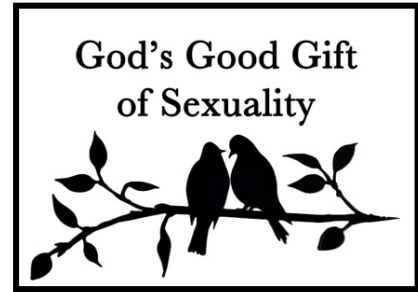


Worship Brainstorming Summary “God’s Good Gift of Sexuality”

August 7-28, 2022 (4 Sundays)



Members present: Jean Kelly, Vicki Zuker, Ron Zuker, Pastor Mary Ivanov, Lynne Richmond, Dave Booth, Ivan Ivanov, Karen Post, Jim Post, Sue Baranowski, Paul Powers, Ed Baranowski, Karen Booth

Theme: The Spiritual Journey Continues...Picking up the pieces

- Connecting the pieces
- Transformation
- Serving others (passionately)

Metaphors:

- Puzzle/puzzle pieces – making a new picture. Related hands-on item: puzzle piece with scripture reference.
- Mosaic – creating something beautiful from broken pieces

Major spoken/unspoken needs:

- Dealing with fear, which often presents itself as anger and rage. One antidote to fear is serving.
- Peace, sense of belonging, safe communities, coming together, compassion
- Finding a new normal – less busy, better sense of priorities, greater gratitude, increased resilience

Social Justice Issue for August 2022: Equitable Education

2021 theme connection: We don't hear much biblical truth spoken around the topic of sexuality – or at least we don't talk about it much in church. Even as adults our understanding of love, lust, sex, sexuality, marriage, pornography, grace, and commitment leaves a lot to be desired. How can we pick up the pieces of this puzzle and grow into healthier relationship?

Potential illustration/series intro: “Jane, the Virgin” television show.

- Jane the Virgin – Trailer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOKUcwrPFmg>
- <https://www.thefandamentals.com/the-villanuevas-and-sex-shame/> This excellent article begins saying, “Sex shaming is sadly still rampant in our society, especially towards women.” Even if you have not watched the show, there is much to be gleaned.
- <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/03/12/jane-the-virgin-is-not-a-guilty-pleasure> Quote from the last paragraph: “Still, there’s a tricky tension in the show between its family-time warmth and its fascination with sex itself, a subject that it has examined seriously, and increasingly graphically, in a way that many theoretically adult shows do not.”

Synopsis: Human beings are created in the image of a relational God and designed to enjoy an intimate relationship with their Creator and one another. There is no dichotomy between body and spirit in the Old or New Testaments. In this series, we'll explore our understanding of God's good gift of sexuality and how our faith in Jesus informs it.

The Scriptures will be taken from suggested passages for weddings.

Resources

IMPORTANT NOTE from Pastor Mary: These resources come from a variety of places – many of them rooted in United Methodist theology and practice, but not all of them. This series will address relationships in general – and also specifically about intimate relationships.

IMPORTANT NOTE from Karen Booth: Given the large number of resources, I thought it might be helpful to cluster related items. Someone else might group them differently. Additional information is available on our website at <https://lakeharborumc.org/2022/07/july-19-2022-worship-brainstorming/>.

Books and related resources:

- Adam Hamilton: Love to Stay: Sex, Grace, and Commitment. Read [Amazon](#)'s substantial excerpts from the book. **Comments:** Both Dave and Karen Booth read this. It has offers good advice for adults of all ages and marital status.
- Gary Chapman: The Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts
 - Other versions: Children, Teens, Singles
 - <https://5lovelanguages.com/>
 - Take the quiz <https://5lovelanguages.com/learn/>
- Rob Bell:
 - Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality and Spirituality
 - *Flame*, a 2002 Nooma video by Rob Bell, length: 10:57. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1327538440139> **Comments:** 1) Like the video. 2) We have lots of questions about the size of the fire, can you only have a big fire like that once, etc. 3) Take-aways: All three types of love are needed. Sexual love alone is not ultimately fulfilling. Relationships need to be nurtured to last. 4) The three Hebrew words for “love” are:
 - Ryah* – friend, companion, soul mate
 - Ahavah* – deep affection or care for one another that leads to commitment
 - Dod* – physical/sexual element of a relationship
 - Loosely related song: “Start a Fire” by Unspoken <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrEzr-rWwe8>
- Nadia Bolz-Weber:
 - Shameless: A Sexual Reformation. Read [Amazon](#)'s substantial excerpt from the book.
 - The Divine Gift of Sex <https://www.faithchoiceohio.org/blog/the-divine-gift-of-sex>

From the United Methodist Church:

- “Social Principles: The Nurturing Community.” <https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-nurturing-community>
- “Wonderfully Made and Difficult Conversations.” <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/blog/wonderfully-made-and-difficult-conversations>
- “Facing Up to Pornography and Sexual Addictions.” <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/facing-up-to-pornography-and-sexual-addictions>
- UM wedding liturgy (see sections at the end of the packet)

Ministry Matters - a community of resources for (Methodist) church leaders:

- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/9858/the-sex-recession>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/7888/when-we-talk-salvation-sexuality-matters>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/5950/must-christianity-change-its-sexual-ethics-history-may-hold-the-key>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/5392/lets-talk-about-sex-umc>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/5375/fallout-from-the-sexual-revolution>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/5267/lets-talk-about-sex-10-questions-with-bromleigh-mcclenaghan>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/4184/the-trivialization-of-sex>
- <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/1494/review-making-sense-of-sex>
- The History (and Humor) of "Incompatibility: A review of the Wesley Bros Comics book, Submitting to Be More Vile: The Illustrated Adventures of John & Charles Wesley <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/11368/the-history-and-humor-of-incompatibility> **Comments:** This resource didn't turn out very promising.

Youth and Young Adults:

- <https://www.umcyoungpeople.org/lead/talking-with-millennials-about-sex-and-intimacy>
- <https://www.umcyoungpeople.org/lead/dos-and-donts-of-talking-sex-in-small-groups>
- <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/lets-talk-about-sex>
- <https://www.umcyoungpeople.org/lead/when-its-time-to-change>

Other denominations, Christianity Today, and Preaching Today:

- An Affirmation of God's Gift of Sexuality <https://family.adventist.org/an-affirmation-of-gods-gift-of-sexuality/>
- Human Sexuality Is Gift from God <https://thecatholicspirit.com/news/nation-and-world/human-sexuality-is-gift-from-god-pope-says/>

- Sex Against God: Three Ways the World Abuses the Gift <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/sex-against-god>
- Urgent Care: Adultery & Emotional Affairs https://www.bclstore.com/products/urgent-care-adultery-emotional-affairs?_pos=6&_sid=0286f27cf&_ss=r&utm_source=Building+Church+Leaders+Newsletter&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=10531&utm_content=7648&utm_campaign=email
- The Bible's Sexual Position <https://www.evidenceunseen.com/theology/practical-theology/the-bibles-sexual-position/>
- America's Unhappy Sex Recession | Preaching Today (available as a pdf on our website)
- Adam's Aloneness Wasn't Just His Singlehood | Christianity Today (available as a pdf on our website)

Related ideas:

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| How many languages have more than one word for love? |
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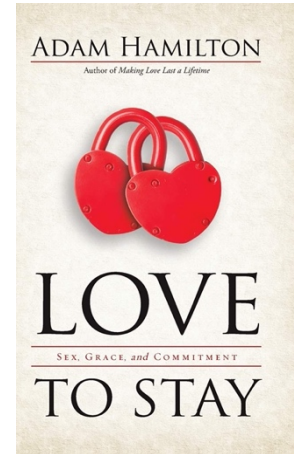
- **4 Greek words for "love"**
 - Eros* – romantic, intimate love
 - Storge* – love between family (parents and children), empathy
 - Phileo* – love in friendship
 - Agape* – self-sacrificing love, selfless, self-giving, God's love
- **Complementarianism** and **egalitarianism** - views on the relationship between men and women, especially in marriage and in ministry.
- Complementarianism stresses that although men and women are equal in personhood, they are created for different roles.
- Egalitarianism also agrees that men and women are equal in personhood but holds that there are no gender-based limitations on the roles of men and women.
- Living survey – invite responses from our congregation
- Offer a small group on *Five Love Languages*
- Vow renewal for married couples
- Find your marriage license – what do you treasure about the other?

Music: *The Gift of Love; When Love Is Found; Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*

Visuals:

- Collection of memes: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/3LuLk8rY9fJqQV7L8>
- Human Sexuality a Divine Fire Within... <https://slideplayer.com/slide/6254360/>
- Lynne's Pinterest board <https://www.pinterest.com/lynandlid/sexuality-as-a-gift-from-god/>
- Sanctuary:
 - Collage of diverse people showing love to each other – could include images of our members.
 - Love birds on a branch

- Interlocking heart locks, like the cover of Love to Stay
- Broken heart



General discussion points:

- *Good gift:* Faith informs every part of our life and should inform human sexuality. It is a good gift and we need to reclaim that.
- *Why we doing this series:* 1) Last September, we thought it would make sense to address issues around sexuality before the UMC General Conference. The conference has been postponed. It still makes sense to talk about it, because we are human and struggle with it. 2) Who is our target audience? Pretty much everyone: adults of all ages, parents raising children, youth, etc.
- *Human sexuality/church:* Although people within our church have lots to say about sex and human sexuality, most never heard it discussed in church from the pulpit, unless it was in a negative light, or from others in the form of gossip.
- *Denominations:* The UMC has been struggling with issues around human sexuality, especially homosexuality, since 1972. See p. 85-86 of the Book of Discipline, Paragraph 72, The Nurturing Community. Other denominations have had similar struggles. Jeff Verry cited two Grand Haven church that had left the Reformed Church of America.
- *Scripture:* 1) Be careful what you wish for in regards to “biblical marriages.” Pretty much every example is a hot mess. Most are not examples of healthy relationships. 2) Sexual ethics and a healthy view of God’s good gift of sexuality can be found in scripture. There are scriptural truths, such as polygamy is a bad idea. Related Netflix docuseries: “Keep Sweet: Pray and Obey” examines the rise of Warren Jeffs in the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and his shocking criminal case. 3) A literal understanding of scripture is neither helpful or accurate. Read: <https://religionnews.com/2022/07/19/john-macarthur-and-the-dangers-of-biblical-literalism/>.
- *LGBTQ+:* 1) We aren’t all going to agree on these issues, but we can have loving discussions if we follow our call to love each other. 2) We know one gay couple who have been together for 45 years and married for three, a role model of faithfulness. 3) There are only seven passages in scripture about homosexuality, far fewer than ones about money or lust. 3) This series will address all relationships, not just hetero ones. 4) Pastor Mary has had gay members in all of her appointments as well as a close family member. She loves them just as she would anyone else. 5) For young adults, this is a non-issue. You don’t need to understand it. Will our understanding and acceptance evolve over time?
- *Growing up:* How did we learn about sex? 1) Church: No. 2) Catholic schools: Ron remembers getting some instruction as a 5th or 6th grader. Karen Booth taught at an all-boys’ high school. Seniors received some education, but since it was from (celibate) priests, many students did not give their advice much credence. 3) Jean taught it as part of a health class. Students even got to see a film showing the whole birthing process. On a lighter note, she said that class didn’t have any labs. 4) Most of us had some education in junior high or middle school. Though we might assume that parents will have the discussions, it is often

too little, too late. Lynne’s mom gave her a book, but no discussion. In one family, there had been abuse, so it was not talked about at all. Ron’s dad took his boys out for a fishing trip and discussion. 5) Dave’s medical school offered one day focus on sex which covered pretty much the whole spectrum of human and animal behavior. He was a bit surprised by some of his classmates’ reactions. 6) More than one person learned from a slightly older neighbor. Lynne’s friend, Barbara, was probably the most celebrated “teacher.” 7) Growing up on a farm answered many reproductive questions (Jim P, Pastor Mary). 8) Ivan’s dad gathered him and his brothers for the talk. He told them sex is like the best ice cream you’ve ever had. Ivan added a comment about making sure you have it in a cone. As a 17-year-old coming to the United States, he told him to beware of free ice cream. He otherwise heard quite a bit from his friends and their fathers who were in the merchant marines.



- *Raising kids:* 1) Ron and Vicki sat down with their kids and read books as a family. 2) The Booths answered kids’ questions, which could be quite persistent and offered a book, which must have been read because it ended up under different kids’ beds. 3) Internet access has changed what kids can find out. The issues are still probably the same as when we were growing up, but they are talked about more. 4) Instruction needs to be age appropriate. 5) Cedar Spring Public Schools offered a good program on good touch, bad touch to elementary age students.
- *Privacy vs. secrecy:* Karen Post remembers most sex-related topics were taboo, something you could sense if you walked into the kitchen into the middle of a discussion and it was suddenly quiet.
- *Consent:* Mary and Ivan watch *16 Candles* with their kids. The kids were appalled at the lack of consent.

August 7, 2022: “The First Thing”

9th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture: Genesis 1: 26-28, 31a; 2: 18-25 (MSG)

1²⁶⁻²⁸ God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature
 So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
 the birds in the air, the cattle,
 And, yes, Earth itself,
 and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.”
 God created human beings;
 he created them godlike,
 Reflecting God’s nature.
 He created them male and female.
 God blessed them:

“Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!”

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| <p>There are two creation stories in Genesis and we are using verses describing God’s creation of mankind from both.</p> |
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Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.”

³¹ God looked over everything he had made;
it was so good, so very good!

²¹⁸⁻²⁰ GOD said, “It’s not good for the Man to be alone; I’ll make him a helper, a companion.” So GOD formed from the dirt of the ground all the animals of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the Man to see what he would name them. Whatever the Man called each living creature, that was its name. The Man named the cattle, named the birds of the air, named the wild animals; but he didn’t find a suitable companion.

²¹⁻²² GOD put the Man into a deep sleep. As he slept he removed one of his ribs and replaced it with flesh. GOD then used the rib that he had taken from the Man to make Woman and presented her to the Man.

²³⁻²⁵ The Man said,
“Finally! Bone of my bone,
flesh of my flesh!
Name her Woman
for she was made from Man.”

Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become one flesh.

The two of them, the Man and his Wife, were naked, but they felt no shame.

Synopsis: Sexuality is one of the first topics addressed in Scripture. It’s important as a good gift of God and should be a topic we don’t shy away from. We are created in God’s image, and sexuality is a part of our full identity.

Felt need: To celebrate the gift of sexuality as a part of God’s good creation

Visuals:

Hands-on item:

Activity: Holy Communion

Media possibilities: The ending is not in line with our mission to welcome all.

- “The Story of Sex.” Length: 2:02. Cost: Free with subscription. Web license: Yes. An inventive introduction to the topic of sex that transitions perfectly into a sermon.
<https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/108205/the-story-of-sex>

Music:

Children’s Time: Where do you see people helping each other?

Social media:

Discussion points:

- *Genesis:* 1) God created man and woman to be each other’s helper, companion, and partner. It is good. They should not be ashamed. This is a picture of original grace. How could it be anything else as we are created in His image? We need to be good stewards of that gift. 2) Genesis 1-10 all happened before recorded history. They are an attempt to explain the world as it is, i.e., the “why” and the “what,” not the “how” or “when.”
- *Interpreting scripture:* 1) Dave had a younger female patient who read the bible very literally. She said that is why women have only 11 ribs. He didn’t correct her. It does point

out the perils of interpreting the bible literally. 2) Paul grew up in a fundamentalist church which read the bible very literally. He had some a-ha moments as he discovered there were and are other ways of interpreting it.

- *Sin:* 1) Why do we equate original sin and sex? Why is shame associated with sex? Adam and Eve's story is not about sex, but disobedience. Yes, they are aware of their nakedness after the apple incident, but that is because they ate of the tree of knowledge. "Original sin" isn't about sex or nakedness. 2) What sin do you think of first? Adultery or something sex related? Murder? 3) Living together before marriage was called, "living in sin." Pastor Mary has only married a handful of people in the past 22 years who have not already lived together. No sex before marriage is not the norm, nor has it ever been (probably).
- *Culture and changing mores:* 1) Our Puritanical culture has connected sex and nakedness with shame. That has been particularly powerful for women (see page 1, Jane the Virgin, "The Villanueva Women and Sex Shame"). 2) Europe and other culture don't have so many inhibitions regarding sex. Example: Men wearing Speedos at the beach. 3) Jean has seen a number of young women in Grand Haven at Pronto Pup wearing thongs, something she has not seen before. 4) Skinny dipping/nude beaches: There is nothing inherently sinful about either, just cultural differences. On the other extreme, some beaches in France have banned burqas. 5) Ivan noticed difference in the US and Europe. Europeans often eat, drink, and socialize outdoors. Topics like politics, paychecks, sex, and religion are discussed more openly. In the US they tend to happen behind closed doors, or at least inside. Is there a connection between that and fewer inhibitions about sex? 6) Jean noted how her dorm experienced changed from year-to-year as rules were relaxed about curfews, visitors, and the dress code.

August 14, 2022: "What Language Are You Speaking?" 10th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture: I Corinthians 12: 31b, 13: 1-13 (NRSV)

^{31b} And I will show you a still more excellent way. ¹ If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹ For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰ but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even

as I have been fully known. ¹³ And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Synopsis: Though we all use the word “love,” we don’t all experience love in the same way. We’ll explore the five love languages (words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch) as a way to understand how God loves us and how we love one another.

Felt need: To better understand our personal love language(s) and those of our loved ones

Visuals: Treasure chest of memories (goes with “Love Life”)

Hands-on item: Conversation hearts (goes with “Love Life”)

Activity:

Media possibilities:

- “Love Life.” Length: 4:31. Cost: Free with subscription. Web license: Yes. 1 Corinthians 13 shares the truest definition of love, and that love takes on a deeper meaning as we get older. This heartwarming mini-movie takes a peek at how this can play out in real life. <https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/35966/love-life> **Note from Karen:** this might work well for August 28 also. **Comments:** We love this! There was some confusion as to whether the man who was ill in bed was the same man that came out to sit with the woman at the end of the video.
- “Love Actually Is.” Length: 1:21. Cost: Free with subscription. Web license: Yes. Most of us could quote Paul’s “love chapter” off the top of our heads. But how many of us consistently live out those definitions of love in the everyday mundane moments of life? <https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/81424/love-actually-is>

Music:

Children’s Time: When do you feel loved?

Social media:

NOTE: This is the Sunday after Unity Christian Music Festival

Discussion points:

- *1 Corinthians:* 1) While read at many weddings, this was written to the church.
- *Five Love Languages:* 1) The first book came out in 1972. Different versions for different target audiences have been added since then. 2) From the website: “When we feel disconnected from the people we are about, life is a lonely place. *The 5 Love Languages* is a simple and effective way to strengthen your connections, so you can experience greater joy and harmony in all of your relationships.” 3) Most couples do not speak the same love language. Mary did not really understand why Ivan kept giving her so many gifts until she understood that his preferred language is gifts. Hers is words of affirmation. The group shared many other stories affirming that loved ones don’t usually speak the same language. 4) Learning about other people’s preferred love language help you express love well to them.

August 21, 2022: “What’s Our Song?”

11th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture: Song of Songs 1: 1-4, 2: 8-14, 16a; 8:6-7 (MSG) – or use readers?

THE SONG—BEST OF ALL SONGS—SOLOMON’S SONG!

The Woman

²⁻³ Kiss me—full on the mouth!
Yes! For your love is better than wine,
headier than your aromatic oils.
The syllables of your name murmur like a meadow brook.
No wonder everyone loves to say your name!
⁴ Take me away with you! Let's run off together!
An elopement with my King-Lover!
We'll celebrate, we'll sing,
we'll make great music.
Yes! For your love is better than vintage wine.
Everyone loves you—of course! And why not?
Look! Listen! There's my lover!
Do you see him coming?
Vaulting the mountains,
leaping the hills.
My lover is like a gazelle, graceful;
like a young stag, virile.
Look at him there, on tiptoe at the gate,
all ears, all eyes—ready!
My lover has arrived
and he's speaking to me!

This could be
read by a
woman and
man. Any ideas
of who might
want to do that?

The Man

¹⁰⁻¹⁴ Get up, my dear friend,
fair and beautiful lover—come to me!
Look around you: Winter is over;
the winter rains are over, gone!
Spring flowers are in blossom all over.
The whole world's a choir—and singing!
Spring warblers are filling the forest
with sweet strains.
Lilacs are exuberantly purple and perfumed,
and cherry trees fragrant with blossoms.
Oh, get up, dear friend,
my fair and beautiful lover—come to me!
Come, my shy and modest dove—
leave your seclusion, come out in the open.
Let me see your face,
let me hear your voice.
For your voice is soothing
and your face is ravishing.

The Woman

My lover is mine, and I am his.

Hang my locket around your neck,
wear my ring on your finger.
Love is invincible facing danger and death.
Passion laughs at the terrors of hell.
The fire of love stops at nothing—
it sweeps everything before it.
Flood waters can't drown love,
torrents of rain can't put it out.
Love can't be bought, love can't be sold—
it's not to be found in the marketplace.

Synopsis: Physical intimacy and desire are a part of God's design for us - meant to bond us to another person in a loving, healthy, consensual, committed relationship. Our struggle to honor that gift can cause great harm and diminish the blessing of it.

Felt need: To claim the joy of intimacy and God's blessing of it – and repent from our misuse of the gift

Visuals:

Hands-on item: Red hot cinnamon candies

Activity:

Media possibilities:

- "Friends with Benefits." Length: 1:02. Cost: \$15.00. Web license: Probably not. This video shows a young man and woman practicing a "friends with benefits" lifestyle.
<https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/49951/friends-with-benefits> **No.**
- "Overview: Song of Songs." Length: 6:58. Cost: Free. **Send the link to members so they can watch it before Sunday.**

Music: *Perfect Day* by Lou Reed

Children's Time: What's your favorite song? Why? What does it make you remember?

Social media:

Discussion points:

- Song of Songs speaks to physical intimacy, desire, and bonding between consenting adults. It is sacred and should be honored.
- Infidelity and (online) porn are sources of strife. Adam Hamilton talks about both in [Love to Stay](#).
- What is your song? 1) Lynne Richmond – Susan Boyle's "I Dreamed a Dream." 2) Ron & Vicki – Bryan Adam's "(Everything I Do) I Do It for You" and Bob Seger's "You'll Accompany Me." 3) Jean Kelly – Shania Twain's "From This Moment," Willie Nelson's "You Are Always on My Mind," and some Elvis songs. 4) Ivan Ivanov (in jest) – Beyonce's "All the Single Ladies."

August 28, 2022: "More than Madly in Love"

12th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture: Philippians 2: 1-4 (NIV)

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then

make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Synopsis: Life-giving and loving relationships require us to reflect the love of Jesus for others.

The challenge is putting others first and understanding that intimacy is beyond a simple physical connection, but includes deep spiritual connection.

Felt need: To understand the connection between sexuality and spirituality

Visuals:

Hands-on item:

Activity:

Media possibilities: "Life Lessons from 100-Year-Olds." Length: 13:29. Cost: Free. Web license:

Not sure. We asked three unique and lovely centenarians what their most valuable life lessons were, and also their regrets. The conversations that followed were remarkable.

They talked about the importance of family, people, relationships and love. Their view on life, as an elderly citizen with a lot of experience is truly an inspiration and motivation.

Note: The discussion of relationship and love begins around 7:00.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AThycGCakk>

Music:

Children's Time:

Social media:

Discussion points:

- *Following Christ:* 1) Philippians calls us to reflect the love of Christ. 2) Ivan recalled how the 12 disciples dropped everything to follow Jesus? Do we have to do the same thing? Does that require celibacy? Mary responded that we know that some of them had in-laws, so they must have been married. And no, you can be married and follow Jesus. On a loosely related note: Ron explained that Catholic priests have not always be required to be celibate. 3) Jesus addressed lust. 4) The apostle Paul was very aware of the sexual immorality. There was open sex in Roman temples.
- *Trust, intimacy, vulnerability:* 1) Sexuality and spirituality have always been connected. 2) Intimacy is relational, not transactional. It requires vulnerability and a large emotional investment. "Vulnerability is a **state of emotional exposure that comes with a certain degree of uncertainty**. It involves a person's willingness to accept the emotional risk that comes from being open and willing to love and be loved. The fear of vulnerability is a very common fear." 3) Intimate encounters amplify good and bad feelings, i.e., they can help couples grown closer, create wounds, or be sources of shame (unplanned pregnancy). 4) We like Rob Bell's holistic approach view of love and sexuality.
- *Communication:* 1) How do we talk to our kids about this aspect of healthy, loving adult relationships? It is not the kind of thing they are going to find out about on their phones. Parents understand how their kids communicate differently (via text) than they did (in person or on the phone). The kids have too much knowledge of what others are doing or not doing; it isn't helpful.

- *Online dating:* People used to meet potential spouses at school, work, or through friends and family? Not so much now. How does online dating work? How can you build trust unless you get to know someone in person?

United Methodist Wedding Liturgy

Covenant

God of all peoples,

you are the true light illumining everyone.
 You show us the way, the truth, and the life.
 You love us even when we are disobedient.
 You sustain us with your Holy Spirit.
 We rejoice in your life in the midst of our lives.
 We praise you for your presence with us,
 and especially in this act of solemn covenant;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Eternal God, Creator and Preserver of all life,

Author of salvation, Giver of all grace:
 Bless and sanctify with your Holy Spirit
Name and *Name*, who come now to join in marriage.
 Grant that they may give their vows to each other
 in the strength of your steadfast love.
 Enable them to grow in love and peace
 with you and with one another all their days,
 that they may reach out
 in concern and service to the world;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O God,

you have so consecrated
 the covenant of Christian marriage
 that in it is represented
 the covenant between Christ and his Church.

Send therefore your blessing upon these two people,
 that they may surely keep their marriage covenant,
 and so grow in love and godliness together
 that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Consent and Commitment

Will you have...to live together in holy marriage?

Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him,
 in sickness and in health,
 and forsaking all others, be faithful to him
 as long as you both shall live?

In the name of God,
I, take you, to be my spouse,
to have and to hold
from this day forward,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish,
until we are parted by death.
This is my solemn vow.

I take you, to be my spouse,
and I promise before God and all who are present here
to be your loving and faithful husband (wife)
as long as we both shall live.
I will serve you with tenderness and respect,
and encourage you to develop God's gifts in you.

In the name of God,
I take you to be my spouse from this time onward,
to join with you and to share all that is to come,
to give and to receive,
to speak and to listen,
to inspire and to respond,
and in all our life together
to be loyal to you with my whole being,
as long as we both shall live.

These rings (symbols)
are the outward and visible sign
of an inward and spiritual grace,
signifying to all the uniting of two people in holy marriage.

I give you this ring
as a sign of my vow,
and with all that I am,
and all that I have,
I honor you;
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

Community and Care

Do you who represent their families
rejoice in their union
and pray God's blessing upon them?

Will all of you, by God's grace,
do everything in your power
to uphold and care for these two persons in their marriage?