

**“Sex: Why Wait?”**  
**Genesis 1:26-31, Matthew 19:1-6**  
**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**July 1, 2007**

When God recognized that, despite a tremendous amount of hard, creative work, there was not yet a helper fit for the man, the great “I Am” slipped him an Ambein, brought out the divine tool bag, and then removed a rib from the man’s side. God then took that rib and hammered and sawed and sawed and hammered until a whole other creature had been created—one that complimented Adam just perfectly. Where he was strong she was weak and vice versa. Where he was impulsive and never asked for directions, she was thoughtful and extremely good at finding garage sales. Where he was tough and chiseled, she was soft and very, very curvy. When finished with this new creation, God went over and shook the man’s shoulder. “Adam, wake up! Look what I’ve made for you!” After rubbing the sleep from his eyes, the man looked and immediately started writing poetry. That’s what you do when you’re in love, right? “Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh; taken from me, woman you’ll be.” It was a great day. God had created them for each other. The bond between a husband and wife, you see, is rooted in God’s creative act. It is why the man leaves his father and mother, cleaves to his wife, and the two become one. For the longest time they just stood there looking at each other, naked as the day they were born. And, my, oh my, *they liked it!*

Let me remind you again that for the next few weeks I am going to preach a series of sermons that I hope will generate some dinner table discussion. I want to talk about some of the issues that affect the young people in our church and our community, give what I believe to be the perspective of our faith, and then let them go home and have a discussion with their families. After all, home and family are where values are formed and those most important decisions are first made. There are no more important people in a young person’s life than his or her adult family members. Even though they would probably never admit it, they want to know what they think about things. This is that opportunity to do something about it. You may or may not agree with what I have to say. You may even think that some of these topics I have chosen are inappropriate for Sunday

worship. But what I hope will happen with this series, and the whole purpose of today's sermon, is for you to take the information I give, go home, and talk about it openly and honestly as a family.

And that is really important when it comes to decisions about how we will live our lives sexually. When Bill Ritter and I were in seminary, we took a class on teaching human sexuality to young people in the church. Since God created us male and female, and since everything that God created is good, we were taught that it is totally appropriate to talk about this topic in that place where God's people come together. The class Bill and I took was taught by the Rev. Wayne Banks, one of the favorite professors of our particular generation of Perkins students. Wayne had a great sense of humor, knew his Bible forward and backward, and loved to say things that would raise our eyebrows. So with his deep West Texas twang, Wayne once told us: "The absolute worst place for young people to make decisions about sexuality is in the back seat of a car." Now that may sound a little crass, but that's the truth. It's too way too late then. One's values must be in place and one's decisions must be made long before situations like that ever have the chance to occur. There has never been a more important time to make those decisions than today. And there has never been a better place to start the discussion than right here in God's house. Don't believe me?

Then take a look at the biblical witness. I have already told you that sex and sexuality was rooted in God's creative act. The tale I told you at the beginning was from the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Genesis. It is sort of the campfire version of the creation story. The first chapter of Genesis presents the more liturgical version. There we find that humankind, the crowning achievement of the created order, was fashioned by God in God's very own image. God created both male and female in the divine image, and then God told male and female to be fruitful and multiply—a definite reference to the full measure of sexual activity. God then looked at male and female in every way that they had been created and saw that it was very good. Despite other ways of thinking that have sometimes crept into our theology and said that it is not, the Bible is consistent in presenting sex and our sexuality as one of the good gifts from God. The ancient psalmist wrote that we were

“fearfully and wonderfully made,” and the more modern science learns about our bodies, the more we know, for instance, how certain hormones cause that very natural attraction between men and women or how human touch is vital for our development and well being or how our sexuality involves so much more than just what happens with our genitals, the more we know that is true. Sex and our sexuality is that which was from the beginning—God’s plan not only for populating the world, but for bringing a husband and wife closer together as well. Everything God creates is good. It is humankind, not God, who sometimes corrupts the good gifts that are given, as we find detailed so well in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Genesis. When humans use the gifts that are given as God intends, then it is good, very good. When we don’t, it can be very, very bad.

That is a message that we find throughout the story of Holy Scripture. There are times when God’s good gift, used in the way God intended it to be used, is a wonderful thing. Read the story of Jacob’s love for Rachel or the relationship between Boaz for Ruth or the very sensuous love poem that it is said that King Solomon wrote to his wife and see if you don’t agree. Each of those couples reveled in their sexuality, and when they did, God saw that it was good. There are other times, however, when it was not so good. There are other times when the good gift of God was not used as God intended it to be used. And when that happened, the consequences were disastrous. Read the story of the rape of Dinah or David’s adultery with Bathsheba or that awful time when Israel’s unfaithfulness was compared to the unfaithfulness of Hosea’s wife and see if you don’t agree. When shared between a husband and a wife, sexuality is a wonderful gift. The two, as Jesus confirmed, become one. But all sorts of complications happen when the opposite takes place.

It is that clear message of Holy Scripture that has led our United Methodist Church to state in our Social Principles: *“We recognize that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. We believe that persons may be fully human only when that gift is acknowledged and affirmed by themselves, the church, and society. We call all persons to the disciplined, responsible fulfillment of themselves, others, and society in the*

*stewardship of this gift.*”<sup>1</sup> As United Methodists, we believe that our sexuality is an integral part of our lives. God made us sexual beings just as surely as God made us spiritual beings. And we are called to be responsible with the good gift God has given us. That is why our Social Principles, standing firmly in line with the scriptures, also goes on to say: “*Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are only clearly affirmed in the marriage bond.*”<sup>2</sup> Our denomination, this church that some complain is far too “liberal,” has historically affirmed that God’s good gift was intended to find its fullest expression in the love between a husband and a wife. It is there, in the midst of a loving, committed, nurturing relationship, that all of the aspects connected with our sexuality seem to come together in the most complimentary of ways.

But it is obvious that our society is moving another way. Most of our young people already know this, having been taught in school, but I think it bears repeating. Recent statistics from the Center for Disease Control state that in 2006, 46.8% of all high school students nationwide reported that they had chosen to engage in sexual intercourse—obviously doing so outside the bonds of marriage. That includes 63.1% of seniors, 51.4% of juniors, 42.8% of sophomores, and 34.3% of freshmen. It was also reported that 6.2% of high school students reported that they had intercourse before the age of 13. We seem to lag somewhat behind the curve here in Nebraska, as only 40.8% of high school students reported the same. Some of the consequences of that choice were as follows: it has been reported that 82% of all pregnancies in women between the ages of 15-19 were unintended, and of those pregnancies, 40% resulted in abortion. In 2005 there were 3,173 abortions in our state. Of those abortions, girls between the ages of 12-15 had 42 of them. Also, 45.5% of all the abortions that took place in our state happened right here in Douglas County. Abortion, of course, brings a whole other set of problems which, due to their length, will have to be addressed elsewhere. Of those who chose to have their children, however, a many other problems arose. Currently there are 60,403 single mothers in Nebraska. Of that group, 21% did not finish high school and 28% have only a

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<sup>1</sup> The Book of Discipline of the UMC, The United Methodist Publishing House, Nashville, 2004, p.100

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 100

high school degree—facts that severely limit a vast number of future life choices. Here in Nebraska, over 29% of that same group lives below the poverty line. Statistics prove that sex outside of marriage can result in all kinds of problems.

The CDC listed several other statistics jumped out at me. One was that 11.9% of high school students nationwide had been tested for HIV. Nearly one half of the 40,000 Americans that are infected each year with that deadly disease are under the age of 25 and more than half of those are women. And while progress has been made in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of other sexually transmitted diseases, the CDC reports that 19 million new infections occur each year, the majority appearing in young people between the ages of 15-24. And don't think that being out here on the edge of the city makes us immune from the problem. The Douglas County Health Department reports that while the rate of STDs in the 68022 zip code is lower than in those zip codes east of here, the rate of increase is greater here than in other parts of the city. It seems that we are quickly doing our part to catch up with everyone else. Mayor Fahey would be proud that the folks of Elkhorn are so quickly becoming just like the rest of Omaha.

The statistics are alarming. The threat is real. Obviously, the one sure way for our young people to avoid all of that is to abstain from sexual intercourse until they are married. Those who choose not to wait, however, should be well prepared long before the time comes to do everything possible to protect themselves. The difference between the time when I grew up and today is that being sexually active cannot only get you pregnant, you can also “get you dead!” So if you choose to ignore the advice offered by scripture, science, parents, and good common sense, be safe. But please know that “Safe Sex” is truly a misnomer. There really is no such thing. The only 100% effective way of preventing pregnancy, a whole host of unwanted STDs, and the consequences that both entail is abstinence. Yet I am not here to scare anyone this morning. I have never thought that fear is a good reason to do anything. You can't frighten a person into making life-changing decisions. That's one reason why you will never hear me preach one of those “fire and brimstone” sermons. Jesus never scared or “guilt-ed” anyone into the kingdom of God. Neither will I. So why should our young people wait? When peer pressure is so

great, when the media is bombarding us with messages that say the time is now, and when our own bodies are telling to go ahead and do it, why wait until one is married to have sex?

Well, let's lay aside the biblical and theological considerations for a moment, and let me offer five very practical reasons to do so. I admit that they are not original with me.<sup>3</sup> Our young people have probably heard them before. But perhaps it is important to hear them again, and this time from their pastor. The first of these reasons has to do with relationships. Sex is a very intimate act. It involves so much more than just your body. A whole suitcase full of emotions usually accompanies it. If one or both of the partners are not ready for where those emotions can often lead, it can unnecessarily complicate a relationship. Those relationships that work best are built upon a foundation of respect, honesty, loyalty, and caring. A foundation that is built with those qualities takes time. Don't be in a hurry. Take the time to build your relationship right.

The second has to do with pressure. Abstaining from sex is a choice and it's your choice. If your partner is pressuring you to have sex, then he or she is disrespecting your choice and also disrespecting you. It is no big secret that relationships that last are never built upon disrespect. You don't have to prove yourself or your love to anyone. Choosing not to have sexual intercourse allows young persons to make deliberate decisions about when, where and how to best express their sexuality. And please remember that no matter if it is your boyfriend or girlfriend, sex under pressure or sex without consent is called rape. And there is certainly no respect or love in that particular very despicable act.

The third reason to wait also has to do with pressure, but in a different kind of way. If you decide to wait until marriage, then the pressure and stress that comes from worrying about an unintended pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease is off. You can then be free to concentrate on building your relationship with one another, a relationship built upon love, trust, common interests, as well as all the other things that make couples

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<sup>3</sup> These ideas were found at <http://ezinearticles.com/5-Reasons-To-Choose-Abstinence>

click, and not just the desire to have sex. And when the time comes to give the gift of your body to that special someone, it will truly be a celebration.

Being different is the fourth reason. Oh, you have heard this one before, haven't you? Perhaps it was your mother who said to you, "If everyone else jumped off a bridge, would you jump too?" As dumb as that sounds, there is a grain of truth behind it. To engage in one of life's most intimate acts simply because everyone else is, is to do so for absolutely the wrong reason. Now I understand peer pressure. It is not just the property of young people, you know. It permeates all parts of life no matter your age. But you have missed the ethical boat if you do anything in life simply because your friend, your classmate, your coworker, or your neighbor is doing so. Take a stand and be your own person.

Finally, marriage is the last reason. Wait until your married, but not for the silly reasons you so often hear. I want to let our young people in on a little secret. They can tell their friends that they heard it from their pastor. Most of us who are older already know this. Ready? The most sensitive sex organ you have will not be found below your belt, but between your ears. And because that is so, the best sex in the whole wide world happens when that which you find up there is filled with love, trust, and commitment—all those qualities upon which the absolute best marriages are built. So why settle for something less than the best? Wait until that love, trust, and commitment become an integral part of your life.

But as good and practical as those reasons may be, I would like to remind you once more of the most important reason to wait. From the very beginning of the world, that has been God's plan for us, not because God is some kind of prude who doesn't want us to have any fun, but because God knows that this is the best way for us to live happy, fulfilled lives. Our faith has always proclaimed that ours is a personal God who continues in relationship with and expresses personal concern over the world he created. God does so not to see if we are "living right" or "obeying his commands," but because God wants us to live up to our full potential, to be all that we were created to be, and to live a life in

harmony with everything else that has been created. According to our faith, God created us as sexual beings and provided a way in which we can express our sexuality in the best possible way. And when we do, a resounding, “It is good” is heard throughout the entire created order. This morning I invite families to go home, sit around the dinner table, and have a good, honest discussion about what you have heard. It may be a little uncomfortable, but it will be a whole lot better than being a little pregnant, or a little sick, or a little dead. Talk, discuss, and begin to make those decisions that will last a lifetime.

It was Friday morning and we had just finished Vacation Bible School. The church was a mess. Balloons and popcorn covered the floor. The sanctuary was littered with streamers and confetti, and songbooks and leftover craft projects were everywhere. As the last few kids were meeting their parents at the door, three people walked into the building. I had never seen any of them before. There was a young man dressed in jeans, a tee shirt, and cowboy boots, a young girl in shorts, a sleeveless top, and sneakers, and an older gentleman wearing a very determined look on his face. It was that man who walked up to me and asked rather gruffly, “You the preacher?” When I responded that I was, he asked, “Can you perform a wedding for my daughter?” I don’t usually do impromptu weddings, but the look of sheer terror on the young man’s face and the tears falling from the girl’s eyes, not to mention the glare from the face of the one I now knew to be the father, told me that I had better not refuse. It didn’t take me long to figure out what had happened. The only thing missing was the shotgun. So not wanting to make things worse than they already were, I led them into the sanctuary and there, amidst the clutter of Vacation Bible School, signed the license and then said, “Friends, we are gathered here in the sight of God to join this man and this woman in Christian marriage...”

I pray that I never have to do a wedding like that again. And I won’t have to if you simply remember to wait.