



1 Corinthians 16:13-14

Pastor Charlie Berthoud | Sermon for Sunday, February 13, 2022

Sex can be wonderful, and sex can cause great damage.

“Like nitroglycerin, [sex] can be used either to blow up bridges or heal hearts.”

In the six weeks of our “Let’s Talk About Sex” series, we’ve seen the truth of this quote, from Presbyterian author Frederick Buechner.

I don’t know much of anything about nitroglycerin, but if it can blow things up, it must be handled carefully, deliberately, purposefully. And if it can heal hearts, we should learn as much as we can about how to use it well.

This is how we talk about using the gifts God has given us, like time, talent, and treasure—which we call stewardship.

Maybe it’s time for us to start thinking about stewardship of sex and

sexuality.

Stewardship in a narrow sense is about church finances. We have stewardship campaigns to provide funding for the operations and outreach of the church. That's stewardship in a basic sense.

In a broader and biblical sense, stewardship is about how we use the time, talent, and treasure entrusted to us for the common good, for the sake of God's Kingdom.

Those of you who worship with us regularly have heard me say that the time of offering isn't just about money. We are called to us what we've been given to serve God, to love neighbors, to make a difference in the world—to OFFER our words and deeds, our particular skills and experiences, our resources of time and money and anything else.

God has given us the gift of sex and sexuality. God has entrusted to our care our bodies and our relationships. God has blessed us with the goodness of touch, sensuality, and orgasm.

Like with our money and with our time and with our various talents, we are called to utilize these gifts carefully and appropriately, to glorify God and to make this world a better place.

Our scripture lesson for today comes from the end of a long letter about Christian theology and life, with encouragement on how to live. I invite you to hear these words with reflection on your bodies, your relationships, your sexual hopes and experiences:

“Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” --1 Corinthians 16:13-14

Pastor and author Rob Bell has a fascinating book called *Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections Between Sexuality and Spirituality*.

The subtitle invites us to think about sex and sexuality in light of our faith, in light of God.

Near the end of the book he points out that the Bible ends with a vision of the new heaven and new earth, with the image of marriage. In Revelation 21 we read:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.... And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” --Rev 21.1-2

He talks about sex—consensual, mutual, respectful—as a brief moment of escape, when all is right. And he asks:

“Is sex a picture of heaven?” (p. 165)

That might be a good way to end the book, but Rob Bell has one more chapter. He tells about a wedding he officiated between two people who had been through a lot of pain. They were very happy on their wedding day.

But a few years later things went bad, and they got a divorce. Bell writes that he ends the book this way because life is risky and messy. But in the midst of the mess God is with us. Bell writes (p. 171):

“I have to believe that we can recover from anything. I have to believe that God can put anything—anyone—back together. I have to believe that the God Jesus invites us to trust is as good as he says he is.

Loving.
Forgiving.
Merciful.
Full of grace.”

During this six-week series, I’ve heard from lots of people about sex and sexuality. Stories of hurt and regret, tales of frustration and confusion, yearnings of hope. I haven’t met anyone who has it all figured out yet.

So we journey onward with the mistakes of the past, with the hurts that we carry, in our frail and flawed bodies, doing the best we can, to remember that God is loving, forgiving, merciful, and full of grace. In other words, remembering that we are all beloved children of God.

If we were worshipping in person today, each of you would get a sticker that says “YOU ARE LOVED.” I’m sad we’re not physically together, but we do have plenty of stickers. Contact the church office if you want to pick one up or if we can mail you one.

Maybe you don’t need one, but maybe someone in your life needs one.

I’m more convinced than ever that we need to do all we can to remember that God loves us.

We need to keep repeating the message and to soak up that love, because so many of us are scarred and hurting, and too many of us have scarred or hurt others.

Nadia Bolz-Weber concludes her book *Shameless* talking about learning to live with our scars, encouraging us to do the ongoing hard work of appreciating our bodies and loving each other in healthy ways.

She shares a poem called “Baptism” by a poet named Ted Thomas, a poem I’ve seen in several places.

“Cold wind.
I help my father
into the shower
with his good hand
he grips my arm for support.
Inside he sits like Buddha on a plastic stool
and waits for me
to begin.

I drench him
with warm water,
soap his head, his back, the flabby stomach,
the private parts private no more.

I had not before seen my father’s nakedness,
nor the changing contour of his being,
his growing helplessness.
His brown skin glistens
and I think of him
as a young man on the night of my conception:
Panting, capable, shining with sweat and definition,
the soft hands of my mother grasping his shoulders.
I pat him dry,
he lets me dress him in the white hospital clothes,
oil his hair,
put him to bed
and forgive him.”

We are born into these incredible vessels called bodies which include the nitroglycerin-like gift of sex. We are all broken and hurting in various ways. We need to keep replenishing our souls with the love of God, and we need to do what we can to help others heal as well.

We need to remember that Jesus was born in the flesh, to dwell among us, as a human, full of grace and truth, with a message of forgiveness and love for the world, love for all of us.

Tomorrow is Valentines Day! It's is a great day to celebrate love. But it wouldn't be very good to only express our love on Valentine's Day. We need to celebrate and work on love well beyond one day in mid February.

Having a six-week series on sex and sexuality is great, but the conversations and the learning and the healing need to continue.

So even though this "Let's Talk About Sex" series is ending, I guess we need to keep talking, thinking, working, praying.

Maybe we keep talking about God and love and relationships and all the challenging and helping things in the Bible.

Maybe the next time you hear something about stewardship, you could ponder how you're doing as a steward of your body and your sexuality.

Maybe you get a sticker or share a sticker and really remember that you are a beloved child of God.

And maybe we all do our best to keep alert, to be courageous and strong, and to let everything we say and do be done in love. Amen.