

Genesis 2:18-25

Standing up here in front of you this morning, I feel a little like the nervous preacher who told the groom after he was married, "It is now kismet to cuss the bride." There are two topics that preachers don't like preaching about. One is money, and the other is the one I'm preaching about today, which may explain my nervousness; and that is sex. But rather than turn a blind eye toward this topic, perhaps it's time to address the issue since God does with the words of Genesis 2..."So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

A few years ago an unmarried college student told me, "Sex is like brushing your teeth. You should do it as frequently as possible to avoid harmful side effects." I suppose he meant cavities. But this statement is not just brazen; it's ignorant. How completely opposite is his attitude about sex (and you know that he speaks for many) from God's attitude and original design. In Genesis 2 God gave the man and woman to each other and it was very good. The term "casual sex" which is so prevalent today is completely foreign to God's way of thinking. There is nothing casual, ever, about the intimacy between a man and a woman. The sexual act is both the symbol and the substance of permanent commitment. When a man and a woman choose to enter into a sexual relationship, they commit themselves in God's eyes, to unity for life and to all the responsibilities that such a life-long union brings with it.

Adam said, "This, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Adam had been lonely. He, alone, among all the creatures which God created had no companion, no counterpart. He was incomplete. And so God gave him Eve and he was fulfilled, completed. And though they would rebel against God and fall into sin, man and woman would still possess the capacity for union and fulfillment through each other. They would continue to leave father and mother, cleave to each other, and commit themselves to each other in sexual union. And in so doing they would experience a further union of mind, emotion, hope, ambition, and love. They would get to know each other. Through the shared experience of sexual relationship man and woman would constantly be reminded of their oneness, their unity in marriage. To put it another way, the Bible never ever separates sex from marriage and family. Marriage and the sexual act are almost identical. Only within the bounds of marriage can a man and a woman realize total unity and the fulfillment which our text speaks of.

In Ephesians Paul says that a man's body is not really his own; it is his wife's, and the wife's body is her husband's. This sharing and giving to the other is the substance of marriage. When we make light of the meaning of sex through adultery or through casual sex before marriage, we are proving our ignorance about God's gift of marriage. In marriage, through sex, a man gives of himself, of his very being to his wife; a woman gives of her being to her husband. But if sex is used as a means for mere self-gratification or for conquest, it will break down rather than build up the unity of marriage. I remember overhearing a man say, "If I ever fail to get my sexual rights in marriage, I'll look elsewhere." By now he probably has. When we enter into a marriage, it is better to think of sexual responsibilities than of sexual rights. As soon as we start making demands we are on the road to trouble.

What we say to those who are married we must say also to the unmarried and to our children. A college boy in an eastern school was quoted as saying, "Sex is conquest, love is surrender; and who

wants to surrender?" That statement is depressing. Our young people are becoming confused and the fault lies partially with us in the church. We Christians, especially Christian parents haven't been talking enough about the meaning of sex. We've given the impression to the world that we're afraid of it or that we find the whole thing distasteful. But while we've sat and kept our mouths shut, others have gone ahead and opened theirs.

Surely that boy misses the whole point of sex. When he uses sex as a means of conquest he turns it into something devilish. We can do that with any gift and power we possess. Sex for conquest is awful. King David found that out with Bathsheba. Sex as surrender in love, in marriage, is one of the most wonderful gifts in the world. But we've got to be bold enough to say these things. And if we don't, we can't blame our young people for getting some pretty ridiculous ideas about the meaning and function of sex.

Because God meant the sexual act to be an act of surrender in love, the church has always opposed sexual relationships outside of marriage. Sex is part and parcel of marriage. We could almost go so far as to say that sex is marriage. In other words, the church is not being old-fashioned when it says, "Reserve sex for your married life." The church is holding out for the true meaning and for the beauty of sex. We're not out to set up all kinds of restrictions. We're holding out for God's original intention for the sexual act; the intention spelled out in our text; for unity in the wonderful bond of marriage. Human sexuality isn't a plaything, a toy, a mere animal instinct that has to be satisfied at regular intervals. Sex is one of the most precious gifts we possess. We must always treat it with care.

It would be nice if we could resolve all our problems of sex just by talking about them in this way; but we can't. None of us will every manage our sexual life perfectly; and I say that to the married as well as to the unmarried. We all fail in the use of our sexual powers, just as we fail with all of our other powers. We use sex to take advantage of other people. We use sex selfishly. Sometimes we get so selfish in our thinking of sex that sex ends up using us. It dominates us. It controls us and we become a slave to it.

Our Heavenly Father knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows why He gave us sexual powers--our sex drive. But He also knows that we are fallen and broken beings; that we cannot use this power without failure. For that reason He gave us His Son in the flesh to live among us and to die for us--for our failures. The Lord Jesus shared our human condition. He knows the temptations we all face including our sexual temptations. And He forgives you and He makes us strong through the power of His Word which comes into our ears. He warned against adultery, and yet He forgave the woman caught in adultery. And to us who also fail in the use of our sexual gifts, He says "neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

I guess I can't say whether this is the most sex-obsessed or sex-crazed country in the world. I do know that sex is a powerful gift of God. I do know that we must control it or it controls us. But above all else I know that we have a Savior who forgives you and me for our failures, also our sexual failures. I know that as Adam was incomplete without Eve, so we are incomplete without Jesus. That's why He became one with you in your baptism. That's why He gives His flesh and blood to you in His Sacrament. He comes to you not to punish you; not to berate you for using your sexual powers in selfish ways, as we all have. He comes with forgiveness for you, and He comes to strengthen you; to help you live a pure life as a sexual being.

No matter how far you have strayed; no matter what sexual sins you have done, you can look to your Savior and say of Him, as Adam said of Eve, "This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." And

because He died for you; because His flesh was pierced for you, He stands by you, and for you, always to forgive and to strengthen. Amen.