

“Let Me See You Walk”
1 Samuel 3:1-20; Psalm 139; John 1:43-51; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
A Sermon preached by Carla Pratt Keyes
Ginter Park Presbyterian Church, Richmond, VA
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This Sunday and next, the lectionary we use directs churches to read portions of First Corinthians. These verses contain some of Paul’s instructions for faithful living. The Apostle addresses all kinds of things: how Christians should settle disputes among themselves and without going to the Roman courts . . . the issue of marriages between believers and nonbelievers . . . the eating of food sacrificed to idols. For Paul, *sexual* morality is a persistent concern, and he talks about it at some length here. He discusses conjugal rights in marriage and whether unmarried people should marry or stay single (given the expectation that Christ was coming back soon). In today’s text Paul talks about prostitutes and extramarital sex. So . . . hold onto your hats, Presbyterians. Hear this guidance from the Apostle Paul.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

As I mentioned to you last Sunday I began the year by attending a series of lectures on “Faith in the City” of Richmond. I got to hear John Kinney, Dean of the School of Theology of Virginia Union University, for the first time. He’s a person of complexity, I know, and a powerful speaker. He’d had hip surgery not long before the week began, so he gave most of his lectures on crutches, but that did not seem to slow him one bit.

Dr. Kinney told us a little bit about the problems he had been having with his hip and, in particular, the doctor they had called in prior to his surgery. The doctor had talked with Kinney awhile then said, “Walk for me. I want to see how you walk.” So Kinney had walked across the room and back. The doctor watched him, then said, “All right. I know now what you need.” Kinney’s gait had told the doctor all he needed to know to determine what was wrong with Kinney, and what was necessary to make him better.

After describing all this, Dr. Kinney looked at us – we who had gathered to talk about faithful living in the city – and he said, “What if there is *another doctor* watching you walk and making an assessment of your condition? . . . *Let me see you walk* . . . What does my walk say about my faith? Am I walking in the light, in the spirit, in newness of life? *Does my walk give incarnational presentation of my faith?*” He let us squirm for a moment. “Our walk is skewed,” he said, “and we are limping.”

Like Kinney, the Apostle Paul looked out at the church (in his case, the Corinthians) and he saw that their walk was skewed and limping. He diagnosed a couple of key problems. First, Paul believed that the Corinthians had a distorted view of Christian freedom. The Corinthians believed, quite correctly, that Christ had put them into a right relationship with God, by grace. Their standing before God did not depend on their having satisfied the law; it was God’s gift to them. *However*, the Corinthians concluded that, having been “made right” with God in Christ, their behavior didn’t really matter. All things were lawful for them, all things fine to do. Paul disagreed. In particular, he was troubled by the Corinthians’ beliefs about their bodies, and the sexual freedoms they exercised. The Corinthians seemed to think that what they did *physically* was insignificant. Since it would all pass away in the end – the body, the desires of the body – they figured that what they did with their bodies *now* had no lasting import.

Such attitudes, Paul believed, put the Corinthians on a dangerous and destructive path. He wanted them to understand, first of all, that Christian freedom isn’t the same as individual autonomy. The Christian claim is not that we are free agents, but that we’re free in Christ *because we belong to Christ*. As members of Christ’s body, we have important responsibilities. Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand what those were.

Here he talks specifically about responsibilities related to the human body. The word for body is *soma* in the Greek. It will help to understand that when Paul used the word *soma*, he was referring to something more than flesh and blood – a physical frame one “has.” He was thinking about the whole person, a “self” that relates to other selves.¹ *This body* was flesh, mind, and spirit – indivisible. It was meant, in Paul’s thinking, for the Lord . . . meant to be raised with the risen Christ . . . destined for life imperishable in God’s kingdom.² So Paul believed that what people did with their bodies *mattered*, long-term, in ways the Corinthians had failed to appreciate. This near to Christmas, I am inclined to make the same point a different way. God chose to have a *soma* – a human body like ours. Christ’s incarnation proves, among other things, that for people of faith *bodies matter*. What we do with our bodies should glorify God. What we do to *other people’s bodies* should honor God, too.

When John Kinney spoke to the gathering last week, he was not talking about sex, not directly. We were heading into conversations about urban poverty, unemployment, incarceration. Kinney prepared us for those conversations by talking about respect . . . the

¹ Victor Paul Furnish, as quoted by Thomas Are in his paper on this text, presented to the Moveable Feast in 2009. (Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians*, 1999, page 57.)

² Douglas Ottati, Theological perspective on 1 Cor 6:12-20, 254-9; *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol. 1.

reverence each person – each *soma* – is due. In language reminiscent of today’s Psalm, Kinney spoke about God’s creativity . . . God’s familiarity with, and love for, all that God has knit together: individuals creatures and communities, both.

We are fearfully and wonderfully made. That’s something every one of God’s creatures can affirm: we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Kinney spoke of the diversity God created: no two leopards with the same spots . . . no two snowflakes with the same design . . . no two flowers precisely alike . . . no two people with the same smell, the same fingerprint, the same DNA. “When I encounter you,” Kinney said, “I am encountering the presence of a ‘God release’ – an example of God’s dexterity and power . . . Men sometimes tell women, ‘Oh, honey, you’re one in a million!’ That’s an insult! [Kinney said.] There are 309 million people in the United States. ‘You’re one in a million?!’ It’s like saying, ‘If things don’t work out with you, there are 309 other women just like you in this country alone!’ But you are not just one in a million, you are one in the *world*.” Created by God. Cherished by God. Freed by God. Belonging to God.

It is the Christian responsibility to treat each person as a manifestation of God’s power and creativity. We honor God when we honor one another. We *dishonor* God when we *dishonor* one another. “I can’t be at my best when I’m destroying you,” Kinney said – when I am judging or neglecting or abusing you. The Christian commitment is that “I will never strip you of your fundamental dignity. I have a responsibility to let justice flow.” And when does justice flow? When we honor each other’s *somas* – body, mind, and spirit. But, like the Corinthians, you and I have much to learn about living in such a way.

My friend Tom Are is a pastor in Kansas City in a church much bigger than ours. They have a sound guy. His only job on a Sunday morning is to make sure that the microphones work. (That’s be nice, right, Doug?) Each Sunday Allen the sound guy brings Tom his microphone, and Tom asks Allen about his week. One week Allen said his week had been great, “Nothing but prostitutes and drugs all week.” You’ll want to know, says Tom, that Allen is a Major in the local police department. His comments reflected the *arrests* of the week. Tom’s always amazed at how much prostitution and drugs there are in his community of trimmed lawns and white collars. Many of the folks arrested are church-going men, Allen says – married, otherwise respectable. Walking with a limp.

The calls that bother Allen the most emerge from situations of domestic violence. Apart from simple theft, the single most frequent 911 call in Tom’s upscale corner of Kansas City is for violence in the home.³ I didn’t check the numbers in our neighborhood – our city – to learn about rank or frequency, but you can bet domestic violence is a huge problem here as well. We’ve all heard how it spikes around events like the Super Bowl . . . or the holidays. Consider it evidence: as a society we are not behaving with reverence for one another. As a *church* we are not acting like we *know* human bodies are precious, members of Christ.

³ Thomas Are, in his 2009 paper on this text for the Moveable Feast.

We cannot be at our best when we destroying each other. Last Wednesday was Human Trafficking Awareness Day. Did you know that some two million people are sold into slavery each year? There are 27 million people enslaved the world over! Today is Martin Luther King, Junior's birthday. Did you know that now, 44 years after his murder, 40 % of the children in Richmond are living in poverty? 40%. Of course there are *many more blacks* than whites in that category.

What does our community say about our faith? Together are we walking in the light, in the spirit, in newness of life? Does our walk give incarnational presentation of our faith? Are we glorifying God in our bodies and the bodies of people around us?

Sometimes we are. Dr. Kinney told about the Grandparents Brigade at his neighborhood hospital. They show up in matching sweatshirts: "The Grandparents Brigade." They hold the babies who've been born into addiction and hardship. Babies who've been listless and malnourished become stronger and more alert when their *bodies* are cherished. "You can love the crack right out of a baby!" Kinney said. You can glorify God in what God has knit together.

At its meeting this Tuesday our Session will hear from the Micah Initiative – a group that encourages us to participate at Mary Scott and Ginter Park Elementary School. There tutors, mentors, and classroom assistants have a chance to speak words that convince a child who has always been told he is no good and his daddy was no good that *it is not true* . . . that he is, in fact, a majestic extension of the God who made heaven and earth. We can remind our children they are temples of the Holy Spirit.

And we can recall the same for ourselves, and for the people we encounter in our homes, in our communities, and on nights we might be tempted to act with something less than honor and reverence. In acts of self-care, acts of tenderness, acts of respect for one another, we can honor what God has knit together in us and among us. We can. The question is whether we *will*.

The doctor *is* watching to see what our walk will reveal about our faith, our condition. He can tell – by watching – what is wrong with us, and what we need in order to get better. But diagnosis and instruction are not all this doctor offers – thank goodness. Jesus Christ holds out his hand to us. Walk *with me*, he says. Walk with me. I will show you how. I will help you to walk.

