twenty-something entertainer should be in magazines and on billboards in his barely-something briefs, but that the company had apparently *altered* the photo to emphasize and enlarge Mr. Bieber's... assets, presumably to sell more of *their* assets. It seems like we can't make it through a half-time show without some sort of nudity or wardrobe malfunction. And we can't have a primetime awards show without a ceaseless stream of sexual innuendo to go with all the red-carpet glitz and glamour.

From the crudest graffiti, to the slickest mainstream productions, to fifty shades of something-or-other, pornography in all its forms has been around for a long, long time. But nowadays, the ubiquity of the Information Superhighway has brought all that, and a lot of stuff that would have been unthinkable a few decades ago, right into every living room or bedroom or basement, right onto every smartphone, for that matter. It has been said that on the Internet, the only thing more popular than lost dogs and cute kittens, is porn. And whether it's a contributing factor or a by-product, in addition to the older forms of predatory prostitution, the primary product of the alarmingly accelerating rate of human trafficking in our world is the sex-trade, the enslavement of women and children, with the biggest hub, I'm told, not in the Far East or in Eastern Europe, but Atlanta, Georgia.

Nor is our obsession limited to the glaring, high-stakes world of Madison Avenue or Hollywood, or in the basement surfing the dark-net, or the deeper, darker "secret" of human trafficking. At the highest levels of what now passes for civil discourse, on one side we have those that seem to think it's a good idea to try to legislate morality back to a simpler, more righteous time that never actually existed outside Mayfield. And on the other we have some that seem to think that any effort to call people to engage their minds before they follow their endocrine systems is an affront to some inalienable right. It seems sometimes that we can talk about little *else* but sex. All the while, we spend billions on birth control, and billions on fertility treatment, and not nearly enough, not nearly enough, not *nearly* enough making sure that children around the world, and children in our own backyard, are safe and fed and loved.

And so, even as we celebrate the freest society on the planet, one vote, and one commercial, and one click at a time, we sell each other, and we sell *ourselves* into a bondage that's as old as the world.

Corinth was a big deal kind of place. That's precisely why Paul had *planted* the Corinthian church. A major hub of world-wide trade since before the rise of the Roman Empire, home to maybe

600,000 people, the site of major temples to every deity worshipped in the ancient world, in terms of population, and commerce, and culture, the city of Corinth rivaled Rome itself.

But with that big-city wealth and prosperity came a whole slew of big-city issues. For one thing, in Corinth prostitution was big business. Some of it was conducted at least under the guise of religion, with priestess-prostitutes offering to take customers, I mean, worshippers, to the heights of religious devotion to Aphrodite or Venus, for the right “contribution.” But there was plenty of the non-religious kind of prostitution going around as well, the common factor being that those that were offered for sale or rent, were slaves to their masters.

It seems all that was causing some Christians in Corinth a few problems living into their new-found faith. Though nobody kept the letter that the church sent to their founding pastor, in writing to the Corinthians, Paul was responding to some serious issues, at least some of which had to do with sex. You see, some of them had rolled their new faith together with a Greek philosophy called Gnosticism to come up with the idea that the body and the spirit were two totally separate entities. Some of these folks used that idea to say that the body should be denied or deprived or even *punished* to allow the spirit to thrive. By contrast, others felt like, since the body didn’t really matter anyway, they could pretty much do anything they wanted with their bodies and none of it would touch their spirit. It sounds like *that* is what was going on in Corinth, and so Pastor Paul had to write back to Corinthians to try to put things right. “Don’t you understand,” he said, “that if you unite yourself to a prostitute, you are giving up your freedom and enslaving yourself to sex?” What’s more, he argues, since you are united to Christ, you are doing the same to Christ!

Of course, Paul isn’t really talking about sex at all. Or rather, he’s using the language of the sex-obsessed culture that he’s writing to, to talk about something more important. In leaving the eternal plane and becoming incarnate, en-fleshed, the Eternal Son of God joined the divine to the created, becoming *fully* human, body *and* spirit, just like you, and just like me. When he went to the cross and to the tomb, he went there fully divine and *fully* human, spirit and body, just like me, and just like you. And when God raised him up, he raised him up in the fullness of God, and in the fullness of humanity, body and spirit, so that the promise of eternal life is already ours, yours, and mine. The point, Paul says, is that, we are now part of him, and he is part of us, all of us, body *and* spirit.

We have been bought with a price, Paul says. We have been bought with the price of Christ’s suffering and death and resurrection. Mind and spirit and body, we are *his*. We have been ransomed by the blood of Christ, and set free from slavery to our base passions or our baser possessions. We have been released from our bondage to rules and regulations and our bondage to any *false* freedom to abuse ourselves or abuse each other. We have been surrounded and enfolded by the unconditional love that empowers us and enlivens us to love *others* as fully and as freely as we have been loved. Why, oh why, would we ever give that up for *any* counterfeit love.