

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Common English Bible

I have the freedom to do anything, but not everything is helpful. I have the freedom to do anything, but I won't be controlled by anything. Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, and yet God will do away with both. The body isn't for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. God has raised the Lord and will raise us through his power. Don't you know that your bodies are parts of Christ? So then, should I take parts of Christ and make them a part of someone who is sleeping around? No way! Don't you know that anyone who is joined to someone who is sleeping around is one body with that person? The scripture says, The two will become one flesh. The one who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. Avoid sexual immorality! Every sin that a person can do is committed outside the body, except those who engage in sexual immorality commit sin against their own bodies. Or don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you? Don't you know that you have the Holy Spirit from God, and you don't belong to yourselves? You have been bought and paid for, so honor God with your body.

I have never heard sex talked about in church. Have you? Growing up in church, it was never said overtly that sex was bad, but I knew that sex could lead to a baby, and I did not want a baby in high school! I do think that it isn't good that most of the conversations I had about sex were with my friends. We did not know much! But, as Kristin Mallory says when she teaches our sex education program, *Wonderfully Made*, we believe it is important for the church to be involved in the sex education of children. Our children are making adult decisions at much younger ages and we need to talk to our children, give them a safe space, and be honest with them.

When we turn to the Bible, you might wonder if there is anything sex positive? There is! The Song of Songs is a book, only 8 chapters if you want to read it, that I would *not* recommend reading to your children because it is not rated G or even PG. It is a book in the Bible that describes a sensual dance between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. Their desire and passion for each other is mutual. Song of Songs wants you to know that sexual pleasure is good!¹

The Bible doesn't say anything about masturbation, abortion, or contraception. But, the Bible begins with an affirmation of humans as sexual beings. In Genesis God creates people to go have sex: "be fruitful and multiply." They are to become one flesh. Sexuality is a gift from God because our bodies are good.

In the reading that we heard today from 1 Corinthians, Paul says that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you. Sex may be a good gift from God, but people are people and we are really good at messing stuff up. We use our power to hurt instead of for good. Good sex is sex that is good for everyone involved. Everything we do has consequences, often beyond what we can see. Paul says to the people in Corinth that we should let people see God in and through our bodies. Whatever we have done in the past, God always makes us whole.

When we look at the Bible, there are many types of relationships. Biblical marriage is not what you may think. Isaac is the *only* patriarch in the Bible who is monogamous. Wise King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. King David *only* had 21 wives. And then Jesus comes along with a message of love and radical inclusiveness for both men and women, for people with different backgrounds and differing sexual lifestyles. The Samaritan woman in John's Gospel whom Jesus meets at the water well has had five husbands and is currently living with another man. Yet Jesus chooses her to spread the message that he is the Messiah, the Savior.

¹ <https://reflections.yale.edu/article/sex-and-church/sexuality-and-scripture-what-else-does-bible-have-say>

She becomes the first female evangelist telling people about Jesus. Jesus never tells her to go home immediately and get married.

What people most want to know is what does the Bible say about homosexuality? The truth is the Bible does not talk about committed, consensual, same sex-adult sexual relationships. Those type of relationships did not exist when the Bible was written. When I started out as a Methodist pastor I worked at a church where the organist and a member of the choir lived together. I assumed that they were a couple but they didn't hold hands or anything like that. The senior pastor I worked with didn't think that they were gay, and the church had a "don't ask, don't tell" kind of vibe. I had the opportunity about five years later to visit the church again and Bill and Bill were getting their church directory photo together. You could have knocked me over with a feather, it was such a big change.

Our world has changed quickly, hasn't it? The Holy Spirit has been moving because disapproval of LGBTQ people was so embedded into the foundation of our world, and the winds of the Holy Spirit have been moving. Last week I was visiting with Margie Holman, our 97 year old church member who is on hospice. She was telling me about when she left a different church. She said that she had to leave because of the LGBT. I asked her what she meant and she said, "That church wanted them to change." Margie couldn't be a part of a church that wanted LGBT people to change. We might think that all churches are as progressive as Greenland Hills, but there are still a lot of "don't ask, don't tell" churches out there.

In 2016 a member of Greenland Hills, Bryn Long shared in worship and in our newsletter about his journey for fifty years of being transgender. After twenty years of being seen as a female member at Greenland Hills, Bryn was able to transform from female to the male identity he had always felt in his soul. Bryn shared about his journey and introduced himself to his church family. We had one family at the church that had been visiting for a few months and they stopped coming. I called them and they shared that they would prefer that we didn't talk about that so openly. One of the things that Bryn wrote about in his newsletter article was he believed he had to compartmentalize his identity and his spirituality. Even though he heard about God's love in this place, he didn't think that he could be his true self. Bryn is a beloved child of God, and I'm so thankful for his willingness to share his journey. Bryn was able to embrace the truth about himself, and his light became brighter. By sharing his truth and light with his church family, our hearts were able to open wider. Bryn has now moved to Colorado and he has found a church home that celebrates him and in October he was recently married!

When I read the Bible, the theme I see over and over again is love and inclusion. When in doubt, err on the side of love. When people pick out a line from the Bible to say that someone's essential nature excludes them from God's love, that is wrong.² It is called the Good News, is it not? Each of us wants to be loved just the way we are, and the good news is, we are.

We have learned that some people don't fit into prescribed boxes. Our job is to remain open and to listen. Our job is to reflect Christ's love to all people. I want to be someone who stays curious and is always listening and learning. In college, I had my first friend come out to me as being gay. My friend's dad was a minister and he talked about how if he could be straight, he would be. He hadn't told his family yet and he was worried about what they would say and do. His life would have been easier if he could fit into the prescribed box, but he didn't fit. When you hear someone's story, your heart breaks wide open.

There was a moment when I was baptized, a moment when I committed my life to Christ, but there wasn't a moment when I decided to villainize a portion of the population for their

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sexual orientation or gender identity. As I have read and listened and studied, I keep coming back to the fact that I am heterosexual. I didn't choose to be. I am. Why is this different for someone who is gay? I don't believe that homosexuality is a sin and I am so thankful to be a part of Greenland Hills that thinks all people are God's beloved.

When I do premarital counseling for a couple, I tell them that marriage is hard, satisfying sex takes work, love is messy, there will be great disappointments and both parties will fail miserably. Life is hard! The good news is we are never alone, God is always with us. Paul says that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you. God is always with you. You are not alone. The Methodist writer and Bishop Will Willimon was asked to summarize the Gospel in seven words or less. He said, "God refuses to be God without us." Thanks be to God, Amen.