

“Seven Words We Don’t Use in Church”  
7 Week Sermon & Worship Series  
Sundays, July 15 – August 26, 2018  
First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
Preaching: Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. James L. Brewer-Calvert

<b>Date</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Holy Scriptures</b>
July 15	SMILE	I Thessalonians 5: 14-18
July 22	CURSES	Psalm 19; Matthew 15: 1-13
July 29	GOSSIP	Proverbs 12: 18; James 3: 9-12; 1 Cor. 13
August 5	SCIENCE	Genesis 1 and 2; Job 38
August 12	PRONOUNS	Matthew 7: 7-12
August 19	SHAME	John 4
August 26	SEX	Song of Solomon 2: 8-13

**Sunday, August 26, 2018**  
**“SEX”**

Song of Solomon 2: 8-13

The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."

**Honoring the Body**

We are going to have yet another a conversation on a summer Sunday  
that is intended to be a conversation starter.

We’ve placed this armchair here in front of the Lectern  
so I can set with you at eye-level;  
so we can lower the volume and lessen anxiety levels; and  
so we can be in a spirit of active listening to one another and the Holy Spirit.

These past few weeks we have shared  
a Word about words we don’t use in church.  
We have conversed honestly, forthrightly, plainly about

Smiling, Cursing, Gossiping, Pronouns, Science, and Shame.  
I could not be any prouder of you, my beloved congregation.  
You have exhibited tremendous courage and grace and hope.  
And, you have not fired me.  
Guess you can say I'm grateful as well as proud.  
We might as well talk about Sex.  
Hey, we're on a roll, so why not?  
Let's give voice to what we've covered up or only spoken in hushed tones  
or relegated to jokes or sensationalism or the church parking lot.  
Let's bring into the warm light of God's beauty & this safe, sacred space  
that which connects us with our sacred and vulnerable selves.  
Let's do this, together, now, in an open spirit of grace.

Yesterday at the workday in our church playground,  
a neighbor was sweating from his efforts in the hot Georgia sun.  
I thanked him for his help.  
He said, "You get more out of something than whatever you put in.  
Hey, you should preach on that tomorrow."  
"Well, that is quite a truth," I said.  
"You do get more out of something than whatever you put in.  
And since I'm preaching about sex,  
I'll be sure to make mention of your wisdom gleaned from experience."

Here is our outline.  
Historically speaking, Church teachings and theologies haven't always been helpful.  
Communally speaking, there is a shadow side that must be brought into plain view.  
Spiritually speaking, we're invited to experience holiness in our senses & sensuality.

### **Honoring the Body**

Let's be frank.  
When it comes to sex and sexuality, when it comes to the human body,  
to our relationships with loved ones and lovers,  
to the subjects of intercourse, procreation and the joy of intimacy,  
Church teachings and theologies haven't always been helpful.

Here's a story.  
This is the story that has been taught by the Church for centuries.  
See if any of it sounds familiar; I'd like to know what you think.

*"Once upon a time God created Adam and Eve with bodies and souls.  
Right away they gave in to a bodily desire--hunger--and fell into sin.  
Then they gave in to another bodily desire--lust--and conceived Cain.  
From then on, spirit and flesh have been at war in the human body.  
Spirit is good, flesh is bad.*

*The Christian must subdue the flesh through the work of the Holy Spirit,  
and then, when the body dies,  
the person will waft into a state of spiritual bliss unencumbered by a  
body.*

*In some versions of the story,  
the Christian will eventually be given a spiritual body  
(whatever that is),  
presumably one that will no longer cause the problems  
that bedevil the physical body.*

*And they all lived happily ever after.” Honoring the Body by Stephanie Paulsell*

Are there parts of that story you agree with, or disagree with, or wonder about?  
When it comes to human sexuality,  
historic Church doctrine has been problematic, at best.

“From its origins, there have always been Christians  
who have found the human body scandalous and repugnant.  
Some early Christians believed that Jesus’ own body must have been an illusion,  
since a mortal human body surely could not bear within it  
something as precious as divinity.” <sup>[i]</sup>

“Early Christians looked for clues about humanity’s relationship to God  
in the body’s most vulnerable moments:  
the moment of sexual desire and the moment of death.  
Some believed that death revealed our separation from God most fully,  
and that sexuality represented God’s sympathy for our mortality  
because it offered a remedy, through procreation, of death.” <sup>[ii]</sup>

The earliest teachings of the Church  
emerged from the “concern over how the basic physical realities  
of death and sexual desire can rob us of our freedom...,” <sup>[iii]</sup>  
i.e., the spiritual freedom of the human will  
to overcome the basic desires and realities of the human body.  
Thus, the Church approached the body as over and against the Spirit,  
as if in opposition to all that is good and holy,  
that what is pleasing to the body should be of great concern,  
such a concern that the human body  
was seen as base, as unholy, as without honor.

As Barbara Brown Taylor articulated in Learning to Walk in the Dark:  
“Christian teaching thrives on dividing reality into opposed pairs:  
good/evil, church/world, spirit/flesh, sacred/profane, light/dark.  
Even if you are not Christian, it should be easy to tell  
which half of each pair is “higher” and which “lower.”  
In every case, the language of opposition works

by placing half of reality closer to God and the other half farther away.”  
...If there is any truth to the teaching that spiritual reality is divided into halves,  
it is the truth that those pairs exist in balance, not opposition.”<sup>[iv]</sup>

What if we, the Church, stop seeing the body as in opposition to God?  
How about the Church chooses now to celebrate the miracle of the human body,  
welcomes these biological marvels as a gift, a blessing,  
something to celebrate and honor.

Are we not made in the image of God?  
Did not this same Creator look upon creation and declared us good, in body and soul?  
The Garden of Eden is a tale of Original Blessing, not Original Sin.  
Creation, procreation, and intimate acts of love are blessings to be cherished.  
Our God is an awesome God, who loves us body and soul, physically and spiritually.

At bedtime a child grabbed her mother’s hand and squeezed it as she got up to leave.  
Her mother said, *“God is with you.”*  
*“I know, Mom. But sometimes I need God with some skin on it.”*

God is alive in our bodies, in Spirit and in our Senses.  
connecting us in sensate and sensual ways,  
physically embodying that we’re loved and lovable.

Professor Stephanie Paulsell, a Disciples pastor, said,  
*“To hold a newborn child in one’s arms  
is to know both the sacredness and the vulnerability of the body;  
indeed, it is to know that there is an intimate connection  
between sacredness and vulnerability.”*

The intimate connection between sacredness and vulnerability  
tugs at our souls and inspires us to remember and then share  
the story of Mary and Joseph and the birth of Jesus.

Imagine God wanting to be weak so we could be strong.  
This speaks to us of the love we experience at the Table of the Lord,  
where we are discover God afresh  
in the intimate connection between sacredness and vulnerability.

### **Honoring the Body**

There’s a shadow side to human sexuality.  
Shadows are made by misunderstanding, misuse and abuse, violence and nonsense.  
*“Early Christians fostered a sexist, destructive fear of women.  
Suspensions of the goodness and sacredness of human sexuality  
can be traced to this unfortunate legacy.”* [Paulsell, paraphrased]  
The Church has participated in or ignored abuse and misuse of sex,  
especially when sex has been used a weapon  
to oppress or subjugate or to violate women, men and children.

Thanks to the #MeToo Movement and countless brave souls,  
awful deeds are being dragged kicking and screaming out of the shadows.  
We—the Church of Now—state clearly that sex is not a weapon  
to be used over or against anyone, at anytime, anywhere.  
We state clearly that parents and mentors, elders and pastors  
are commissioned to raise boys and girls to respect one another.  
When a boy throws something at a girl, don't say to her,  
"Oh, that boy hurt you because he likes you!"  
Instead, instruct the boy, "That is not how we behave.  
You need to honor her, not do violence against her."  
And then model respectful behavior yourself.  
The best way to stop this...is to stop this.  
Like the person who goes to the clinic and says, "Doc, when I do this, it hurts."  
"So stop doing it!" said the doctor.

As the Church of Jesus Christ moves forward into a new day,  
let us be intentional about honoring the body as a sacred gift of God.  
Let's stop being sexist.  
Let's desist from doing anything against another soul's will.  
May we cease to receive anyone as an Other, as a Lesser Being to be feared.  
May the Church instead take on a spirituality of honoring the body in every moment,  
to claim the sacredness of our selves in such a time as this,  
to relish opportunities to be vulnerable in the moment.

### **Honoring the Body**

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*My beloved speaks and says to me:*

*"Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." (Song of Solomon 2: 8-13)*

The Song of Solomon "portrays the beauties of human sexuality."

The book in the Bible is a collection of love poems.

You may choose to read them as allegory,

an ode to the love between God and humanity,  
or Christ and the whole people of God.

"All the mushy love stuff aside, God is very much present in this text.  
Knowing my lover's voice

resonates with Jesus describing the Good Shepherd's voice (John 10:3-4)...  
The commandments to love both God and others  
are the priority in the Christian life and they mirror each other.  
The creativity we use to depict our passion toward another human being  
is the closest thing we can use  
to imagine God's longing for relationship with us.  
God is the lover and we are the beloved—and that is the perfect love affair.”<sup>[vi]</sup>

You may also read these love poems as an expression of  
the “God-given joy that derives from human sexuality.” <sup>[vii]</sup>  
In our passage from Song of Solomon, the poet coos, “The voice of my beloved!”  
We know our love's voice.  
We can pick out our beloved's voice from across a crowded room.  
The more we communicate, the better we communicate.  
When I counsel couples in pre-marital sessions, we discuss sex and intimacy.  
Our emphasis is on communication.  
The three keys to a healthy relationship, to any relationship,  
are communication, communication, and communication.  
In terms of intimacy,  
each partner in a couple is empowered to speak up and ask for  
whatever she or he or they would like.  
At the same time,  
the one who asks must also respect the partner's power  
to say yes, or no, or maybe another time.  
Intimacy between two lovers bonding in body and soul  
creates an experience that goes beyond the physical  
to the metaphysical.

### **Honoring the Body**

What do these species have in common?  
Swans, pigeons, penguins, Gibbon apes, wolves, coyotes,  
barn owls, beavers, eagles & French angel fish...  
That's right: they are all monogamous.  
They mate for life.  
They walk, or swim, or fly side-by-side for a lifetime.  
Some are sexually active throughout and some are not.  
Life together can have meaning with or without sex.  
Relationships may include but are not dependent upon sex to have meaning.  
Humans may walk side-by-side for a lifetime,  
voluntarily sharing their lives and selves,  
being supportive of one another as long as they both shall live.

In 2015, I presided at a wedding for two men

along the bank of the Chattahoochee River.  
During the vows, I asked the first man to repeat after me:  
“I promise to love and comfort you -- honor and cherish you  
-- for better or for worse -- for richer or for poorer...”  
At which point he interrupted, “For richer or for richer!”

Despite what Hollywood and Bollywood insist,  
there is more to life than flash, pizzazz, & immediate gratification.  
The love poems in Song of Solomon testify  
to what ultimately matters:  
commune deeply, spiritually and physically,  
intimately in tune and in touch  
with our beloved, our loved ones, and our God who loves.

Chances are, you will get more out of it than...

*All Power Be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*

#### Communion Invitation

“When we come to the Lord’s Table,  
we are meant to see the bigger picture of God’s love and sacrifice.  
This meal represents a welcome table  
that is set for all who confess that Jesus is Lord and Savior.  
It is also set for those who want to meet Jesus,  
even for the first time,  
and discover for themselves the goodness of God.  
Jesus invites us all in, saints and sinners alike,  
and then uses this meal to bring us together.  
Our Savior doesn’t worry about the little details of our life.  
Jesus is concerned about the bigger matters,  
like forgiveness and salvation, like reconciliation and redemption,  
like being love and sharing grace upon grace,  
that are offered in this Bread of Life and Cup of the New Covenant.”  
The Table is set. Come to the feast, and know that the Lord is God.

(Paraphrased from Jason Gottman, The Journal of Worship Resources, Pentecost II, 2008 Issue, p. 23)

EXTRA MATERIAL:

“Diana is in the midst of seminary education, learning to be the minister God is calling her to be. She is smart and funny and an exceptionally good listener, and so she has done very well. But she began to get a little tense, a little nervous, before her field education, her year of supervised ministry in a parish, began. She finally admitted that what she was anxious about was her role as cupbearer during the Eucharist, a task her teaching pastor had asked her to assume. Having been born with cerebral palsy, Diana jerks a bit when she walks and drags one leg. She was afraid, *really* afraid, that she would spill the cup on the floor or, worse, on someone she was serving. But, being Diana, she didn't ask to be relieved of this duty; she gave it a try. And things went well. Nothing spilled, but she remained extremely vigilant.

One spring Sunday, Diana served again as cupbearer and walked from person to person kneeling at the rail at the front of her church, offering them a drink. "The blood of Christ," she said to each one, "the cup of salvation." And as she raised the cup to each person's lips, taking the utmost care not to fall, she saw her own reflection in the shiny silver chalice. Over and over again, she saw the reflection of her body in the cup. *This is my broken body*, she thought, *-serving this church. This is my body, teaching people what we do with brokenness in the church. Here in this cup is new life, and here is my body, expressing the truth of what this new life means!*

We are not disembodied spirits, nor ever will be. We are Christ's body, taken, blessed, broken, and given. His body, and our bodies in his, are honorable.” [Honoring the Body by Stephanie Paulsell]

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[i] Practicing Our Faith, Chapter on “Honoring the Body” by Stephanie Paulcell, Editor Dorothy Bass, 1997, 2010.

[ii] Ibid, Paulsell.

[iii] Ibid, Paulsell.

[iv] Barbara Brown Taylor, Learning to Walk in the Dark, Harper One, 2015.

[v] “Meditation” By: Diane Hunter, published in Prayer Ministry, Email, First Christian Church of Decatur, August 22, 2018

[vi] Texts for Preaching: Year B, Walter Brueggemann, et al, Westminster, 1993.