

Being the Church at Brentwood

Serving Jesus Christ

1 Corinthians 6:12-20
(Hymns – 480, 96, 350, 667)

January 15, 2012

Most of the sermons
I've heard or read on this text from Paul's letter to the Corinthians
have been about sex.
This one isn't.

I don't think that's the key focus in this passage.
I think it's an example Paul uses
to discuss something much broader,
and therefore much more important.

The focus for Paul in this passage
is how we use our physical bodies,
and everything enable us to do as human beings,
in the service of Jesus Christ.

There are three principles of faithful living,
three perspectives on who we are as beloved children of God,
that emerged for me this week as I read and reflected upon this text.
They are the principles of similarity, stewardship, and service.

First, we have been created with significant similarities to God.
Genesis talks about humanity being created in the image of God.
Psalm 8, in its witness to God's glory,
to the way God's energy of Love is seen in all the world,
speaks of God creating humanity inferior only to himself.
It speaks of God crowning or investing humanity
with glory and honour, with energy and worth.
When God chose to come as close to the creation as he could imagine,
to come in the power of Love to heal, reveal, and free,
he took human flesh in Jesus Christ
and filled that human flesh with grace and truth.
Through that particular and unique human being,
both human and divine,
human flesh and everything it contains and enables,
was blessed and sanctified
so we can be "in Christ" and serve Jesus Christ
with everything we are, and do, and have.

We serve Jesus Christ best
when we have for ourselves the same respect and affection
that God has for us,
when we let God's loving and forgiving view of us
shape the way we see ourselves.

We've all had those times in our lives
when we've felt like the Psalmist in Psalm 22:6,
crying that we are no longer human, but merely worms,
despised and scorned by everyone,
especially by ourselves.

But notice that even here the writer
recognizes that this feeling
makes us see ourselves as less than human.

Throughout the Scriptures,
we find affirmation after affirmation that humanity is created in God's image
and that God's redemptive desire and work
is all directed at enabling humans
to live with that kind of dignity and worth.

That's the quality of human life
Paul is talking about in this passage.

He uses one of his favourite metaphors for Christians –
parts of the body of Christ.
We are in and of Christ,
by God's loving act of grace in grafting us into Jesus Christ.
When we agree to be joined to Jesus Christ in faith,
our bodies and everything they contain and enable
become temples for the Holy Spirit,
spaces and places where God's power is expressed in the world.

We become the agents – stewards - of God's Love.

Stewardship is what we do with the life, dignity, and worth
graciously given to us by God in Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Stewards are people who administer, care for, run something
as an agent of another.

The idea is most frequently applied
to persons who are given charge over a household
and held responsible for the flourishing and comfort of those who live there.

In Genesis, and repeatedly throughout the Scriptures,
humans are reminded
that they have been given stewardship over the whole creation.
In Genesis 1:26ff, humans are created and blessed to be like God,
to resemble God, to be the image of God.
They are given power over the earth,
entrusted with its care.
That's what's involved in being the blessings we are called to be
in the Covenant with Abraham
and in every other version of the Covenant as its renewed by God
down through the ages until its final fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

So, there's a powerful and persuasive affirmation
that we are formed and fashioned in the image of God,
empowered with God's energy
to be God's stewards and agents on earth.

The kind of human being God desires us to be
is seen most clearly in the life and witness of Jesus Christ.
And in Jesus Christ, God makes it possible
for us to that kind of person,
to be part of the ongoing Body of Christ in the world,
part of the community that is the church
under the headship of Jesus Christ.

In serving as Christ's body,
in exercising discipline over what we do with our bodies
in order to be and do what Jesus Christ would be and do,
we will experience the delight of being with God,
of being for God's purpose,
of showing to others the power of God's Love,
of caring for the earth as God's beloved creation.

We need to get over our discomfort with being God-like.
With humble confidence, we need to claim
the gift of faith, hope, and love
celebrated by Paul a bit later in this letter to the Corinthians.
We need to use that gift of faith to be the love
that generates hope in this world.

That's how we can best flourish by serving Jesus Christ.