

Lent 2B 2018
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Good to be with you all today. Archbishop Foley wants the bishops talking about marriage and sexuality wherever we go. I've chosen to use this epistle today out of order. We read that epistle on the second Sunday of Epiphany already, so you heard it once. I don't know if you remember back that far or if you thought somebody was reading the wrong epistle today, but it's a crucial one. It gives us Paul's perspective on sexuality. He's speaking to the folks in Corinth who were not known for their discipline, shall we say, not known for their discipline.

Corinth is a port city and so, like every port city, it was known for all kinds of wild stuff. If you look at Corinth, a city kind of on the coast, a big mountain rises behind it called the Acrocorinth, and on that mountain was a huge temple in the Greek time to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. It had as many as a thousand temple prostitutes.

Now, we're in the time of the Roman period and, of course, that temple has been destroyed, but there's other smaller temples up there that are doing the same thing. I think that at that time, too, that licentiousness was a spiritual problem that was over the city of Corinth. So Paul speaks specifically to this situation in Corinth, a very sexually immoral place.

In the ancient world, if you were known as a Corinthian, you were thought to be sexually immoral. "Oh, you're a Corinthian," kinda thing, like a libertine. That was the name that they would use for people who were libertines in those days. In other words, people who believed in free sex and all that kind of stuff. Now, I don't know if this compares at all to our culture, but I think you're gonna see what's going on with our culture today. Amen?

Paul starts out. I see we don't have any Bibles and you don't have the Scripture there, so I'm gonna read the Scripture again to you.

"For do you now know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?"

The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God, and so Paul is speaking and challenging the Corinthians to be righteous. But the reality is we can't be righteous in and of ourselves, right? How are we righteous? How are we made righteous? Do we remember, as good Anglicans? How can a person become righteous before God? There's only one way, and it's not by the things we do, although we try to convince ourselves that it's dependent on us. It's not dependent on us, it's dependent on the Lord Jesus, and it's depending on us to accept what Jesus has done for us and cover us with his righteousness, because we can't be righteous. Amen? Are you with me? Glory to God.

Now, I've been a bishop overseas and in Latin territory, and so I'm used to having people respond. Now I know Father Doug gets upset when people respond, but that's okay. You can feel okay if you wanna say amen out there, okay? Amen?

Okay, praise God. Paul says, "Do not be deceived, neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who practice homosexuality, and there's two words there, one for passive and one for active homosexuality, nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor revilers nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God."

Now, there's a pretty big sin list, which is not bad for Lent. We throw those things out, but Paul is specifically talking to the Corinthians. They're saying, a little further down, "All things

are lawful for me," because Paul has already told them, "You can't be made righteous by following the Ten Commandments." In other words, it's not by what we do that we're made righteous. It's by us accepting the righteousness of Jesus in our place. So they're right about that. They understand what Paul's saying, but then they go too far. They say, "All things are lawful for me then, so I can do whatever I want." Now Paul did not say that.

He then lists five sexual sins and five other kinds of sins that the Corinthians are involved in. Sexual sin is a big issue in Corinth. From the Greek times until now, to the Roman times, illustrated by the temples that they have that are controlling their lives. It's interesting though to see what he mentions.

First, he mentions sexually immoral, the general word for sex outside of marriage. Then he mentions idolaters. Then he mentions adulterers. Well, adultery is illicit sex inside of marriage. Then he throws in idolaters, too, because the people in Corinth thought, "Well, if I go up to the temple to do my religious duty, that's not being immoral. That's just being religious." Well, Paul throws that in, too. He's covered all kinds of sexual immorality. Pornea, he's covered all kinds of pornea in that sense.

He mentions two types of homosexual sin. Now, what's interesting is our liturgical churches who have read this text, well, not quite this text. They usually read I Corinthians 6:12-20. They don't read this first part. It's been shut out of the lectionary for the last 40 years. In our churches in the United States, we have not read this text for a long time. We go to the second part, but I think there's some really important things that we see here. Paul is treating all kinds of sexual immorality, heterosexual and homosexual, equally. He doesn't single out one. In fact, he covers everything. He covers the waterfront. You should not be sexually immoral. He lists five sexual sins here.

Then he lists five other sins. Oh, interesting. Five plus five is ten. Ten, let's think. Ten, ten. Would that be like something that we've heard before? Ten? Ten Commandments, huh? Yes. So, he's taken the Ten Commandments that they're kind of saying, "Well, we don't have to worry about the Ten Commandments anymore." He's substituted ten sins that are specifically directed to the Corinthians.

In the center of Corinth is the agora, the meeting place. Around the agora are temples as well as shops. In the shops, each shop has a stone that you can pull aside, and it drops down to the river there. That was where they would lower their wine down to the river and keep their wine cool, so that when one of their friends passed by, they could pull up the wine and have a little glass. The Corinthians are drinking all the time. So we read in the second set, drunkards, right in the middle, and Paul will talk about that problem in the church of Corinth later on. People are arriving tipsy to the worship service. People are getting tipsy in the worship service. This is Corinth. This is Corinth.

He's just talked about taking people to court to try to defraud them, so there's thieves and swindlers. He's got greedy and revilers in there. He's specifically talking to the Corinthians. He's saying, "You may be setting aside the Ten, but here's your ten, folks in Corinth." Specifically, he's talking to them.

Then he says, "These will not inherit the Kingdom of God, and such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified, or made righteous, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God."

What's he talking about there? Now, you probably noticed already that I will not answer my questions that I give you. First, because I don't want you to fall asleep and, secondly, to test you and see what kind of job Father Doug is doing. So, what's that question? What is "you were washed, you were sanctified, you were made righteous," what is he talking about there?

Congregant 1: Salvation.

Salvation and specifically baptism, salvation as experienced in our lives and as we participate in baptism. I think we're also gonna see in this how we are washed by the blood of Jesus as well. It's not only the cleansing of the water of baptism, but it is the continual cleansing that we need in our lives, that we celebrate here each Sunday, being washed in the blood of Jesus. Amen?

That's what he's talking about. In other words, the sacraments that we have show us the reality of our salvation, that we are participating in this all the time. Then he quotes that thing that they're always saying, "All things are lawful for me," but then Paul says, "But not all things are helpful." "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything." The problem in Corinth is they're dominated by that spirit of lust and sexual immorality that has always been in that city, and they're given over to those things. They have authority over them. That's the Greek word that's there. When he says, "I will not be dominated, I will not let these things have authority over me." But, folks, these things take authority over us when we're involved in them, and we can't escape unless it is through Jesus. Amen?

Congregation: Amen.

That pornea, that porn that's rampant in our society, on the internet that pops however, just is there. It's impossible for us to get away from that, so later on he'll say, "Flee immorality." We have to flee. We just have to move on. We have to say a prayer. We have to call out to Jesus. We have to move on from that or it will dominate us. It will dominate us.

Why? Because in sexual immorality, there's an importantly spiritual thing going on. That's what he's gonna talk about in the second section, in the second sermon that he has right here. Well, he goes on. He quotes another statement that they make in Corinth. He says, "Food is meant for the stomach, and the stomach for food. And God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power."

Paul is saying that your body is important in the Jewish understanding of body, soul, and spirit. The Greeks are thinking something else. The Greeks are thinking that as we pass into the heavens, as our spirit goes to be with God, our bodies like a booster rocket that falls away, so we don't have to worry about what we do in our body 'cause it's not gonna have any significance later on. We're really spiritual beings and we're trying to get out of this body. But Paul uses the idea of the resurrection to say, "No, God raised the Lord bodily."

Now we all know that God raised the Lord in a special body, amen? We're all waiting for that day, too, the special body. Amen. That body has marks in it, the marks of the cross, the marks of the passion. Paul is trying to help the Corinthians see that what we do in the body here has significance later on, and the sexually immoral stuff that's going on has consequence to our spiritual existence. That's difficult to understand because we don't see spiritual existence. We just see body. We don't see spiritual, so we're not always thinking spiritual things. Paul says you can't

divide spirit and body in that way. The resurrection shows us that our bodies will be resurrected as well.

There's something else going on here, too. There's something else I believe that's going on, and that is that in our sexual activity and sexual union, we are creating blood covenants. When I was a little guy last century, not that long ago though, there were stories about having blood brothers. If you were close to a guy and you wanted to make a pact, you'd prick your thumb and he'd pick his thumb, and you'd share the blood. Then you were blood brothers. Now, the church at that time said "Don't do that kind of stuff. There's a spiritual ramification to participating in that."

A couple weeks ago I was watching Clint Eastwood on *The Legend of Josey Wales*, or something like that, and he makes a blood covenant with the Cherokee, and the Cherokee chief just slices his hand and Clint does a little thing on his hand. There's a huge amount of blood coming down over here, and there's just a little trickle of blood over there. They make a blood covenant, and that meant that they would support each other, the tribe and Josey would support each other. They would defend each other from enemies and aggressors. They wouldn't defraud each other. They were now blood brothers.

When we are involved in sexual unions, we're doing the same. We're not cutting ourselves, but there's blood there. Sure enough, in Corinth in the agora is a small temple to the god Asclepius, who is the god of healing, because when we have sexual unions and there's multiple sexual unions going on, there's also blood diseases happening. Sure enough, in the ruins of the temple, there are found all kinds of little amulets that are taken to the god in this temple to ask for healing. If you had a broken arm, there's a little silver amulet that looks like an arm. It has a hand and has both parts of the arm, so there's arms. There's legs, obviously for broken legs. Guess what other body parts are found amongst the amulets in this temple? You guessed it, I don't have to share, because when there is sexual immorality, there's all kinds of blood diseases affecting all parts of our body. That's the consequence of what's going on right there.

In fact, a little further away from Corinth is a huge temple to Asclepius. I guess if you couldn't get it done in the small temple, you'd go to the big temple. We need healing. We're not quite sure exactly what's going on here, but I think today we can understand biologically that it is sharing bodily fluids and the diseases that we can get by that. That is affecting all the people, many of the people in Corinth.

"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never. For do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is written, the two will become one flesh." Not just in body, but mind, soul, spirit. "But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

Now, we have a blood covenant that we make with the Lord, and we do that each Sunday. That's why we celebrate communion each Sunday, so we need to think about communion in a slightly different way today than we normally do. This is Jesus sharing his blood with us. Amen? Congregation: Amen.

Bishop: He does that so that we might be made righteous, so that we might be healed, so that we are covered in that blood covenant. In the Exodus, there's a blood covenant made with God in which the Israelites take the blood of the lamb and spread it on the lintels of their door to protect them from the angel of death. Remember how they did that? They spread it on the lintel, or they probably go up and then to the right and then to the left because that's the way they write anyway, but what does that look like? We spread on the lintel and on the doorposts of the door. What does it look like we're doing?

Congregant 2: Sign of the cross.

Sign of the cross. But that same blood covenant, that blood that protects, the blood that heals, the blood that washes are those things that are going on when God is making permanent covenants with us. Of course, we celebrate the blood of Jesus who gave his blood on the cross that we might be made righteous, that he would take away sin and that he would take away death. Paul is asking the Corinthians, "Why do you wanna stay involved with sin and death? Why do you wanna do this? Why do you let that have dominion, have authority over you when Jesus has already paid that price, has already rescued us?"

In the ancient Near East, you could go, and if you saved up money, you could go to the temple and buy yourself back. If you could raise enough money that your master had paid for you, you would go to the temple and take money and keep taking it there until it built up, so you could buy yourself back. You then belonged to the god and not your master, if you could do that, if you could raise and maintain that much money. But Jesus has already paid that price. Jesus has already bought us back and Jesus who makes us righteous.

Paul says flee then, flee this stuff. Don't do this stuff. Don't be involved in adultery. Don't be involved in porn. That's not healthy, not good. It dominates us. Flee those things. This is Paul. Paul in other places is not separating homosexual sin from heterosexual sin. People have decided not to read this passage because it mentions homosexual sin, but it's right in there with every other kind of sexual sin you can be involved. Paul covers the whole waterfront. Paul makes no distinctions at that point. But we have people that won't talk about it and won't read about it. We have people that zero in on the homosexual sin, leave the heterosexual sin out. My problem, brothers and sisters, is that we live in a Corinthian culture today and we're dominated by this lust and sexual immorality. Paul says flee, flee it. Don't go anywhere near it. Jesus loves you. Jesus has paid that price for you. He should be enough for each of us. Amen?

Congregation: Amen.

You are not your own. You were bought with a price, so glorify God in your body. In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.