

**The Continuum of Sexuality and Spirituality:
Sex For Everyone
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Galatians 5:13-15, 22-23

The gifts of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self control..."

World Words:

Whatever one's religious background, the beauty of your sexuality is a clear gift from on high, a portal we experience that transports us to timeless realms where the pulse of the universe is palpable.

Body Theology and Human Sexuality:

A sexual ethic:

- *Understands sexuality as a moral good rooted in the sacred value of our sensuality;*
- *Is grounded in respect for our own and for others' bodily integrity;*
- *Celebrates fidelity in our commitments to our partners;*
- *And these principles apply equally, and without double standards, to persons of both genders and of all colors, bodily conditions and sexual orientations.*

Music: Give Yourself to Love,

*Give yourself to love if love is what you're after
Open up your heart to the tears and laughter
And give yourself to love, give yourself to love.*

Larry: We called this sermon sex for everyone. We figured it might be one way to get people to church this Sunday, but we also actually believe in the principle that sexuality is for everyone. The beautiful song that Catherine just sang reflects the longing that we all have for connection, and the need to give ourselves to love in order to receive love. It's all part of that connection of body and soul and the continuum of sexuality and spirituality.

Here's an image to us get started with this idea.

In a "Peanuts" cartoon, Linus, talking about the cute girl in his Sunday School class, says, "I used to just sit there and smile at her. Sometimes she'd smile at me. Now I hear she's switched churches."

Charlie Brown replies, "That will change your theology in a hurry."

Sandy: Last week we said that body and spirit were one. Both sexuality and spirituality move us out of ourselves into another realm of awareness, enabling us to feel alive and connected. The connection of spirituality and

sexuality is God's way of calling us out of separation and loneliness into communion and connection.

What happens to us as individuals, in our culture, in our spiritual journey when body and soul are separated? The answers can be seen all around us. An informal survey suggests that 80 per cent of women dislike their bodies or at least many parts of their bodies. Sexy is seen as a physical attribute, expressed only by and with the body, and mostly confined to a narrow-minded vision of the ideal body type. Eating disorders are on the rise not only among women, but also among men.

When we affirm the connection of the soul with the body, then our souls also enjoy the gifts of food, nature, laughter, tears, and perhaps most deeply, the sights, sounds, and touches of one another. And this connection enriches our spiritual life. I am no longer happy sitting in a church without windows, without color or without textures. I don't find reading a sermon alone from a book or on the internet to have the sense of the embodied word as sharing in a community of caring people. Solitude has a meaningful place in my life, including spiritual solitude, but it is never the complete picture of spiritual life.

The incarnation of word into flesh for me means that the true sacrament of the church is not just baptism. It's not just Communion with bread and wine. The true sacrament of the church is within each other, within the embodied experience of the spiritual journey. Walking the labyrinth with others along the same path, passing, turning toward and then away from one another, is the perfect illustration for me of the classic Christian phrase, the body of Christ. We are all there on this path where our bodies and spirits connect.

Theologian James Nelson says that we often think of God as a noun, says James Nelson. But we also need to experience God as a verb, creating, flowing, touching, trusting, giving, receiving in us. (*Nelson, p.14, Between Two Gardens*) **Larry** – It is also important to remember that sexuality is not limited to what we call "having sex." Sexuality is a continuum of experience. A continuum is a long line that includes all the elements that go into an experience. The continuum of sexuality begins on the one end with our senses. It travels along to feeling good about ourselves and our bodies, to our way of being male or female in the world. Then we move along the continuum to simple experiences of touch: greeting someone warmly, hugging a friend, holding someone's hand, wiping away a tear. I remember hugging my mother one evening shortly after my father died. She hung on to me a little longer than usual and said, "One of the many things I miss about dad is that there's no one around to hug me." Other people who live alone have repeated this to me. It reminds me how precious it is for us to keep good nurturing hugs alive among ourselves in youth, middle, and older age. These are some of the ways that sex is for everybody.

Sandy: Next on the continuum is the touch of a partner. Can you not remember a moment when you first touched a special someone's hand and the sparks flew up and down your arm and in your heart? Those touches, of course, lead to other physical expressions of sexuality between partners at the other end

of the continuum. One of the problems with the portrayal of sexuality in TV and film today is that sexual attraction typically leaps immediately to sexual intercourse, as if all the possibilities between that initial spark and the act of sex were unimportant or nonessential.

Larry: The remarkable thing about the bible is that Jesus does not say much about sex, either positively or negatively. His main concern is in enabling us to see each other the way God sees us, without the barriers between Israelite and Samaritan, between the prostitute and the Pharisee, between the sinner and the saved, between man and woman. Then as now there was the same temptation to make sex sacred or sinful in and of itself. Jesus did neither.

Theologian Tom Driver says that Jesus is tempted with every sin in the wilderness - sloth, pride, power, envy - but not sex. Why? Because, Driver says, sex is not a sin. Nor is it simply neutral.

If sex is not a sin, holy, or neutral, then what is it? Sex is a high order value, which means that it gains power in the service of other values. Here is the moral question for every sexual encounter: How that sexual moment serves the other values that we believe in?

In Galatians, Paul says the gifts of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Sexuality in the service of these values enhances each of them, and in turn each of these values enhances sexuality, and thus the very spiritual essence of our lives is enhanced. But sexuality in the service of hatred, fear, violence, aggression, bullying, lies, and selfishness multiplies the evil of those behaviors exponentially.

Sandy: When sex is added to violence and becomes rape, it intensifies the brutality of that assault.

Larry: When sex occurs in the context of lies and deceit, it destroys not only the trust in the fabric of that relationship but also the ability of the one who is deceived to believe in themselves.

Sandy: In high school, sex can too easily skip intimacy and love to become confusing, painful, and empty.

Larry: On campus sex can too easily become an act of conquest.

Sandy: In a single's bar, sex can too easily disintegrate into lonely self-gratification.

Larry: In long term partnerships, sex can too easily sink to wordless duty.

Sandy: People in authority like politicians, preachers, professors, teachers, counselors, and coaches can far too easily use their power to exploit the sexual vulnerability of those whose only mistake is to give their leaders the trust they should deserve.

Larry: And the fashion, music, and media of our culture most insidiously exploit children's innocent and innate wishes to grow up by sexualizing them, especially little girls, at far too early an age.

These are examples of unholy sexuality, where our bodies are alienated from our souls. This is how we should be speaking of sexual and moral values in our society, not in terms of sex inside or outside of marriage, not in terms of

homosexuality or heterosexuality. We should ask the question of whether our sexuality, and whether our sexual actions, are linked with our spiritual values, such as honesty, caring, kindness, and mutual respect. Homosexual rape is no more or less evil than a heterosexual rape. Heterosexual promiscuity is just as destructive as homosexual promiscuity. In the continuum of sexuality and spirituality, all our sexual activities are judged by the spiritual values we hold dear.

Sandy: A number of years ago Barb Rienzo and I led a Women's Overnight on the theme of Sexuality and Spirituality. On that overnight, as a group, we challenged ourselves to define sacred sexuality, that place where spirituality and sexuality meet. For us, sacred sexuality, and sacred spirituality are both positive, affirming, radically authentic to one's deepest self, compassionate, and transforming, in that they bring a sense of unity and wholeness.

When body and soul are connected, they move us out of ourselves into another realm of awareness. We lose our self-consciousness and we feel so alive. Both connect us with the cycles of life. Sexuality and spirituality both have their own rhythms, their own ebb and flow. Spirituality and sexuality are both attitudes we have about ourselves and about our lives and our meaning; no one else can give us our sexuality or our spirituality – we find our way, our own path, and our own identity.

Larry: I believe that part of our mission as faithful and growing people is to reconnect sexuality to spirituality and to God's love.

Here is a good definition of a sexual ethic, printed in your bulletin:

A sexual ethic:

- *understands sexuality as a moral good rooted in the sacred value of our sensuality,*
- *is grounded in respect for our own and for other's bodily integrity;*
- *celebrates fidelity in our commitments to our partners;*
- *and these principles apply equally and without double standards to persons of both genders, of all colors, bodily conditions and sexual orientations.*

James Nelson says that our sexuality "embraces our embodied ways of being in the world as female and male, our differing gender meanings, our varied orientations, our deep desires for sensuous touch with the world, our hungers for physical and emotional intimacy. Genitally active or celibate, single or paired, young or old, living with disability or temporarily able-bodied, by the goodness of God we are all sexual beings from birth to death." (Yale Divinity School "Reflections")

Sex is indeed for everyone. So treasure it; make it a holy expression of who you are, from the smile on your face, to the touch of your hand, to the beauty of your soul that shines within and on you.

Sandy: As you "Give yourself to love," talk about these ideas we've been lifting up over the past three Sundays. Talk with friends, family, and your dearest love. Don't hide your hopes and your questions; talk about them. And leave here

today with a new awareness of the connection of your soul and your body that affirms the wonderful continuum of spirituality and sexuality in every stage and cycle of your life.

Our whole motivation for this theme has been to speak about what is so often unspoken. And now it is your turn to continue the conversation.

Prayer –

O God, before we start asking for help, we pause to say thank you, for all that is glorious about our bodies, the deep feelings that stir our hearts, the wonder that warms our souls when a smile comes our way, whether that is the smile of someone we love, a stranger who catches our eye, or the sun breaking through after clouds and tears. Thank you for putting us in these bodies that can be so happy.

But you know us God. Life is not always so good. So we pray for the place today where we yearn to connect with one another and yet do not know how. May we feel your blessing, your gentle sense that you've been here too.

We pray a place where our heart is broken, and we can't understand how and why this has to be. May we feel your blessing, your gentle sense that you've been here too.

We pray for a place where love seems so long in coming, and we feel so lost and alone. May we feel your blessing, your gentle sense that you've been here too.

And we pray for all that place in life where we're unsure if we should risk another shot at love, whether that be romance, a new friend, even a risk of opening our hearts a little to each other in this church. We pray; Should we do it or leave well enough alone?

As we close our prayer with this question on our hearts, we listen for your answer, your heart beating in a poem and in a song.

Amen.

A Red, Red Rose

By Robert Burns

O my luvie is like a red, red rose, that's newly sprung in June

O my luvie's like the melodie that's sweetly played in tune.

As far art thou, my bonnie lass, So deep in luvie am I,

And I will luvie thee still, my dear, Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear and rocks melt wi' the sun:

O I will luvie thee still, my dear, when the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only luvie, and Fare thee weel awhile!

And I will come again, my luvie, Thou it were ten thousand mile.

