

Sometimes an amazing thing happens. We read over something for 40 years, and we take it for granted. But then we dig in a little more deeply, and we see words that convey an idea that is so beautiful, and so profound. This has struck me in the last day regarding these words that we just heard. A slightly different version of the words says this:

The LORD God built the rib that he had taken from the human into a woman and brought her to the human. The human said “This time, she is it! Bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh! She will be called Ishah, for from Ish she was taken! Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. Now the two of them, the human and his wife, were nude, yet they were not ashamed.”

I did some deeper digging on this, and I found something so special. According to this very ancient and profound story, the woman, Ishah, is originally a part of the Ish, and he wants to cling to this part of himself in order to be whole. The two separate persons are somehow turned into one being as they cling to each other, literally one flesh. Of course this is often seen as resulting in a baby brought into life. Either way, the two persons clinging to each other becoming one flesh, or, the creation of a new little baby, both things are profound. And this should be a serious spiritual reminder for us as children of God.

Humans are not just animals that run around mating like rabbits or cats. We are not a part of nature. We are spirits in bodies. What we do with our bodies directly connects to the

spirit within us, so it matters what we do with our bodies. And so, we have our topic for this Sunday in Lent. Let us walk this road together for a while.

I have to share a sad memory from childhood and young adulthood: I grew up very active in our local Methodist and then United Methodist church. I went to Sunday School and Church, and then often Youth Group on Sunday night, back in the time when people could actually give more than one hour to God. I was in church every week. As I look back, and, I do have a good memory, so as I look back, I do not remember hearing ONE word about sexuality from the time I was an upper elementary school kid, or junior high, or senior high. I was interested in girls from the time I was in Kindergarten. I didn't know what sexuality was (we didn't have that in school when I was growing up, as it was only for the girls) but I sure knew that I liked girls and was very interested in them. And yet, I never heard a word about how any of this business was supposed to be dealt with or approached. Not a word. Well, guess what? I was curious, and very interested about girls.

So, when it came time to learn about anything significant that had to do with them and how I might relate to them, there was only silence. I heard nothing in any way from my church, from my youth group, from a Pastor. Nothing. So, I learned what I learned from other boys, whether in Boy Scouts or school or where ever. It seems that this is what happens when we as a church decide to stay silent. If we as the Church decide that that is not something to mention, or to provide some kind of

guidance, then we are giving our kids to the culture around us. Our kids will be raised by Lady Gaga or Madonna, or someone else in the media world. Could you imagine what our kids might learn if we, the Church, were not here to offer something for them in this crucial area of life? They would surely learn something. But it might not be very good.

Let me interject just a quick thought before I need to move along: in the Muslim world, lots of people look to the West to Europe, and North America, and they see drunkenness and drugs, and they see hyper-sexuality! They see crazy things, and dirty things, everywhere. And they say that we are doing it wrong. In their cultures people wear clothing that is loose fitting on purpose so that you cannot make out every detail of a person's body. And we laugh at them for having their women wear a covering on their heads or basically a big robe on their bodies. But they do that on purpose, because they believe that physical things between two people belong to those who are committed only to each other. Those people can see what is under the loose fitting clothing because it is proper for them in that context. I am not suggesting we all start wearing big robes to cover our bodies. But we need to not wear suggestive things which permit other people to not have to imagine very much to wonder what's under our clothes. So, let's keep that in our thoughts somewhere on this issue.

Speaking of people who wear a specific kind of clothing in our culture, I always love to tell a story about some young ladies who were a part of a different culture like that. Fourteen years

ago, I taught for a few semesters at Malone College, an evangelical Christian college in Canton (Jill actually taught counseling courses there too). In 2004 and 2005 I had taught courses with 45 kids in the class, and I would have an entire flock of Mennonite girls from Hartville all sitting in a row in their white hats and shoes, and blue dresses, all very discreet and proper. And I will never forget what happened when we were studying the beginning of Genesis. We came to the part where it spoke of Adam “knowing” his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore a son. And I always would take a minute to talk about this “knowing” business.

It would only take a minute, but I would basically say the following: the wise people from ancient Israel used a very interesting word to refer to this intimate clinging that would take place between two people, resulting in a child being born. Why would those ancient people use the word Yawdah, the word “to know?” Well, for one, they didn’t have very many words. So words often had double duty. But why that word? Well, I would tell them that maybe there is a message in this word. And the message is, **the only way in which this knowing is proper and not destructive is for it to happen with two people who are committed only to each other, and who are willing to spend their lives in knowing each other’s hearts and fears and dreams and hopes. If you are going to do this special knowing, it is designed for those who are going to spend years and years and years**

getting to know everything about each others hearts, not just their bodies.

Well, I would set that out for them, and I would have this row of 8 Mennonite girls frantically writing all this down and smiling, like they had just learned the secrets of the universe! I guess they never heard anything at their churches about this either! But it's right there in Genesis. People are going to cling, and people are going to know. And it is a sacred and spiritual thing. It is sacramental, it is holy. It is not a toy, or a joke, or some way to have power over someone else or to intentionally hurt them. It is sacred. And we must teach this to our children. Our Confirmation kids heard this from me a few weeks ago, because we hit that spot in Genesis. Not quite the same reaction as the Mennonite girls, but still appreciated I think.

I finally realized last night that out of the 10 Commandments, 2 of them have to do with sexuality, numbers 7 and 10. #7 says "No Adultery," and #10 says "You are not to desire your neighbor's wife (or husband)." People always get hung up on this idea that they are not supposed to desire anything in life. Well, that is not what it says. It says that you must NOT desire someone that you cannot rightfully have because that person is not available! It is completely wrong to look at someone with great hopes that you might take them away from their marriage and their family because of your desire which is probably more than a bit sexual.

We live in a sex-crazed culture, in case you haven't noticed. People wear things that don't cover up much. This probably is

not going to change. But one thing can change: we can talk about things in our church, with our people, and especially with our kids as they grow older. And, not only do we need to talk to them about these things, but we need to distill the wisdom of our ancestors from Genesis, and share these healthy and sacred ideas with our kids and young adults. Whatever age we might be, what do we do if a younger relative approaches us with questions about sexuality, and they are sincerely seeking some kind of good advice, what do we do when they ask us what this is all about? What might we tell them? I hope they will be told more than I was. Will we give them something that will be helpful for their lives, and their fragile hearts? Or will we leave them for the world? May God guide us as we try to offer wisdom for life, especially as it pertains to crucially important things like these. AMEN.