

**Sermon for Evening Prayer<sup>1</sup>**  
**The Second Sunday in Lent**

**Lessons:**<sup>2</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the twelfth Chapter of the Second Book of Samuel.<sup>3</sup>

“And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

“And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith [SETH] the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master’s house, and thy master’s wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. ... And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD

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<sup>4</sup> I Corinthians 6:9-end (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> I Corinthians 6:9b-10 (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> I Corinthians 6:9b-10 (RSV).

<sup>7</sup> I Corinthians 6:9b-10 (NIV 1984).

<sup>8</sup> HERBERT G. MAY AND BRUCE M. METZGER, EDS., THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE WITH THE APOCRYPHA, Expanded Edition, Revised Standard Version 1385 fn. (Oxford University Press, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> I Corinthians 6:16-17 (RSV).

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1:27.

<sup>11</sup> Cf., “The earth was without form and void,...” Genesis 1:2a (RSV).

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also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the ninth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.<sup>4</sup>

“... Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith [SETH] he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

are united sexually, they become, in a mystical but very real way, one body. That, for example, is why true marriage is indissoluble during the lives of its partners.

Yet Christians are people who, through their Baptism, are also united with God. Thus a Christian husband and wife are simultaneously united sacramentally with each other and with God, making God a sort of third member of a sacramental triad. Thus when people are irregularly united with each other sexually, and also try to unite themselves to God, the result is a sort of ontological chaos. And God, as we know, is the God of order, not the God of chaos.<sup>11</sup>

That is the background to what St. Paul is telling the Corinthians in today’s First Lesson.

### Conclusion:

So if we wish to be Christians, we are left with the uniform understanding of the New Testament teachers, supported by two thousand years of the universal consensus of the Church: All people are called to obey the law of chastity, under which sexual *activity* of all forms is forbidden except that which takes place between one male husband and one female wife who are united to each other in matrimony.

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The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister<sup>12</sup>  
March 20, 2011.

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<sup>1</sup> “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>2</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xix (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>3</sup> II Samuel 12:1-10, 13-14 (KJV).

argue that the ancient Jews and the early Christians did not understand what it was that their God was denouncing.

The logical weakness in these arguments is that they contain a hidden, an unexpressed, premise. That is the notion that when someone feels sexual temptation, then that person is bound to act upon that temptation, like a dog or a cat in heat. The truth, of course, is just the opposite: human beings are, so far as we know, the only animals who are not chained to a cycle of ungovernable estrus but who, on the contrary, have the rational power to decide to indulge in or to refrain from their sexual desires.

And the reason that God is concerned with His people's sexual fidelity is also set forth in today's Second Lesson: "Do you not know that he who joins himself who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, 'The two shall become one flesh.' But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him."<sup>9</sup> Let us unpack that statement for a moment.

It unites two thoughts, neither of which is one we are accustomed to dwell upon, especially in today's hedonistic world. The first is the reminder that by bestowing upon us the sexual faculty, and doing so in a way that lets us conceive and give birth to rational human beings – to beings made in the image of God<sup>10</sup> -- He has permitted us to be partners with Him in the creation of life.

Reproduction, therefore, is a divinely-appointed function, a solemn means of re-creation [**REE-kree-aay-shun**] rather than a crass means of recreation [**WRECK-ree-aay-shun**]. Let me repeat that: Reproduction is a divinely-appointed means of re-creation [**REE-kree-aay-shun**] rather than a simple means of recreation [**WRECK-ree-aay-shun**].

One consequence of this divine calling to be God's co-creators of human life is that when a man and a woman

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### Text:

From the Second Lesson: "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."<sup>5</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

### Introduction and Theme:

You have just heard the King James Version's rendering of the text I have taken from our Second Lesson. The Revised Standard Version gives those verses as: "Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God."<sup>6</sup>

In the popular New International Version, they are given as: "Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."<sup>7</sup> Each of these renderings differs in slight details but the same message is clear in all of them: sexual irregularities, such as adultery, and sexual perversions are just as reprehensible as are crimes against people's means of subsistence.

### Development:

In fact, both of today's Lessons deal with the uncomfortable but recurring topic of sexual misbehavior. And let me emphasize at the very beginning that what we are speaking of here is *behavior*, not temptation. The First Lesson recounts how King David's lust for Bathsheeba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, led him into adultery with her. If David

had merely stood on his rooftop and peeped longingly at Bathsheeba next door, his lustful thoughts might have been sinful but they would never have given rise to murder and the other events recounted in our First Lesson. It was when David *acted on* that temptation, and seduced Bathsheeba, that the evils ensued that are the subject of that account.

As if David's adultery were not sinful enough, when his adulterous affair was threatened with exposure because Bathsheeba became pregnant by David during her husband's absence on military service, David had him murdered in the course of a battle against Israel's enemies.

In our day no less than in King David's, the wealthy, the socially prominent, the celebrated and the politically powerful easily come to believe that the rules God has laid down for us govern only lesser men and women but do not apply to those on the "A list". In just the past couple of years, we have seen at least two state Governors and several U.S. Senators, one of them a candidate for President, fall victim to their own *hubris*, only to have their political careers come crashing down around them in ruins.

One of the issues in the next Presidential election cycle will be the question whether a former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives can become a viable candidate for President despite his affair with a staffer which had forced him to resign from his powerful position.

But it is not only the well-to-do or the well-known who are capable of persuading themselves that the Law of Nature does not apply to them. In Paul's day, as in ours, those who would defend sexual laxity argued that sexual desire is just a natural bodily instinct, on the same level as our desire for food, so that indulging that appetite has no greater significance than indulging our appetite for nutriment.<sup>8</sup>

This, of course, is simply self-serving rationalization. We, as Christians, are bound to accept the witness of Scripture and Scripture tells us unequivocally that God has forbidden these things to be done. That should be the end of the matter but today we are surrounded by people who would cloak themselves in the name of Christian who, to perpetuate their disguise but also to avoid amending their conduct, seek to reinterpret Scripture.

They tell us either that Scripture does not actually say what it plainly does say, particularly in the matter of homosexual conduct, or when they are speaking with someone who knows enough Scripture to see through that imposture, then they argue that neither the ancient Hebrews or the Greeks, who made up the bulk of the first Christians, were familiar with some supposedly all-absolving concept of "sexual orientation", knowledge of which has been vouchsafed only to late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western society.

Unfortunately for the moral revisionists, this argument suffers from two fatal infirmities, one factual and one logical. Its factual weakness is that it is based on those arguers' own ignorance of the ancient world and of Classical times. The Old Testament Hebrews lived surrounded by Philistines and others who were devoted to the cults of fertility gods and goddesses, whose shrines were, you should pardon the pun, hotbeds of male and female sacred prostitution. As a result of this apparent divine sanction, those pagan societies were rife with all forms of sexual perversion, perversions with which the Hebrews, therefore, were all too familiar.

Similarly, ancient Greek society tolerated almost every conceivable form of sexual irregularity, especially so long as the more bizarre forms kept a decently low profile. But on the matter of homosexuality, as almost anyone with a high school or college education knows, Greek culture actually defended and fostered it. So it is simply nonsense to