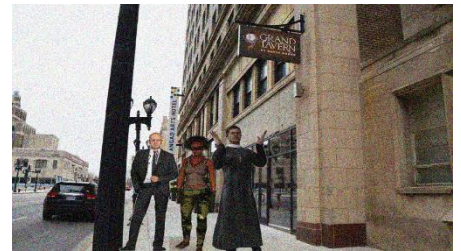


Sermon Notes March, 17, 21, and April 7

Series on Human Sexuality

(notes provided for those who missed one of the messages and to provide resources)

Senior pastor of one of the largest United Methodist churches in the United States, an Anglican priest, and a lesbian hip-hop artist all walk into a bar and start talking about sex. It sounds like the beginning of some sort of joke. While the setting is not completely



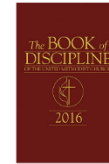
true, what is true is the fact that these three individuals along with several other voices have contributed to a conversation that has helped shape my thought regarding our current issue in the church of human sexuality.

Why we are here.

Recently the General Conference of the United Methodist Church met in St. Louis Missouri to hopefully resolve a contentious issue within the church regarding human sexuality. The special called conference was designed in order for the church to make decisions and rules regarding same-sex marriages and whether the church would allow their pastors to be self-avowed practicing gay or lesbian individuals. The issue is not a new one within the church. Since 1972 and for every four years that followed, the general conference has wrestled with how the church should respond the LBGTQIA+ community.

Since 1972, when the church first began considering their response to the issues of homosexuality, their stance has been one that is considered conservative. The Book of Discipline make these statements regarding homosexuality.

The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.



¶ 304.3: The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.

¶ 341.6: Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.

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However, the church is being pressured to consider this conservative stance regarding human sexuality and changing to one that is more culturally relevant and progressive. This pressure is being put on the church for a number of reasons.

1. Current cultural conditions allow for a much more free expression of human sexuality without the fear of condemnation. This has allowed the LBGTQIA+ community to become more organized, more vocal, and more influential in the institutions within Society.
2. Society, especially Western societies, have relaxed their regulations on marriage. States are allowing same-sex marriages.
3. Other church denominations have evolved in order to be more compatible with their cultures by not only receiving people of the LBGTQIA+ Community into their congregations, but also celebrating the marriage of people in that community as well as ordaining practicing homosexuals as clergy.

¹ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*. (2016). Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, ¶ 304.3 and ¶ 341.6.

4. Within the United Methodist Church there are many who have disregarded the restrictions found in the Book of Discipline. Ordained ministers who have vowed to uphold that Discipline are performing same-sex marriages. Also the church itself is ordaining practicing homosexuals into ministry and allowing practicing homosexuals to become Bishops.

These are some of the more progressive pressures being applied to our denomination. At this year's special General Conference and after over 4 million dollars were spent to organize and administer a conference, the few decisions that resulted from the legislature reaffirmed the current conservative language that is found within the Book of Discipline. Additionally, the conference placed some punitive language in the discipline for those within the church that are breaking those rules on same-sex unions and the ordination of practicing homosexuals.

Clearly these decisions were a tremendous blow for those within the United Methodist Church who were hoping for major modifications to be made to the Book of Discipline on the manner in which the church views human sexuality. While the percentage of people who are in the LBGTQIA+ community is relatively low, the legislation passed was approximately 53% to 47%. It was a close vote with nearly half the people disappointed with the outcome. Many of those who are part of the United Methodist Church and are LBGTQIA+ and or are supporters of the community feel disenfranchised with their Church. Many feel they are no longer welcome within the church.

Adam Hamilton is the senior pastor of The Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City and is the largest United Methodist church in the country. He is the first of the three characters in my make-believe bar scene. He is an author of many books (some of which we have used in our church - *Faithful – Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph* and *John The Gospel of Light and Life*). He was a delegate to the Conference and voted against the Traditional Plan and was for a plan that would remove the language from the Discipline regarding sexuality allowing for a more *inclusive* church. He addressed his congregation after the conference and said,

The traditional plan was designed to push people out [supporters of the full inclusion of the LBGTQIA+ community] ... this language is hurtful to people ... In its place, they proposed an even more regressive plan that includes relieving gay and lesbian clergy and bishops of their positions, imposing penalties on bishops who do not enforce the Discipline, and on clergy who officiate at same-sex weddings, adding teeth to the current policies... I don't want gay and lesbian children who come to our church feel that they are second class citizens. I don't want gay and lesbian couples who come to our church to feel they are incompatible with our teaching. I don't want to ask same sex married couples to divorce and split up their kids. ... This is not one of those pivotal issues we divide over.²

I bring this up for several reasons:

- To begin to understand how the progressives perceive scripture, the role of the church, and their understanding of human sexuality. To be honest, this has caused a lot of turmoil within me. And I'm ok with that because I know that turmoil is forcing me to grow. How can there be two such differing opinions? Two different theologies. How did we get here?

² Hamilton, A. (2019, March 3). *Church of the Resurrection*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/churchoftheresurrection/videos/399593084190104/>

The old Dana Carvey's church lady, "Could it be Satan?" Is one side or both sides evil? Over half of the Conference's delegates voted for prohibitive language against a behavior among a group of people. There are large numbers of people within the church and organizing to disregard church policy. One petition was signed by over 1000 people, pastors, and doctors, etc.

- To acknowledge there are those within our church who have been indoctrinated into a thinking where same-sex practices are acceptable. Hamilton points out that in his church, as with so many others, there are children who are being raised in homes with two moms or two dads. Now their church has reaffirmed a position that contradicts what they have known. There are those within the church who are deeply committed to their faith and have differing opinions on this issue.

What can be said for sure is that this debate is far from over. No doubt fights will continue. People will leave the church from both the conservative side as well as the liberal side. Adam Hamilton is reviewing how their apportionment tithe (kinda big - about \$2.5 M!) is being spent and does not want to fund ministries that are organized by people who supported the Traditional Plan. Their church is going to lever their money against the traditionalists. The Western Jurisdiction is going even further. They have stated that they will continue to disregard the Discipline:

As United Methodists, we must resist injustice and insist that the Church repent of the exclusionary principles of the Traditional Plan ... we will celebrate the fullness of God's creation in all its differences. In this moment we especially celebrate the lay and clergy leadership of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual children of God. And we will maintain the rights

for our clergy and local churches to serve all people, which includes honoring the covenant of marriage for couples of all identities and orientations.³

Similarly there are those who are on the conservative side of the issue who feel that the legislation does not go far enough. They would say there are no measures put in place for accountability to be maintained across the many jurisdictions within the organizational structure of the church. We can see the truth in that by looking at what the Western Jurisdiction has proclaimed.

Perhaps what is most amazing about all of the energy and efforts that have been put forth to resolve this issue, there is very little conversation which gets at the very core of the issue. What is church's official theology regarding sexual behavior? The question hasn't been answered primarily because it hasn't been raised. Once the church understands their theological framework regarding human sexuality then the church's polity can be developed. I can only imagine why there is no dialogue regarding this question. No doubt the political correctness of our culture instills fear in us of offending anyone else who may have a difference of opinion. This is especially true within our church that is so diverse and cuts across so many cultures and accepted traditions across the world.

Clearly there are things within the practice of our faith that allow for tremendous flexibility as we find ways to express our faith within that diversity of culture. But just as well, within our practice of faith there are universal boundaries that must be maintained. Rephrasing the question then, are

³ The Mission Cabinet of the Western Jurisdiction. (2019). *westernjurisdictionumc*. Retrieved from <http://westernjurisdictionumc.org/as-we-make-our-way-back-home/>

there boundaries set for the expression of sexuality or are we free to express ourselves sexually in any way we choose? Oooooow! Are we really gonna talk about this?

I think it is worth working through this.

- To be informed about what is happening with our church. It's out there. What do you think, right now, the general perception is of the UMC? How's our brand?
- Deal with the theology of the problem. I don't think we have really thought through this from our Christian worldview. To simply say it's really a matter of personal choice, let people do what they want is not really a biblical approach. Nor is taking a definitive stance against because "the Bible says such and such" is problematic as well.
- Learn to deal with our differences GRACE-fully
- Deeply consider the role of the church in the development of this issue. We've been silent on sexuality while the world has been shouting
- Do church better
- Do marriage better
- how we navigate this issue how we deal with this current problem really is the way we should approach most of other life's issues seeking truth and Grace

The issue is difficult. To me it forces me to acknowledge our dependence upon him. We just simply do not know how to do life. *Maranatha - Lord, come!*

I've been kind of sneaking up on you a bit. We have been talking about the speech given by Stephen in his defense before the Sanhedrin as found in Acts 7. Stephen is recalling the history of the Jewish people for the purpose of proclaiming that their story throughout time came to a climax

with the coming, the crucifixion, the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. He in essence is saying that who we were as Jews, what our purpose was, why the law was given has found its completion in Jesus. He has superseded that which was before and is moving the story forward. I said last week It is in this story where Stephen's accusers were stuck. All of what this story was leading to was Jesus. But many in Israel especially those in leadership simply missed the point of the story. They were supposed to change. They were supposed to draw people closer to God not make connecting with him difficult. It was about the heart. Stephen points out that their ancestors turned away, turned to other gods and turned back to Egypt. "Don't turn away again!"

Acts 7:51-53 (NRSV) ⁵¹ "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do... ⁵³ You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it."

Their rejection of truth got Stephen killed. They had not seen the shift in the story. They rejected his teaching and they rejected Jesus as their Messiah. They did not know how to apply the authority of their story to the time in which they lived. And this is the question we face today, "How do we apply the authority of our story, scripture, to today?" I don't think the UMC is getting this right and that is the reason for the mess we are in. Don't get me wrong. It is not a simple solution, for if it was we would have resolved it long ago.

Back to the question.

The sticking point within the Discipline is the statement, "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." To be clear, the statement does not say homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching or that homosexuals are incompatible with Christian teaching. It is the acting out or the expressing of homosexual behavior. The question then that

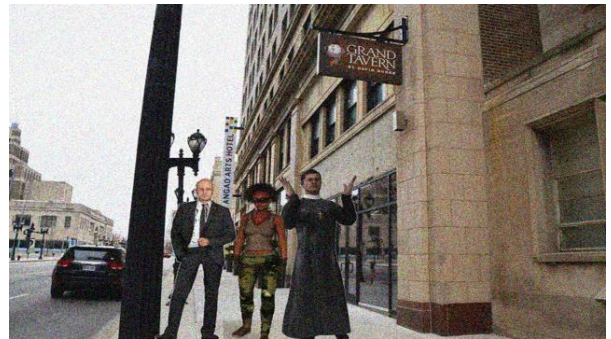
should be debated is “Is homosexual practice incompatible with Christian teaching” or “Is homosexual sex sin?” Again, the question is not being discussed.

But I believe we can ask a better question. The better question, regarding the expression of human sexuality, is, “What is good and what is intended?” Rather than create a list of various ways human sexuality is expressed and deem them right or wrong, it is much better to look at what God intended for humans as they experience sexual relations.

Last week we began talking about the issue of human sexuality and how the UMC is failing at creating governing policies that deal with human sexuality as it relates to participation in church, specifically marriage and ordination. To me this is very worthwhile for us to talk about even though we may find the topic uncomfortable. But within this discussion, I hope we find our dependence upon God, our necessity to discern properly the authority of Scripture and to become people who know how to balance truth and grace.



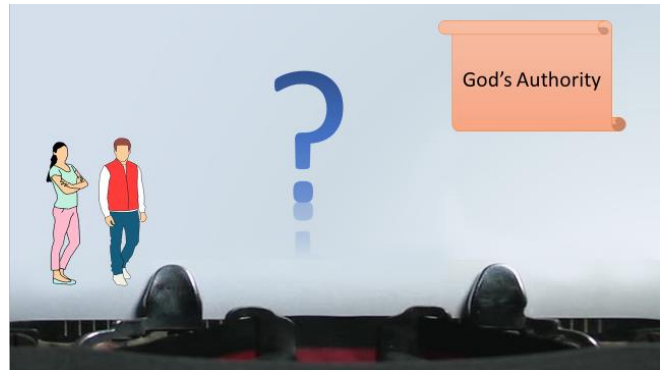
I introduced you to three people last week I am using as representative voices in this conversation who come to this issue from varying perspectives. “Pastor, priest, and a lesbian hip-hop artist walk into a bar and start to talk about sex.” We heard a little from Adam Hamilton who is the senior pastor from the Church of



the Resurrection who has a progressive view towards marriage and ordination. He would argue for full inclusion of LBGQTQIA in the church including same-sex marriages and the ordination of practicing non-heterosexuals. He believes that what was passed at the General Conference, which maintains a conservative view of human sexuality, is exclusive and hurtful.

Historically the church has taken a viewpoint different from what Hamilton suggests. And how do you get there? How do you seek truth and yet go against what has been taught through time? Sometimes this is right. The role of women in the church, Martin Luther, and slavery.

How do you determine what God's will is for an issue? I do believe Adam Hamilton believes he is in line with what God would have the church do? But how do we within the church work this through? Here is how not to do it:



Don't deal with it at all, it will go away

Look at what the world is doing then make the church look like that

Consider only how you *feel* about it. Or to just use human reasoning. "What I think..."

Apply the Bible word-for-word

Leviticus 18:22-23 (NRSV) ²² You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. ²³ You shall not have sexual relations with any animal and defile yourself with it, nor shall any woman give herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it: it is perversion.

Leviticus 20:10 (NRSV) ¹⁰ If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death.

We as followers of Christ seek God's authority primarily through Scripture, but bathed with prayer, depend upon the Holy Spirit to reveal and guide, use our reasoning ability, the community of other followers, and consider then how truth is experienced in our culture and context.

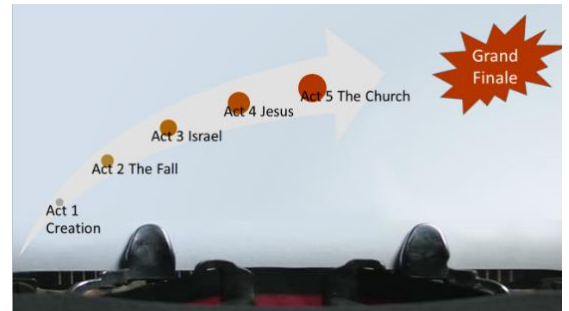


So when there is a new thinking I want to see how it fits into this process.

NT Wright is a former Anglican bishop and modern day theologian, the second character from my make-believe bar joke. You know of him for sure since I use him and his illustrations quite often. In his book Scripture and the Authority of God, he provides a framework by which we can navigate through a similar issue – polygamy. He demonstrates how to use the authority from Scripture to

understand what the church’s stance should be regarding polygamy. It is a different topic, but his reasoning and method provide the means to help us do the same regarding the expression of human sexuality. This helps us to answer that question, “What is good and what is intended?”

Recall it is Wright who views the Bible as *story* - a grand narrative that reveals God to us. Familiar! The story Stephen was trying to tell to the religious leaders of the day. The story can be considered as a five-act master play. Act 1 is the creation act where all that is created is “good”. In



Act 2, human sin ruins the good state and the relationship between people and God. God begins his restorative move in Act 3 by selecting a people, Israel, and a process by which humans can once again come to know their Creator. The Law is the means by which humans learn obedience, submission, and the character of God. In Act 4, Jesus brings fulfillment and completion of the Law by sacrificing himself for all humankind. Humans are provided forgiveness and righteousness by faith in Jesus’ saving act on a cross. We find ourselves in Act 5 living out a new covenant, empowered by Jesus’ work at the cross, his victory in the Resurrection, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. We are to know this story, know the trajectory of the story, know the end of the story, then we have liberty to play out our part in the story. What an awesome thing that is for you and me! To find our part and participate in this grand story of God and his people.

A simplification of this *grand story* is God made an original creation which was good and he is in the business of remaking it back to that good.⁴ What then of the question of marriage and what is

⁴ Wright, N. (2005). *Scripture and the Authority of God*. Harper Collins, p. 189.

marriage, what is good and what is right? The religious leaders of the day, with the intent of tripping Jesus up, ask him about divorce. He asks them to recite the law which comes from Act 3.

In that act we learned that there are provisions for a man to divorce his wife.

Mark 10:4 (NRSV) ⁴ They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." (quoting from Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

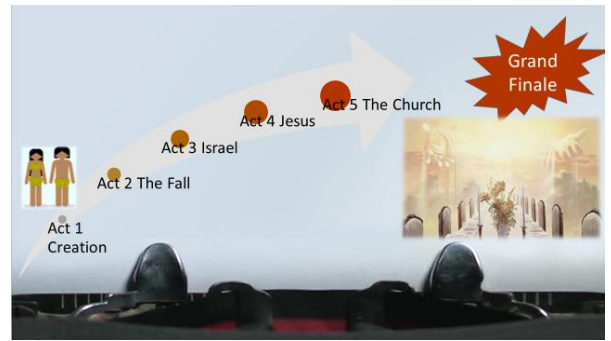
Jesus' response is that this law from Act 3 was put in place because of the hardness of people's hearts which began in Act 2. He takes the story back to Act 1, the beginning of creation, when all things were good. There, in Act 1, is the description of what the *original intended creation* was to be. *God is in the business of restoring that good creation*. It has been restored in Act 4 by Christ's work.

Mark 10:5-9 (NRSV) ⁵ But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart (ACT 2) he wrote this commandment for you. (ACT 3) ⁶ But from the beginning of creation, (ACT 1) 'God made them male and female.'⁷ 'For this reason (ACT 5 *restoring that good that was originally intended*) a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh.⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

We are then in Act 5 and in the middle of this process of restoration. We are a people that should be responding to what has happened in Act 4, understanding that we are part of restoring that which was originally intended as good. What then does this do for the church as she responds to the cultural questions regarding marriage and human sexuality? What was marriage depicted as in the original creation as good? Wright suggests that this "good" that God created was for a man and a woman to be joined as one.

It is interesting to note too that there is a wedding in the beginning of Genesis between a man and a woman. There is another wedding at the end of the book, at the end of Act 5, at the end of the play.

Revelation 19:6-8 (NRSV) ⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; ⁸ to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.



This is sometimes referred to as “the marriage supper of

the Lamb” where Jesus Christ is the bridegroom and the church (us and all his followers) are the bride. Paul speaks about this:

Ephesians 5:31-32 (NRSV) ³¹ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³² This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.

There is this mysterious connection between a human marriage and the relationship between Jesus and us, the church, his bride. Marriage is designed to glorify God by symbolically revealing the relationship between Christ and his church. Christ calls his bride to come. He purifies his bride. He pays the price for the bride. This relationship between Jesus and the church is put on display in a wedding and throughout the marriage. That needs to sink in deeply. Civil marriage is a contract, opposed to a covenantal relationship with God. The church views marriage much differently than a mere civil contract. As Jesus is one with the Father, Jesus and his church are to become one.

John 14:20 (NRSV) ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

Jesus praying to the Father:

John 17:22-23 (NRSV) ²² The glory that you [Father] have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

This man-woman, two-becoming-one mystery is spoken of in our United Methodist wedding ceremonies.

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the presence of these witnesses, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honorable estate, instituted of God, and signifying unto us the mystical union that exists between Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence in Cana of Galilee. It is therefore not to be entered into unadvisedly, but reverently, discreetly, and in the fear of God. Into this holy estate these two persons come now to be joined.⁵

Therefore, the expression of human sexuality, when the “a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”, is when it is expressed in this mysterious, God-given union of a man and woman in marriage. This gift was given to humans originally and declared “good.” Soon after, however, the good became broken. But Jesus came to restore that which was “good.”

When Jesus talked to his disciples about the wonderful, good, mysterious, sexual expression, the disciples began to realize the deeper and important meaning of marriage.

Matthew 19:10-12 (NRSV) ¹⁰ His disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." ¹¹ But he said to them, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. ¹² For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

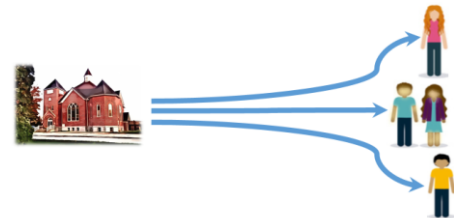
The disciples seem to be saying that the marital union is of such significance, it might be better to stay single than run the risk of bringing dishonor to the sacred union of marriage and its reflection of the union between Jesus and the Church and Jesus and the Father. Jesus, in vv. 11-12 does

⁵ UMC Book of Worship, A service of Christian Marriage II.

acknowledge that for some, celibacy is a good thing. Paul speaks about singleness and its advantages in being able to focus on God’s work and not be hindered by marriage and family issues.

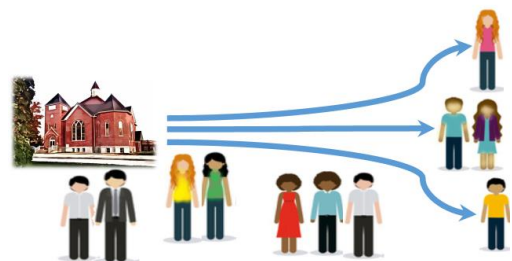
1 Corinthians 7:32-34 (NRSV) ³² I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; ³³ but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, ³⁴ and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband.

Regarding, then, the expression of human sexuality, there are two options that are regarded as “good” where we find ourselves in Act 5 – the restoration of the “good” creation – the oneness found in a marriage between one man and one woman



or the celibate single. This should be the influence of the church on the community. We are to be a people of God who promote the goodness of marriage AND the goodness of being single. The church should be this great influence on people and on the world regarding what is “good” about the expression of human sexuality.

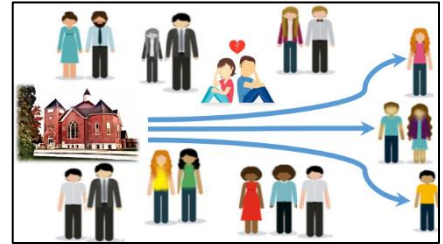
Unfortunately, there are other influences on this topic as well. And their voices are loud. And they would suggest alternatives for the expression of human sexuality: same-sex relationships, bi- sexual practice, and polyamorism



(more than two people) are forms of sexual expressions that are not in line with the “good” originally intended gift from God. Adam Hamilton says that what the United Methodist Church has most recently said is “hurtful to people.” He pushes back on language that “hurts people.” But that last statement I made, most likely is hurtful to some. There are many (and many within

the UMC) that are involved in sexual practices that are not consistent with that originally intended good gift. No doubt that hurts and is offensive.

But the hurt goes further. Because even within monogamous hetero-sexual marriages, I wonder if they are always about expressing themselves as God-centered union who are two that become one with God? Broken marriages, divorce and remarriage,



pre-marital cohabitation. Are they always about mutual submission and living out a life that reflects this wonderful and mysterious union of Jesus and the Church? Or does selfishness creep into sexual expression? Is sex ever used as a manipulative tool? Is there ever abuse? Extra-marital affairs – adultery. Is there ever lust or pornography?

Matthew 5:27-28 (NRSV) ²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

- The porn industry's annual revenue is more than the NFL, NBA and MLB combined. It is also more than the combined revenues of ABC, CBS and NBC.
- 68 percent of church-going men and over 50 percent of pastors view porn on a regular basis.⁶

Just the same, these miss the mark of being that which is good and like that which we were created for. Is that language “hurtful to people?” Sorry Adam Hamilton. It ought to hurt! That’s the truth part. We are a people about truth and what is good and true is what we ought to be about. And here’s the grace part: All those are welcome in the church. This church should be a place that welcomes and accepts everyone. Good thing otherwise no one would be here. The church’s job

⁶ <https://www.charismanews.com/us/73208-15-statistics-about-the-church-and-pornography-that-will-blow-your-mind>

is not to condemn, but accept which is not the same as affirming or approving of everything you do. We are to strive to promote that which we believe is good about the expression of human sexuality.

If our sexuality is to be expressed it is done in this *good* union created by God that exemplifies the mysterious and awesome love that Christ has for the church. This is what we, the church, are to be influencing. I don't want to get into your bedrooms, but I do want to get in your heart and your mind. We as a church are about standing for the goodness that God has given us. This is the voice that the church should have regarding human sexuality and we have been silent.

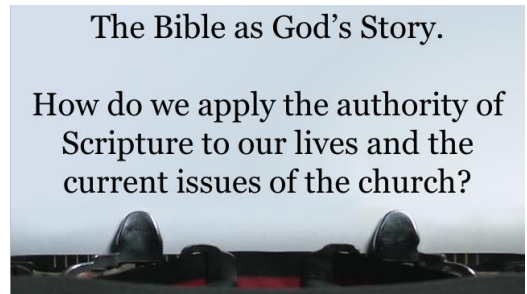
Adam Hamilton says there are those within his church “that have been born this way or shaped this way” meaning that there are many who are same-sex attracted that were either born with same-sex desires or developed same-sex desires. It's the nature / nurture point. What if there is an element of nurture? What if it is possible that sexuality is a development that is influenced in part by one's surrounding and culture? To me that puts tremendous responsibility on us. We are to be an influential factor on people as this aspect of their lives develop. In the past several decades, the world has been a strong influential force that often contradicts this understanding of human sexuality. But because the church is relatively silent, the world becomes the greater influence.

This church isn't silent now! Hopefully you've been given some things to consider. We simply do not base our thinking on our own feelings, but prayerfully and humbly seek God's will for us regarding this issue and really for all issues. Hopefully we will consider the great importance of Christian marriage and what it is and what it represents and respond accordingly in our own lives and how we relate with others.

“But what about these feelings?” “What about this desire I have had in me all my life?”

Clearly this is real. I hope you will come next week to hear from the third voice who is at the make-believe Grand Tavern.

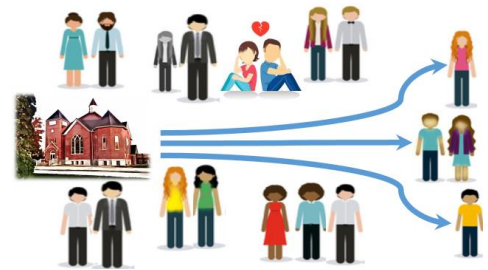
2 Corinthians 12:7-9 (NRSV) ⁷ ...to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. ⁸ Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, ⁹ but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.



Romans 7:15-25 (NRSV) ¹⁵ I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³ but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

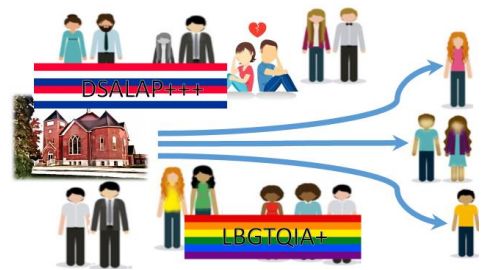
It is not clear what Paul's thorn was. Vision, health, etc. We don't know what things he was doing that was the sin living in him. Clearly there was a struggle. He had an element of his flesh that worked counter to the good he was to be living and it was a struggle. But we don't know the specifics. That is ok with me because it allows me to struggles. There are things in me that seem to be like a thorn in the side as well. Why do I still struggle with things of the flesh? Do the things I do not want to do? It seems sometimes that as your faith grows, these things would go away. That you would no longer struggle with pride, racism, gossip, slander.

Consider this idea as it relates to our discussion of the expression of our sexuality as our church fails to come to a way to move forward through its dilemma of determining how we should work through the growing community of LGBTQIA. From our discussion last week I stated that as a church we see sexual expression a good thing that is for a

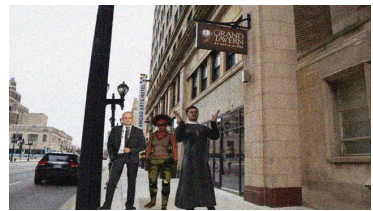


man and woman in the God-given covenant of marriage or not expressed as celibate singles. That is what is good and what was originally intended. Marriage and the one-ness reflect the mystical relationship between the church and Jesus. We as followers are to model that relationship. So all other expressions of sexuality are off of that mark. So all of those letters are incompatible with that which was originally deemed “good.”

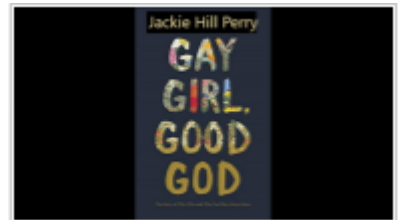
But what about the other letters Divorce, Selfishness, Abuse, Lust, Adultery, pre-marital cohabitation. We need our string of letters too and form a voice as well. DSALAP+++.



When you get down to it both groups of people who would identify in the LGBTQIA+ or the DSALAP+++ group have *feelings* things they want to do which are a deviation away from the good expression that God has given. They have a thorn in the flesh that is working against that which was designed to be good.



Intro to video Jackie Hill Perry [Gay Girl, Good God.](#)



As Hill was growing up in the church the “do’s and don’ts” were not worth listening to. “Satan, on the other hand, only told me to do what felt good, or what made sense to *me*.” God is good, all that he says is good, all that he created is good, even the things he requires of us, the things he commands of us are good. Hill says to live in his kind of goodness requires faith. Unbelief, or

lack of faith, “doesn’t see God as the ultimate good ... it instead sees sin as a good thing, a stumbling block to joy.”⁷

We spoke last week about our thinking and our feeling. We should not base what we believe to be right or wrong solely on those. Left alone our thinking and our feeling are flawed. We need to seek the authority of scripture and properly applying that authority to our life.



(the following section is heavy on quotes from Gay Girl Good God, not all were quoted in the sermon but are useful for reading ... or just get the book and read it!!!)

“Being born human meant that I had the capacity for affection and logic. Being born sinful meant both were inherently broken ... Desires exist because God gave them to us. But homosexual desires exist because sin does. Loving Him, as we were created to do, involves both the will and the affections, but sin steals this love God placed in us for Himself and tells it to go elsewhere. Sin had taken hold of the heart and turned it toward something lesser. Same-sex desires are actual. Though born of sin, they aren’t an imaginary feeling one conjures up for the sake of being different. But the actuality of the affection doesn’t make them morally justifiable. It is the mind, when conformed to the image of sin, that moves us to call evil good simply because it feels good to us.”⁸

I have heard a lot of people say how difficult it would be if their child came and said that they had same-sex attractions. Or how hard it was when it actually happened. (it is interesting how many people seem to be on the progressive side of this issue *because* someone close to them or in their family “came out”). There seems to be a different deal to the child who admits same-sex attraction than the boy who is caught viewing pornographic images of women or that he is talking with the other boys about the sexy body of a girl. It is all off the mark. If sexuality is to be expressed,

⁷ Perry, J. H. (2018). *Gay Girl, Good God The Story of Who I was and Who God Has Always Been*. Nashville: B&H Publishing (Kindle version), Location 230.

⁸ Perry, Location 238.

God's good plan for that is in the context of a man and a woman in marriage. Any variance from that is sin. And we all have this bent to work against what God has called good.

“God was not a Las Vegas chaplain or an impatient mother, intent on sending a man my way to "cure" me of my homosexuality. He was God. A God after my whole heart, desperate to make it new. Committed to making it like Him. In my becoming Holy as He is, I would not be miraculously made into a woman that didn't like women; I'd be made into a woman that loved God more than anything. If marriage ever came or singleness called me by name, He wanted to guarantee by the work of His hands that both would be lived unto Him. (To my surprise, years later, marriage did come. But in God calling me, it was not for me to find a man to love. Or to live as if my same-sex attractions weren't a reality; it was to love God with all my heart, mind, and soul [Matthew 22:36-37]”⁹

“The struggle with homosexuality was a battle of faith. To give in to temptation would be to give into unbelief. To decide that the body mattered more than God, or that the pleasure of sin would sustain all that I am better than He. It was incredible how real and tangible and persistent they could be, but their power was an illusion, Jesus had already proven that temptation could be defeated, and He already promised to help me when I came to His throne of grace for it. It was up to me to believe Him, His Word was authoritative, active, sharp. In it, God spoke and showed us what He is like, how much better He was than anything that had been made, how eligible He was to be our joy, our peace, our portion, how trusting Him, if even a little at a time, would move mountains, the biggest one, being me. These Scriptures were a weapon, a sword, that when used would defeat the flesh. My faith in them would be a shield, that when placed in front of the body would distinguish all satanic attacks coming toward it.”¹⁰

A common lie thrown far and wide is that if salvation has truly come to someone who is same-sex attracted, then those attractions should immediately vanish. To be cleansed by Jesus, they presume, is to be immune to the enticement of sin. This, we know not to be true because of Jesus. He being completely perfect and yet He still experiences temptation: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4: 15). It should be expected then that any who would follow Him as Lord would still find themselves urged to do what ought not to be done. That they would at times sense in their bodies the temptation to obey it and not God. I (and all humans) had the unique disadvantage of having given into the passions of the body so easily and so often before Christ that after coming under His Lordship, learning how to experience same-sex attraction and not act on it was frustrating. To me, it would've been easier if when God cleansed me of my sin, He also took the taste for it out of my mouth. But even He could understand the grace needed to flee a flavorless feast, at a greater depth than I ever would.¹¹

⁹ Perry, Location 684.

¹⁰ Perry, Location 875.

¹¹ Perry, Location 851.

As Jeff Vanderstelt stated so well, “The gospel doesn’t just bring about forgiveness of sins and save us from hell. The gospel of Jesus Christ empowers us to live a whole new life today by the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead.” How is it then that I would think that God would provide another way for me to walk freely that did not find its pulse in His gospel? I was not to assume that the gospel was only an introduction to Jesus. I needed to cling to, meditate on, trust in, and believe always, this gospel daily, with the same kind of unhindered desperation that led me to it the first time. In being anchored in this gospel, I would be holding onto God.¹²

[SSA] men and women are referred to as an SSA Christian because, though they have been renewed by the power of the Spirit, they are still tempted by the flesh to do what is displeasing to God, namely, to submit to all disordered versions of sexuality. I only use the designation to be specific about to whom it is that I am speaking, or about, as it relates to the topic at hand. To be clear, I am not implying that because these men and women are still tempted with SSA, that they bear the identity of what some would call a “Gay Christian.” Again, as I said before, I don’t believe it is wise or truthful to the power of the gospel to identify oneself by the sins of one’s past or the temptations of one’s present but rather to only be defined by the Christ who’s overcome both for those He calls His own. All men and women, including myself, that are well acquainted with sexual temptation are ultimately not what our temptation says of us. We are what Christ had done for us; therefore, our ultimate identity is very simple: We are Christians.¹³

This is how the story becomes one’s story. Jackie Hill Perry here has seen this story. She has come to know God, sin, temptation, forgiveness, and has found a way to center her life on the center of this great story, Jesus. It is here where she finds her identity, her part in the story. She plays this part of confession to the world her sin, her bent toward that which is not good. She admits that the temptations still exist but she lives for the story, the author of the story, the center of the story and finds her identity there. She professes to us that her feelings are inferior to her faith. She has decided to live by that which is commanded rather than a set of feelings that may deceptively provide good feelings. Real goodness, she has found, is in her faith in God.

IDENTITY IS A BIG deal. It, like a language we carry on our faces, says a lot of what we believe about God, ourselves, and others. Unable to help itself, it will determine the “how” that governs our steps. The way we move about the world can always be traced back to the question, “Who am I today?” and “What is God always?” The question is one of incredible importance for born-again Christians that are yet and still SSA. The world we find ourselves in has made sexuality central to our identity. An identity where pride is

¹² Perry, Location 1026.

¹³ Perry, Location 1458.

demonstrated by waving a promise made after God destroyed the world with water. Gayness is not just a way to act but a way to be. It is, as they say, “Just who you are.” LGBT culture has done an excellent job of renewing or should I say, destroying, the mind of many, mainly by consistently using words as their greatest tool in their efforts to draw people into finding greater joy in identifying with their sin rather than their Creator. Once sanctification begins in the life of a believer that has SSA, mind renewal has also begun. A beautiful miracle in which God enters in and starts turning the heart into the cathedral it was intended to be. As the heart is, the mind is also. A new heart is the beginning of a new mind, but there is still effort needed on our end. We don’t just sit back and expect great fruitfulness to come from minimal zeal. We work alongside God to “act the miracle” (see Philippians 2: 12-13) of sanctification into its grandest potential.¹⁴

Philippians 2:12-13 (NRSV) ¹² Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So, the burden for SSA Christians—when it comes to identity—is not to learn more about themselves or to “become a better you” as an entry into self-empowerment. It is to renew the mind so that men and women begin seeing themselves in light of who God has revealed Himself to be so that they can glorify Him in the ways He commanded. This happens among community, with much prayer, and with a consistent, thoughtful internalizing of the Word of God.¹⁵

Both, the isolated Christian and the isolating Christian are a part of a family, a body, an organism of human beings with different sins and the same Savior. Even if many Christians cannot understand the specific struggle of SSA, all Christians can understand the general struggle of sin. It is this body that God has made us all a part of - to sanctify the saints, equip the saints for ministry, and reveal God in deeper ways to the saints. It was true then, and it is true now, that man was not meant to be alone. And by the grace of God, we are not and will never be.¹⁶

For the unbeliever that is SSA, God is not mainly calling them to be straight; He’s calling them to Himself. To know Christ, love Christ, serve Christ, honor Christ, and exalt Christ, forever. When He is the aim of their repentance, and the object of their faith, they are made right with God the Father and given the power by the Holy Spirit to deny all sin—sexual and otherwise. Someone trying to pursue heterosexuality and not holiness is just as far from right standing with God as someone actively pursuing homosexuality. And in fact, when an SSA Christian pursues heterosexuality as the goal instead of Christ, they will ultimately find themselves merely replacing one idol for the other. Through abiding in Him and walking in the holiness that no one can see without the Lord (Hebrews 1 2214), SSA Christians, even when alive to same-sex temptations, are able to choose God over their previous sexual identity. Their identity as image—bearers, and not their sexual impulses, is the primary identifier that many SSA men and women desperately need to hear from the

¹⁴ Perry, Location 1473.

¹⁵ Perry, Location 1491.

¹⁶ Perry, Location 1577.

pulpits and the pews. If sexuality was their (and our) primary identity, then that would make sexuality our primary call. But we were not ultimately made for sex; we were made for God and His glory alone (Col. 1:16).¹⁷

We have been discussing the issue of human sexuality because it has surface as a main problem denominationally as the UMC tries to muddle through the issue and its pain it has caused within the church. But hopefully you have seen that we have taken the issue to a deeper level – to that of truth. Truth that we see that God has revealed to us through scripture. We are a people who are not governed solely by our own thoughts and feelings, but rather by the authority we find prescribed by God and that is good.

We run a tremendous risk deviating from that which God has commanded.

Genesis 3:1 (NIV) ¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, ...

This is where we are at in the church. We, I believe, are at a point not unlike Genesis 3:1. “Did God really say”

- **Genesis 2:24 (NIV)** ²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.
- **Romans 1:24-27 (NIV)** ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen. ²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.
- **1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NIV)** ⁹ Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

¹⁷ Perry, Location 1789.

When we begin to question the goodness of God revealed to us, we begin to place our trust in something other than him. Perhaps our feelings or our reasoning. We believe in something other than God. That is simply idolatry. How important is it that we be a people who are discerning correctly the authority of God? How important then is it that we be a people who are grounded in Scripture, confessing of our sins, a people of prayer, a community of believers who seek God to reveal his truth?

Yet we must realize this is much deeper than a homosexual issue. We've seen the model by which sexuality is to be expressed, but within heterosexual relations, there is also so much that misses the mark. We all are sinners who struggle and therefore welcome others to the struggle and work to connect more deeply with our Savior.

You and I are players in the grand story of God. Each of us, no doubt, has struggles that run counter to the goodness God has declared for us. For some it is sexual in nature, for others it is pride, it is self-centeredness. For some it is gossiping and finding ways to put others beneath you. For some it is greed. For some it is dependency like pornography, gambling, alcohol, tobacco, or drugs. For some it is racism. For some it is hatred.

“When salvation has taken place in the life of someone under the sovereign hand of God, they are set free from the penalty of sin *and* its power. In a body without the Spirit, sin is an unshakable king under whose dominion no man can flee. The entire body, with its members, affections, and mind all willfully submit themselves to sin's rule. But when the Spirit of God takes back the body that He created for Himself, He sets it free from the pathetic master that once held it captive and releases it into the marvelous light of its Savior. It is then able to not only want God, but it is actually able to obey God. And isn't that what freedom is supposed to be? The ability to not do as I please, but the power to do what is pleasing.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Perry, Location 835.

I want to be a play my part in this story well. And my hope is you do to. I want to be part of a body that stands for and teaches what is good and what is right. I want to be a part of a church that proclaims truth even when it may be hurtful or uncomfortable. But I also want to be a church that is accepting and not condemning. I want to welcome those like Jackie Hill Perry who struggle with humanity but find their real identity in Christ. I want to acknowledge that we all struggle with varying things, none of which define us. I want to be a place where what is proclaimed is the power of the cross and the resurrection sets us free from the penalty of sin *and* its power. We have the resources to be renewed in ways that bring the greatest purpose to our lives by glorifying him.

Links to videos from each of the three characters from “The Grand Tavern” can be found at pleasantchapel.org

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