

SPICY HOT
[written in oral form]

Song of Solomon 2:8-13
13th Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

September 2, 2018
Gordon Allaby

Since this sermon will mention sex, sensuality and eroticism, I think it is prudent to have a preface,.....*and..... I likely have already captured your attention.*

We normally don't talk about such things in church— **this is** unique. Moreover, this is only time in the lectionary cycle that a passage from Song of Solomon is used. And, since I feel it is my obligation to present the essence of the Biblical text as best as I am able, then I will attempt to do just that.

~~~~~  
Time restraints severely limit the scope of the examination on the subject. I will not examine sexual abuse, pornography and sexual addiction. Nevertheless, a few comments need to be mentioned.

~~~~~  
First: sexual interaction must be consensual, based on clear thinking, with partners of equal power and status -- No exceptions. If those conditions are not met, then it is sexual abuse!

~~~~~  
Pornography:  
Because of the internet, pornography has moved into "respectable" homes, and is easily obtained by most anyone,... unless filters are in place. Yet, it is NOT respectable because it objectifies people; it distorts and devalues reality with contrived images and delusional relationships. AND, it contributes to sexual addiction.

Sexual addiction is destructive to the individual because it tends to draw the addicted person into the isolation of a fantasy world, and away from normal social interaction. It is also destructive to marriages.

~~~~~  
Most people know very little about this addiction, because in the public domain, we don't talk about such things.... because we rarely talk about sex..... in an open and healthy way. And, two obvious examples are that we rarely hear sermons about sex or sermons from the Song of Solomon.

~~~~~  
Frankly, I'm a bit hesitant to preach on this text / about such passion.. ....because it is Spicy Stuff!

~~~~~  
Some people try to claim that Song of Solomon is an allegory for an ecstatic relationship with God. I don't think so; God is not mentioned once!!

The book **is** about passion, and... NOT the passion of Christ, but the passion of **young love**. Infatuation courses through the veins of Song of Solomon or Song of Songs, as it is often called.

Passion overflows from the verses,.... and perhaps that's what makes us so uneasy with this book. It invites us to **abandon** ourselves to love. AND, most of us have a enormous fear of losing control!

Moreover, many are uncomfortable about mixing Religion with SEX, with sensuality and eroticism.

~~~~~

WELL,..... Here goes..... and if it is “Shocking”, then .....well... maybe the issue has been ignored too long???

For a long time, Christianity has been prudish and bland. Maybe we could blame that on Plato or Augustine or the Puritans.

Regardless of why, we Christians are really uneasy with openly talking about sex.

In fact, most parents are even hesitant to educate their kids about the details of sex, let alone including it in casual conversation.

~~~~~

*Teenagers know more about sex than parents think, yet teenagers DON'T know as much as they think they do..... or **Need to know**.*

And, if they are not getting their information about sex from safe and respectable sources, then I wonder where they are learning about sex?

??????

There has been a “hush, hush” attitude about sex in respectable society.

We all know about sex, BUT dare not discuss it in “proper circles.”

Traditionally, in the church realm, conversing about SEX has been a taboo..... even though doing healthy sexuality with our marriage partner was, after all, condoned and commanded by God.

~~~~~

A couple may share how wonderful it was to get away for an anniversary, and about the great meal they had. But, would foyer conversation include describing the great time they had after the meal???

~~~~~

We are slowly opening up, compared to the past, yet most of us are still uncomfortable casually talking about sex, especially in church.

~~~~~

Perhaps, Sex, sensuality, And Eroticism, in the context of wholeness, health and love, .....IS DIVINE..... and belongs in religion, in the church domain??

Thomas Moore, author of Care of the Soul, points out in his book The Soul of SEX, he points out.. the beauty of the Kama Sutra, and how in many old religions beautiful erotic figures were carved into the walls of sacred temples, depicting **imaginable** sex acts, ..... all within the context of worship.

Mother Jones magazine, 9/97

Thomas Moore asks, “I wonder why the Indians put their sexual fantasies on temples, and we give ours over to pornography?”

~~~~~

He notes, in Western Culture, we seem to be **obsessed** with sex **AND...** embarrassed by it. Moore wonders why we can't mix spirituality and sex?

He also points out that Medieval monks spent hours copying the Bible, and while they were doing that, they would occasionally doodle sexual images and phrases in the margin, which were called “gutters.”

Their mind would sometimes drift to the “gutters.”

Moore said about modern culture, “we do something similar when we create the air of an efficient, “clean” world, including plain, no-nonsense buildings, ... and all the while, our sexual images (our *dirty thoughts*) are funnelled into the red-light districts or the unregulated Internet.

He also noted, – *Most modern buildings are sterile and non-sensual*, but that is starting to change.

He adds that this behaviour is strange since ... sex is at the heart of life. We came into being because of sex; it enhances love and marriages. It is the wonder of creation.

~~~~~

We do need to be more open about sex, including with children.

Meg Hickley, wrote on the need to be open with our children. From her book, Speaking of sex, she stresses that children who are educated about healthy bodies and healthy sexuality are better protected from abuse and exploitation. She points out that children **need vocabulary and information** to protect themselves against sexual abuse.

\*Did you hear that Doug Ford?

She also emphasized, “If you wait for children to ask questions before giving them information, then you may wait forever.”

~~~~~

~~~~~

Okay..... Maybe we should pause a moment and gather ourselves.  
I have already said that three letter word more than you would hear in a year’s worth of sermons.

~~~~~

SEX..... --what a hot and explosive topic.

Frederick Buechner said, Sex is like nitroglycerin. It can either be used to heal hearts or blow up bridges.

~~~~~

Alright, .... to the point, and please understand this:

If we don’t embrace sex – celebrate it in the LIGHT, then it is left to the domain of darkness, and it becomes perverted!

If we don't celebrate and talk about sex in the beauty of the church domain, then we are surrendering Control of the conversation to the secular world.

If sex is not openly a part of respectable culture and religious conversation, Then...it is, by default, delegated to the corrupt, lustful and exploitive world.. .....and to whispers.

We are uncomfortable talking about it because it is a topic that dwells in the shadows or behind doors, and it is there because we put it there.

~~~~~

At this juncture, I want to examine Sensuality and Eroticism.

Sensuality deals with all the senses, and eroticism focuses on particular senses and responses, mostly physical. They may have different innuendoes, but even so, it is NOT easy to separate the two.

Both involve PASSION..... ..in.... and from life.

Sensuality and Eroticism are not limited to sex.

~~~~~

Sensuality can be a cozy armchair or a visit to the beauty salon or silk between your fingers ... or melt in your mouth dark chocolate.

It can include tantalizing cheese cake ....or... skinny dipping .

It can be a hot bath in the cold of winter.....and, .....it could be a part of all of our lives, ..... including church.

~~~~~

A lot of church buildings are sensual.

Ours is more subtle, yet the colours are soothing,.....and that rock wall is kind of sensual, with the flowing, living plants at the base.

I could go on, and it would sound like a verse from the Song of Solomon.

Churches do dabble in sensuality: some liturgies awaken the senses; some churches like to swing and sway.

The Shakers danced,.... *yet didn't trust themselves.* ??

We Mennonites..... allow the passion of eating, but even that is done with a tinge of guilt.

~~~~~

So why the problem with Sensuality and Eroticism????

?????????

Perhaps it is because we Christians have focussed mostly on Agape love and eschewed / shunned Eros.

???

Agape love is selfless love. A love with unqualified commitment.

It is a Gracious Love..... A giving love, a Divine love.

Eros is longing and desiring fulfilment and satisfaction, as if we are incomplete. It is based on need.

It allows for lust.

~~~~~

Truth is we are NOT God, and we have drives and desires – **Eros**, but Christian religion has taught us to hide it. So, Eros is forced to sneak out at night, and that can result in strange, corrupt and sinful ways.

God has given us bodies..... we have needs and desires -- EROS, **And**, God has challenged us to embrace Agape love..... **and** we are able to **because** of the Holy Spirit.

Yet, when we try to ignore or squelch our humanness..... we become anxious, unfulfilled, and that....can lead to guilt and shame.

The solution is wholeness; it is to embrace all forms of love, including Eros.

Jesus is a wonderful model. He demonstrated Agape love in many ways, and Eros too. Jesus enjoying the anointing of expensive perfume, is but one example.

~~~~~

Nevertheless, historically, the church has cried out, “WHOA, we dare NOT embrace sensuality and eroticism....., it will lead us into debauchery, adultery and perversion.

Yet, that fear devalues the power and influence of Agape love and the Holy Spirit.

Agape seeks beauty and purity. It won't allow exploitation and abuse.

BUT, as we all know..... Eros sure feels more powerful.

~~~~~  
I think it feels more powerful because we are NOT open with it; we try to ignore it or squelch it, so it screams.

~~~~~  
AND!!!..... in the event, if we block God's Spirit and fail to do **Agape love**, we have the Laws and the Book of James!

James **Commands**.... Behaviour Modification.

~~~~~  
To be sure, the issue isn't just sex.

There is much more to sensuality and eroticism than just sex.

This is good news, no it is **GREAT News** for all people who are alone or unable to have sex.

Everyone can and should enjoy Sensuality and Eroticism.

Sensuality and Eroticism is the wonder and spice of life.

It is a passion for living, instead of merely existing.

It is enjoying and celebrating our physical bodies,.. and ... I believe our bodies are a blessing and not a curse.

** So, know that it is good to be passionate and sensuous!

~~~~~  
We are human. We are complex living creatures, with passion and desires, AND the potential for gracious love.

Eros and Agape are both a part of life: God's creation and intention for us!

When they are both united / combined, life becomes a wonderful celebration of healthy wholeness.

Wholeness: Heart.... mind.... body... enjoying God's creation, **and**..... not leaving part of it in the gutter.

~~~~~  
The text from Song of Songs is a love song about life, love and creation. **And**, not by accident, it **IS IN the Bible**.

Read the rest of the book. *It gets even more spicier, and erotic.*

~~~~~  
Sensuality and Eroticism in life is similar to Spicy HOT peppers mixed with food.

~~~~~  
You can eat food in three ways!

You can eat your food bland, without spice.

Eating just to sustain our bodies is dull and boring, and it may lead to the temptation of indulging, **secretly**, in a Hot fudge Sunday..... just for the thrill.

Or,

Add some spice, like Hot peppers to your food.

Hot peppers actually bring out the flavour in food..... for a tantalizing, satisfying experience.

But, don't overdo it, because that gets into the third way.

Which is: you can ignore wisdom, focus on Eros and yield to gluttony, yielding to the big error of – if a little is good, then a lot must be better.

That error can lead to pain and remorse.

~~~~~

Too much Hot Pepper overwhelms the food **and it will burn you up!**

The analogy should be obvious.

~~~~~

There are three choices, and.... it is Best to season for taste.... for complete, whole enjoyment.

~~~~~

Finally, I've not said much about Eroticism.

Eroticism is NOT perverted extremism.

It has received a bad reputation from the pornographic world.

I think Erotic love is intentional, focussed and intense love. It is the experience of fully giving and receiving. **\*\* It is Intense! \*\***

It is the perfectly spiced meal of life that is shared with another!

~~~~~

A minister described it this way to a young couple in pre-marital counselling. He told them, "Years from now, when you are two old people in rocking chairs, sitting on the front porch, and one of you touches the other's knee, then.... **THEN... you'll understand erotic love.** Quote from Bishop Mahoney

That is erotic love because you have lived all your life in love, with all its pain and beauty, and you know you are trusted and loved."

Eroticism can be the touch on the knee **or thigh** from a mutually affirming and dearly loved person.

~~~~~

Perhaps we can take sensuality and erotic love out of the gutter and place it in the light of the divine????

The Gospels present Christ displaying complete love. We see it in creation, too.

Sensuality, eroticism and sex are the Spice of Life -- gifts from God.

Eros and Agape Love: thanks be to God!