

**PRACTICAL MATTERS:
INTIMATE MATTERS
GENESIS 1:26-31; 2:15-18, 21-25; 3:7-12, 16
SEPTEMBER 9, 2012**

When I say the word “intimacy,” what do you think of?

I see a few people squirming uncomfortably in the pews.

The word “intimacy” automatically brings our thoughts to the arena of sex.

And while sex is related to intimacy,

it’s not the whole thing or even the main thing.

In fact, it’s possible to have sex

without being intimate in the most meaningful sense of the word.

But that sexual interaction will make your life less rich than God wants it to be.

Sex and intimacy.

In God’s design the two belong together.

But let me back up the cart and load up some scripture.

We’ll go back to the beginning, to see God’s design for sexuality and intimacy from creation, which, by the way, is often cited by Jesus as the standard.

GENESIS 1:26-31

“Let us make man in our image.”

Actually the Hebrew word is “adamah,”

which is not a male person, but means the human being or humanity.

Make the human in our image.

What does that mean?

It seems to be related to the task of stewardship that is immediately given, to “rule over” the earth.”

But it may also be related to our capacity for relationships.

Did you notice the text says, “Let US make humanity in OUR image.”

It’s not what you would expect of a monotheistic Jewish faith with its key scripture verse being,

“Hear, O Israel: the Lord, the Lord our God is ONE.” (Dt.6:4)

How can ONE God be a “we”?

Could this be a hint at the divine Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

And so could the image of God in us have something to do with our built-in social nature?

And part of that social nature is spelled out in our being made “male and female.”

We are created with biological complementarity, indicating we belong together.

That, then, is linked to the next verse, verse 28,

where the command is to “be fruitful and increase in number.”

That does not mean every married couple are commanded to have children, and to not have children is a sin.

But it does indicate God’s general will for us.

As we read into the next chapter things get spelled out even more clearly.

GENESIS 2:15-18

Again the word here is “adamah,” which is not the male person, but the human being.

Again there is the stewardship role given.

And the mention of the human being’s social nature, our built-in need for relationships.

“It is not good that the human be alone.”

God intends to “make a helper.”

The Hebrew word translated as “helper” does not imply any inferiority or subordination.

In fact, this word is used elsewhere of God’s relationship with Israel. (Hos.13:9)

God is Israel’s helper,

so it’s clearly not subordination.

It comes from a root implying a power equal to, more like a partner.

After this God proceeds to bring all sorts of animals before the human being,
who gives each one a name.

“Horse, dog, cat, aardvark, really? koala. rhinoceros, mosquito...”

But none of them were appropriate.

None could truly be the needed partner for life.

Dog came pretty close, but not quite.

GENESIS 2:21-25

From the human being a rib was taken,

and then there are the gender specific terms for man and woman.

Or, as some have suggested the first utterance of Adam to be, “Woa! Man!”

“Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bones.”

The two belong together.

In chapter 2 procreation is not the issue so much as relational intimacy, bonding.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.”

Older translations say the man will “cleave to his wife.”

So this is sometimes called the “leave and cleave” dynamic of marriage.

Leave the family of origin.

It doesn’t mean you are cut off from your parents.

But now your first allegiance is to your spouse.

There should be no rivalry,

no question of who is number one in your human relationships.

One man, one woman, and the two become one flesh.

“The man and his wife,”

certainly the covenant of marriage is central in this picture,

as “the man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”

While sexual intimacy is certainly part of the picture,

that’s not the whole thing.

It suggests a relationship of mutual trust and vulnerability.

Nothing is hidden, nothing held back.

There’s no fear of being hurt or judged.

Everything is out in the open.

That is a picture of true and pure intimacy,

God’s ideal for marriage,

one man, one woman,

joined in a marriage of absolute trust and vulnerability,

partners in life.

And sexual intimacy is set in that context,

as an expression of love

and a powerful bonding agent.

The trouble is, that’s not the end of the story.

In Genesis 3 we have the story of Satan tempting Adam and Eve,

their failure to believe God was truly watching out for their well-being

when he told them to not eat the fruit,
 their disobedience,
 and all the consequences that flowed from it.

GENESIS 3:7

There's the loss of trust,
 the closing off of vulnerability,
 hiding from one another, not just physically, but emotionally.
 There's a measure of stupidity here, too.
 Do you know how rough a fig leaf is?
 That's like getting super heavy starch for your underwear.
 They're hiding from each other, their intimacy lost.
 And they try to hide from God.
 Another foolish venture.

GENESIS 3:8-12

I'll bet that answer did wonderful things for their relationship!
 It's the woman's fault.
 And actually he even suggested it was God's fault.
 "the woman you put here with me."
 Remember, God, she was your idea.

The consequences of their sin invades the sanctity of marriage,
 twisting it out of the shared life partnership God intended it to be.

GENESIS 3:16

That side-by-side partnership is now warped by the power of sin into a hierarchy of husband ruling over wife.

Please note:

That was not God's original design.
 Nor is it God's desire.
 It is a consequence of sin.

There are people who try to insist that's the way it's supposed to be from Genesis 3 to the end of time.

But I would ask:

If that's the case, and we're not supposed to do anything to change that,
 then why do we try to reduce the pain a woman experiences in childbirth?
 The text says that's a consequence of sin, too.
 Why would we try to make working conditions better?
 The following verses in Genesis say because of sin
 human labor would be difficult, painful, toil.
 Should we then make sure it stays that way?

Because of the reality of sin,

our relationships, even in the best of marriages,
 require a lot of hard work to overcome
 the loss of trust,
 the tendency to hide our less positive traits from one another.
 True intimacy now requires hard work.
 It won't happen on its own.

We have to be intentional about it,
 carving out time to talk, to share our thoughts and feelings,
 to listen, to truly love.

So sin has invaded human relationships,
 including marriage,
 including our sexuality,

and the rest of the Bible gives us a history of
 the resultant mess,
 the brokenness of creation,
 the human wreckage,
 and God's efforts to reach us, to rescue and redeem us.

Throughout the Bible we find God giving rules and commandments about human relationships,
 with special attention to how we should and should not express our sexuality.

Apparently, God knew this would be a problem area for us.

God, having created sex, knows sex is a powerful thing,
 and that power when warped by sin can create real problems.
 So he gave us an owner's manual for life,
 including human sexuality.

In the owner's manual we find stories of polygamy leading to all sorts of jealousy and rivalry,
 and clear prohibitions of any sexual intercourse
 outside of the bonds of the marriage of one man and one woman.

Not before marriage, (Mt. 15:19; 2Cor. 12:21; Ga. 5:19; Ep. 5:3; Col. 3:5)
 not in adultery, (Ex. 20:20:14; Le. 18:20; 20:10; Mk. 7:21; 1Cor. 6:9; 1Tim. 1:10)
 not in same sex relations, (Lev. 18:22-23; 20:13; Ro. 1:26-27; 1Cor. 6:9; 1Tim. 1:10)
 not with close relatives, (Le. 18:6-18; 20:11-12, 17, 19-21)
 not with animals. (Le. 18:23; 20:15-16)
 It's all in there.

The United Methodist Church upholds God's ideal for human sexual expression
 when it requires its ordained ministers to commit to
 "celibacy in singleness and fidelity in marriage."

Our church's law book, the Discipline, expresses clearly that
 all people are created in the image of God,
 are loved and valued by God,
 and so ought to be loved and valued by us,
 BUT...

there are expressions of human sexuality, accepted by many people,
 that are "not compatible with the teachings of Scripture."

Today, many people think that's old fashioned, pre-scientific, primitive,
 so we should just leave it all behind.

We're more sexually enlightened today.

Really?

Think of what the sexual revolution has brought us.

Sexually transmitted diseases more rampant than ever,
 new varieties that were once unheard of, some that can't be cured, some that kill.

How many unplanned and unwanted pregnancies?

How many of them end in abortion?

How many children are raised by a struggling single mom or by the grandparents?

And studies show there are all sorts of consequences in the lives of
 children who do not grow up in a home
 centered on a loving marriage of their mother and father.

Lower educational achievement, lower wages in adulthood,
 a greater likelihood of drug or alcohol abuse,
 higher crime rates, and more.

How many children, teens, and young adults are victimized by the sex trade?

How many people are addicted to pornography?

How many people only see the opposite sex as an object to be used for personal pleasure,
no longer as a person with whom they could have a whole relationship?

How many marriages broken by infidelity?

How many marriages haunted by memories of past sexual partners?

We're more sexually enlightened?

Really?

God gave us his owner's manual, with all those rules and commandments,

not to spoil our fun,

but to protect us from harm,

and to provide for us the best life possible,

so sexual intimacy would be a precious and joyful gift,

a celebration of love,

and a powerful bonding experience between a husband and a wife.

It's not impossible to live up to God's design.

It's not easy, but it's not impossible.

Otherwise, it would not be God's call and command to us.

It requires us to make a decision,

and to make it new each day,

perhaps several times in some days.

And it requires us to seek God's help all along the way.

Michael Hargrove was picking up a friend at the airport.

He noticed a man coming toward him carrying two light bags.

The man stopped right next to Hargrove to greet his family.

The man motioned to his youngest son (maybe six years old) as he laid down his bags.

They hugged and Hargrove heard the father say,

"It's so good to see you, son. I missed you so much!"

"Me, too, Dad!"

The oldest son (maybe nine or ten) was next.

"You're already quite the young man. I love you very much, Zach!"

Then he turned to their little girl (perhaps one or one-and-a-half).

He kissed her and held her close.

He handed his daughter to his oldest son and declared,

"I've saved the best for last!"

and proceeded to give his wife a long, passionate kiss.

"I love you so much!"

Once their kiss was over, Hargrove interrupted this idyllic scene to ask,

"Wow! How long have you two been married?"

"Been together fourteen years," the man said as he gazed into his wife's face.

"Well then, how long have you been away?"

The husband said, "Two whole days!"

Hargrove was stunned.

"I hope my marriage is still that passionate after fourteen years!"

The man stopped smiling, looked Hargrove in the eye, and said,

"Don't hope, friend... Decide!"

And that's it, isn't it?

It comes down to a decision.

A decision to be faithful.

A decision to be passionate.

A decision to be intimate.

“Till death us do part.”

It is the ideal that God gives us.

If you’ve already fallen short of the ideal,

God offers forgiveness, renewal, a fresh start.

And if you constantly seek the power of his Holy Spirit,

he’ll help you grow into that ideal,

from this day forward, till death do us part.