

So today Paul advises us *not to indulge in sexual immorality*.
Well, when I hear that,
I can't resist
I just want to ask back:
Define immorality.
Because the church usually makes it easy for us, right?
In case of sexual morality, we often have a picture with two columns:
One column with marital sex, and this is holy sex.
And one column with everything else, and it is sinful sex.

Sunday February 28, 2016
Third Sunday in Lent

Exodus 3:1-15,
Psalm 63:1-8
1 Co 10:1-13
Luke 13:1-9

The Rev. Fanny Belanger

Well, sure this way of thinking spares us a lot of headaches
but you know
last week I was looking at statistics
and I learned that 20% couples are concerned with domestic violence.
According to the survey,
it looks like sexual assault does not only happen in dark corners of a street
it happens in lovely tidy homes too,
between people who made their vows to the Almighty.
Our careful definition of morality does not protect us from this kind of nightmares.

But even without going so far
even without violence,
and too often, even in married couples,
sex can be constrained or humiliating, or probably more often just
indifferent, selfish and bored.
Not to speak about how it can be spoiled with
the constant fear of getting pregnant, or, on the other end, the constant pressure to make a baby.
All of that,
I don't know where it ranges in terms of sinfulness or immorality but
I just think
It's not a way to love each other, you see.

Marital sex does not always make sex all right.
If Paul in Corinthians claims that
The wife's body belongs to her husband, and the husband's body belongs to his wife,
well, it has nothing to do with
doing whatever pleases you of your partner.
Love your neighbor as yourself, remember?
In Paul's words it means marriage makes you so close, it's like he or she is you, and you are he, or she.

But Paul does not teach that sex is holy.
Actually, Paul is totally put off
by the religious cults in Corinthe
that used sex as a way of worshipping.
Obviously for Paul sex is sex, and seriously,
saying it's a God thing makes it quite embarrassing.

Saying there is something intrinsically sacred to sexuality can mean all sort of things,
and it seems a shortcut a little risky.

One of the great blessings of our current debate around homosexuality
Is that it helps us to think differently about sex.
Not as a list of acts you can describe, good or bad,
but we start to understand how sexuality is about who we are.
Sexuality is about who we are.
Since Freud, we know that sex is much more
than what we do.
Sex, he says, is about desire, the way we invest our energy
yes it's about nature but much more, it is
the way we transcend or not
this raw thirst for life that lies in the depth of us.

According to Freud, we all are sexually driven
which keeps life interesting
which keeps ourselves interesting.
We want to be attractive, to look beautiful, smart.
From the first stages of life, sexual instinct leads us to bound with people and to explore the world.
If our desires are given a direction, in this process,
we become human beings.

Yes, like we eat to keep ourselves alive individually
We have sex to keep us alive throughout the generations – it's nature, we say.
But these experiences can be all sort of things,
highly enjoyable or greatly painful.
And here lies the choice we need to do.
I guess this is all there is to be humans: To give meaning, or not, to our instincts.

I think it is a terrible misinterpretation of Paul
to say he keeps a list of does and don'ts.
When we know there is no law anymore for Paul.
Oh, he will often discuss what is culturally appropriated
He does that all the time with the question of defiled and undefiled food.
But he concludes each time that
It's all about this great law of Christ's love.

I guess the right and the wrong in our sexual life is not unlike
what we do with our food
We can eat in a way that keeps us alive and happy, or we can eat in a way that keeps us wanting and
unhealthy.

So the question we may want to ask ourselves, as individuals but also as a society, is
Is our sexuality
bringing us life and joy
Or are we hurting ourselves and those around us?
Are we building a relationship, are we learning to love
or are we destroying love, violently or silently?

Desire can be all kind of things, from selfish greediness to spiritual energy.
And it's important to think about these things because
being alive is all about desire and looking for God is about desire, too.

The psalm we have today
is quite sensual if you think about it.
My soul thirsts for you
My flesh faints for you as in a barren and dry land where there is no water
My soul is content, as with marrow and fatness
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
When I remember you upon my bed, and meditates on you in the night watches.

I guess the question for us is about
what do we do with we who we are and what we do of our desires.
It's about being joy oriented, life oriented, God oriented.
Human beings are animals who cannot just do what they have to do, they need meaning, actually.

This quest for meaning
is at the heart of the question that is brought before Jesus today.
The slaughter of the Galileans and the fall of the tower of Siloam.
People dying for no reason. Perishing.
I think on top of the grief it brings over us,
to lose suddenly and violently members of our community,
to witness lives cut short,
it's devastating because it makes no sense at all.
It makes us think
we're just animals and our lives are not worth anything.

A few months ago, I visited the 9/11 Memorial in New-York City
and when you're there and
you read all these names set in stone for eternity
there's no way you can fight this feeling that tells you
We mean nothing
It's all about fate.
And you cannot find a sense of individual destiny.
In the dirt and the dust at Ground zero, it's not only people but meaning that has been wiped away.

A disturbing thing, though.
Maybe you're aware that
on the third day after the catastrophe,
they found a cross made of steel in the fragments of the building,
with a piece of metal folded like a linen on the side.
The symbol of the resurrection.
And what is crazy about it,
is not so much that they found this cross
- which is kind of crazy -
But the craziest thing is this cross had been enough
for thousands of people to find hope.
In all the confusion, suddenly, things could make sense again for them.

So it looks like at some point we're okay with dying I guess, but we don't want to perish like beasts.
We want to die as human beings.
We want to find meaning.

Yet Jesus warns us: Perishing has nothing to do with fate.
Because it depends on us to have a life that's worth living.
It depends on us to bear fruit
It depends on us to be a burning bush.
The story of the burning bush we have heard this morning
has been read as a foretelling of the story of Mary.
Because bearing the fire in her womb,
she remained a Virgin, kept her integrity.
Burning with God's desire, she was not consumed.
We can make sense of our desire, or we can just perish with it.
Perishing is not about having your life cut short.
Otherwise, Jesus would have perished too.
Perishing is about being a barren tree.

What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?
Asks Mary Oliver in her poem *The Summer Day*
Well, bearing fruit is not about doing great stuff and accomplishing.
Last Tuesday, I saw a man downtown
he was sitting in a wheelchair, begging for money.
Rain was pouring on him.
And he smiled to me. He smiled to me.
And I thought, oh this is the beautiful fruit of his beautiful life:
He is happy
Or, at least, there is joy inside of him.
Maybe there is no meaning with being
so crushed by life you have to sit in the rain for a living.
We say God gives meaning to life.
Well, God does not always give meaning to life, we know that.
Jesus does not explain the catastrophe.
God does not solve tragedies.
But the crazy thing is,
as when they found the cross at Ground Zero,
once you've truly found God, you don't ask for more meaning.
I think this man I saw on the street had found God.
Once you've found God you've found everything.
He is the end of our desire, of everything we could long for.
God is even beyond meaning.
He is the great I AM, you see.

When Paul tells us that we won't be tested beyond our strengths, I want to talk back.
I want to say, well God often tests us beyond our strengths
not only with our fleshy desires.
We are tempted in every ways, from indulging in hot fudge chocolate to lose our faith in tragedies.
But I know what Paul would say:
It is not beyond our strengths since God is
our strength.
That's how we can burn without being consumed, actually,
and live out in holiness this one wild precious life God has given us.
Amen.