

08.20.2017

The Sixth Commandment

Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-33; Matthew 5:27-30

Rev. David V. Miller

Lutheran Church of the Ascension

Atlanta, GA

When I was an adolescent, I dreaded getting “the talk” from my Dad. Now that *I’m* a Dad, I’m dreading having to give “the talk” to my kids. And ever since we began this series in church, I’ve been dreading the day we get to the Sixth Commandment when I have to give *you all* “the talk.” But instead of popping in a video about our changing bodies, let’s instead hear what *God* has to say about the birds and the bees.

Each one of us is a work of art—literally. As much as we try to convince ourselves that we are autonomous, self-made, independently-functioning beings, we can’t escape the evidence that we’re not. We don’t create ourselves, but you and I are creatures created by our Creator, God. All we have to do is do some navel-gazing to see this is true—every single one of us has a belly-button, which tells us that we can’t take credit for anything that we are. Our humanity—our bodies, our hearts, minds, and souls—is all gift. And as individual, hand-crafted, one-of-a-kind works of art, we all bear the signature of our sculptor.

Now, if you look at the Pietà at St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City—y’know, that famous sculpture of the Virgin Mary holding in her lap the corpse of her son Jesus—you’ll find none other than the name of Michelangelo. Likewise, inside and out, God has autographed each of us. Every person on the planet has been fashioned in His own divine image and likeness. Which means both our anatomy and our deepest longings say something about Him.

For example, we know that God is love—He has created us and has redeemed us to be together in relationship with Him. And while we couldn’t be more different from God—I mean, us being mortal and Him being, well, *God*—the truth is, we need Him, and God refuses to go without you and me. Similarly, boys and girls—as different as they are—are two parts of a whole, meant for each another. That’s why we introduce our spouses as “this is my other half.” Even the ancients understood this, so much so in fact that they came up with a whole mythology to explain it.

Maybe you’ve heard of Plato’s “Symposium”? In it, the philosopher Aristophanes puts forth this great explanation of how we got to have the two sexes. Aristophanes says that at the start, human beings had four legs, four arms, and two faces—humanity was a mighty race, a force to be reckoned with. But the gods, fearful of humanity’s power and wanting to maintain their own, cut these super people in half, making men and women. Now, humanity spends its days wandering the earth, looking for its “other half.” We hear something similar when God says, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” Men and women are complementary, needing each other, made for one another. More than just anatomically, but in many ways, women have what men don’t, and men have what women don’t—we balance each other out and make a whole. And this fact that we are built for relationships is just one way we bear the signature of a God who is love.

Monogamy is another quality of God—He promises to always be faithful, to never leave us nor forsake us. St. Augustine puts it this way, “God loves each of us as if there was only one of us.” Much the same, it’s a common human trait to hope to find somebody, that *one* person to settle down and spend the rest of our lives with. Most of us desire to give ourselves completely to another, and desire to have someone want to give themselves completely to us. We want to love and to be loved, to know and to be known. Without monogamy, sharing ourselves 100% and being shared with 100% could never happen. But that yearning to pledge ourselves and to be pledged to is yet another way God’s left His mark on our hearts.

So God is love, and God is faithful, but God is also the author of life—and it is out of His love, out of His commitment, that He creates. Same goes for us, from our committed monogamous relationships comes procreation. In a very real way, we mirror God’s creativity, bringing life into being, by starting families. The Bible says that husbands and wives become “one flesh,” which may mean the union between man and woman, a metaphor, as if in the two coming together there’s no way to tell where one ends and the other begins. But even more, this is a deeply profound statement. It’s a real-life uniting of two fleshs into a whole new one: a child of whom people say, “He’s got his mother’s eyes” or “She’s got her father’s smile.” It’s amazing to think, even before the command not to eat the forbidden fruit,

God's very first command was to "be fruitful and multiply." And this act of procreation, and how our bodies are made for it, we come to find out is one more inscription on us of our creator God.

This whole design is God's wonderful, masterful, beautiful plan. By our relationships, our faithfulness, and our procreation, we reflect His image and likeness to the world. Living in this order, it's hard to go wrong; but without it, it's very tough to get it right. After all, these truths are self-evident, our bodies and souls bear witness, it is a biological fact—any question of it denies our humanity, our very personhood. If we believe otherwise, we're only living a lie. Perhaps that's why St. Paul says, "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body" (1 Cor 6:18). We might have other plans, try to do things different from God, but at the end of the day we only end up hurting ourselves. Our own hearts cry out against us, point a finger and accuse us of rejecting the obvious truth that's right under our noses.

It's not hard to see how our world's swallowed the lie—hook, line, and sinker. Macro evolution has denied both God and His design, degrading us to nothing more than animals, exercising our baser instincts, taking the beautiful union of husband and wife and cheapening it to "getting laid." Contraception (not that we, as a Church, are necessarily against it, but it) has removed procreation completely from the equation, making us forget what any of this is really about. The "hook-up culture" has deceived us into thinking we're somehow just robots, mechanically hopping into bed while leaving what makes us human—our thoughts and feelings—at the door. But the truth is, this lie has done so much damage, left so many bodies in its wake.

My guess is all of us have fallen victim in one way or another. For some, pornography has robbed us of so much that was good in our lives. For others, we've found ourselves faced with the unthinkable by terminating a pregnancy. There are those that have lost the love of their life to infidelity. And still others suffer a physical toll on their own body. Then there are the ones who are still haunted by the ghosts of an abusive past.

The good news is, when this lie is exposed for what it is, God's truth speaks for itself. Imagine if everyone lived according to God's design, kept sexual relations within marriage, just think of all the pain and tragedy, all the medical bills, so many court orders and lawsuits would just up and (POOF!) disappear! Imagine if everyone lived according to God's design, just think of the childhoods kids would have with a Mommy and Daddy who loved them and loved each other! Imagine if everyone lived according to God's design, every man and every woman would have all the intercourse without any of the risk! That's the truth—God's offering us the best version of ourselves, the most fulfilling relationships, and the secret to the best possible lovemaking! Maybe that's how we should market abstinence—we're not denying ourselves, but cashing in on the big grand prize! See, God wants you to enjoy getting between the sheets—after all, He invented it—it's just that there's a best time and place for it, and He'd hate for you to miss out.

Now, if you're one of the ones who've been living outside of this design, who've bought into the lie, and who now find yourself feeling cheap, dirty, and ashamed, then welcome to the club. Even the best of us, who try to live within God's design, still fail. As Jesus said earlier, "Whoever looks at another lustfully has already committed adultery in their heart." Try as we might, all of us are card-carrying members.

On a different note, I'll never forget my wedding day. I still remember standing there at the altar—nervous, palms sweaty, shaky—then I saw her, my Jeni. In that instant, I couldn't help it—my heart skipped a beat, my eyes welled up with tears—she was stunning. That dress, her hair, that smile—I couldn't take my eyes off her. I grinned from ear to ear—this was the woman who I'd get to spend the rest of my life with; and even more, *she* was willing to spend her life with me. Leading up to that moment, I don't have a clue what all Jeni had to do to get ready. My guess is there was probably some bathing involved, and getting hair done, and putting on makeup, and getting dressed, and spraying on perfume. But I'll tell you what, when everything was said and done, it was all worth it—Jeni couldn't have made a more beautiful bride.

No matter what our damage, that's exactly how Jesus sees you—He gets all choked up, His heart melts, His knees give out. To Him, you couldn't be more beautiful, more chaste, more lovely. But the difference between Him and me is Jesus knows exactly what all went into getting you ready. He's all too familiar with the blood, sweat, and tears it took to make

08.20.2017

The Sixth Commandment

Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-33; Matthew 5:27-30

Rev. David V. Miller
Lutheran Church of the Ascension
Atlanta, GA

you what you are. Here's what I mean—St. Paul says, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

See, on the cross Jesus gave His best Adam impression. You'll remember that in order to get His bride, Adam had to fall into a deep sleep. Well, just like Adam, Jesus also fell into a deep sleep—the deep sleep of death—so that God could make for Him His very own Eve. But instead of using a rib, God took from Jesus the blood and water that flowed from His side. And it was with that blood and water, the very same that poured over us at Baptism, that God created a bride, the Church—you and me—and brought us to the man, Jesus. Together, we have been sanctified, cleansed, washed with water and the Word. Anything that made us feel cheap, dirty, or ashamed has been scrubbed clean. And now, since “whoever has been baptized into Christ, has put on Christ” (Gal 3:27), we have been wrapped up in His holiness, dressed in His goodness, draped in His righteousness. You think it's a coincidence that the baptized often wear the same color that brides do? So now, when He lays eyes on you—to Jesus, you are an absolute dream! Was it worth it, Jesus? He excitedly nods His head YES!

Y'know, it's always sad when a bride doesn't feel beautiful even on her own wedding day. Of course, objectively, nothing could be further from the truth—every bride really *is* beautiful! I mean, how could they *not* be beautiful when never before have they looked so radiant! My guess is, even after being told how radiant we look today, you and I might still wonder. After all, it's been a while since our Baptism, and a lot's happened since then.

But Jesus knew this might happen, and so He gives you another “I love you” this morning. In just a few moments, He will reaffirm His vows to you, as He waits at this altar for you to walk down the aisle. Putting in your hand His very body and blood, this wafer and wine, it's as if He's giving you His ring and pledging Himself to you all over again. Once more, Jesus looks into your eyes and promises to take you to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, and not even death can you do part. So, “what God has joined together, let no one put asunder.”