

FAITH AND HUMAN SEXUALITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Sermon Preached in The Mackey Worship Center

Westminster Presbyterian Church

353 East Pine Street, Wooster, Ohio, 44691

The Rev. Dr. Carroll C. Meyer, Preaching

February 18, 2007

Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday

Scripture: II Samuel 5: 13 – 16, I Kings 11: 1 – 5

Proverbs 5: 15 – 23

Hymns: Hymn of Praise: 554 Let all things now living

The Hymn of Meditation: (The Ordination Hymn) 391 Take My Life and Let It Be

The Hymn of Commitment: 540 God be with you til we meet again

15 Drink water from your own cistern,

running water from your own well.

16 Should your springs overflow in the streets,

your streams of water in the public squares?

17 Let them be yours alone,

never to be shared with strangers.

18 May your fountain be blessed,

and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.

19 A loving doe, a graceful deer—

may her breasts satisfy you always,

may you ever be intoxicated by her love.

What is our society's public law regarding sexual intimacy? And how is it enforced? What is the church's policy regarding sexual intimacy? But most important today is this question, "What is the private sexual practice between consenting adults and what are the moral and ethical implications of those practices?" And then arises the question, from whence cometh any kinds of standards or ethical norms for those private practices? Going a little further in the dialogue, how does a person even talk about a 'taboo'

subject with enough sensitivity that no one is alienated in the conversation? Again, there can be no question that an individual's choice of private practices has greater influence in their behaviors than any public influence. Private practice trumps public mores.

These were just a few of the themes that arose as I spoke with a number of College of Wooster students into the wee hours of the morning this past week. It is clear that the influence of what ever vague notions the church has about some policy regulating private sexual practices, we are so far out of control of that conversation as to be moot. On the other hand, in a society that still does not teach about even the basics of human sexuality, there is a role for the church, at the middle school age level, to have an educational role within the church's own youth ministry. There is a critical felt need to talk and be informed but there is not really any one who seems to know how that talk should take place. There is no question for some students that sexuality is nothing more than recreation, like a game of tennis, without any further consequences to ones life save potential diseases. For some, the notion of a dynamic between sexual intimacy and commitment, trust, children, marriage, devotion, value, and single partnership just does not even come to mind. Sexuality is not a church issue. There is a complete disconnect between a person's private practice and the church. For others, because of some churches' teachings there is significant and damaging psychological repression. In an atmosphere of threats and damnation, church policy can be damaging. And finally, the sexuality that we see presented so casually in the media is not educational.

In other words, if the church has a message, it has not been presented to this group of very bright and socially minded students in a way that has been helpful or meaningful. And what is more striking, for all the public display our society makes of sexuality in the magazine rack, movie theater and television, it is still a taboo subject for conversation and education. As one graduating senior said, "We know that world is totally distant from our individual lives. It does not count in our real life practices." Oh yes, there was one more thing, every student present was of the opinion that living together before marriage was a wise thing to do before marriage.

I was pleased that a few of the students had a pretty good working knowledge of New Testament scriptures regarding marriage and the equality of the relationship between husband and wife talked about by the Apostle Paul. I was pleased that from what I could interpret from the tone of the

evening's conversation, these students had worked out for themselves a manageable set of moral values they could live by and be comfortable. I was pleased that we have a very good role model in Greg Barbu and two wonderful college interns working with teens in our own church.

Have you thought about these differences from just a century ago? The average marriage only lasted about ten years. They did not end in divorce. They ended because the wife died at the age of 28 in childbirth. Women today are living on average 50 years longer than a century ago. That is a lot longer time to live together with the same man. Women are physically maturing at age ten today and they did not physically mature until at 16 a century ago. Life begins a lot earlier today. We did not have penicillin, birth control pills, television and a technological world that makes having children an economic burden rather than an economic asset.

Perhaps I am just too positive about life but from what I could make of our time together this past week with these students, but given all the changes and challenges in our society, they seemed to me to have a pretty good head on their shoulders. They seemed to be trying their best to be thoughtful and caring individuals. They were clear that recreational sex is happening but it was not their choice and not the choice of their peers. And, in a moment of deep thoughtfulness, they considered that behavior to be a sign of serious other psychological issues.

So my friends, regardless of what you may be seeing in the public eye, take heart, it is not what is happening for most of our young people in their private life. It is not the story of David and Solomon. It is the story of the writer of the Proverbs:

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 running water from your own well.

16 Should your springs overflow in the streets,

 your streams of water in the public squares?

17 Let them be yours alone,

 never to be shared with strangers.

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