

19th June, 2022

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe,

light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as

you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service set out below.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

When words are not enough
To tell of all You've done
I bow the knee, let silence speak
And gaze upon Your majesty

These songs could not convey
A picture of Your love
And knowing this, my life I give
To You an offering of praise

And I surrender all
And I surrender all
Unveil my heart to see
The wonder of Your worth
As I surrender all

As I surrender all

The worship You require
Is brokenness of heart
So here I stand with open hands
Surrendered to Your love and power

And I surrender all
And I surrender all
Unveil my heart to see
The wonder of Your worth
As I surrender all
As I surrender all

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Matthew 5:27-32

Thessalonica as a free city enjoys prosperity and a great deal of license to pursue pleasure without restraint. This letter is written to encourage, strengthen and challenge the new Christians.

Last week, Fatherly, Paul, Silas, and Timothy express their love for the Thessalonians and their desire for them to know fullness of life. Jesus said, I have come



that all may have life and have it to the full. (John 10:10) So, it makes sense to pay attention to his instructions about the way we should behave in his world.

God is the perfect father and his laws are less, 'thou shalt not' and more, 'please don't.'

In his love God wants to protect us from the awful consequences of sin, his righteous judgement, and enable to live safely in the freedom of liberating boundaries. Like a fence around our garden keeps the children safe, so God's laws are wise boundaries.

So, what is the best way to live? Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-4. Our best way to live is to please God, to be holy. But why is sexual behaviour mentioned so quickly?

Sex affects us at the core of our being. Sexual pleasure is not just a physical pleasure – and for many it's not even that – it's a holy thing, a deeply impacting relational thing, that points to something so much greater. Read, 1 Corinthians 6: 18-20.

To talk about Sexuality is a big risk. There's an idea that the church talks about it too much, or rather gives it's – mostly unwelcome – opinion on it too much, but also, paradoxically, that we never talk about it at all.

Part of the problem with talking about it is that there are today so many different understandings and experiences.

Societies through history struggle to make sense of sexuality – to have a base from which to gain perspective. So, hence each generation seems to swing from the previous the pendulum place: repression to liberation and back again.

Our own culture, like the free Roman culture of Thessalonica, is a liberal, experiential society, self-centred and instant – have it my way and have it now.

But with this, there are winners and lots of losers. Those with power and a voice and those who get hurt. There is for many much emotional weight and considerable pain in any discussion.

And so, we struggle for language – so sensitive are feelings in our society about our sexuality and right to self-expression. Our society demands a new freedom bringing down previously held boundaries and understandings of sex, gender and parenthood. All of this means any statement can be quickly condemned as a phobia or -ism.

It is hard to see any place from which we can safely comment – but the Bible is not slow in coming forwards to talk about sex. In fact it's a theme in the whole of scripture as a preview of the eternal relationship with God! So the Bible says that sex is for:

1. Marital Union and the two becoming one. The first marriage in in the Bible – is Genesis and this was perfect. But with our decision to serve ourselves, the marriage relationship, with our sexuality, and all other relationships is messed up.
2. For having children – with the command 'go forth and multiply.'
3. For sharing pleasure, just read Song of Songs.

But there is a problem with these first answers, we are all sexual beings but we are not all married, and even those married are not all able to have children or are enjoying sex.

John Piper says this: 'the ultimate reason (not the only one) why we are sexual is to make God more deeply knowable. The language and imagery of sexuality are the most graphic and most powerful that the Bible uses to describe the relationship between God and his people – both positively (when we are faithful) and negatively (when we are not).' (Sex and the supremacy of Christ, part one.)

Positively we have the constant comparison between the love, the passion, and the miracle of unity, of a great marriage between a man and women, and the extraordinary depth of love, passion and miracle of unity between Christ and his church. Song of Songs is both a love song of a human couple and an allegory of our relationship with God.

Jesus uses the same, becoming one language, speaking of his disciples, including us, and the Godhead as is used in Genesis to describe becoming one of a husband and wife.

Falling in love, and the power of sexual feelings, give us a glimpse into the passion that God has for us. (See Ephesians 5:28-33)

Negatively, our breaking of the covenant with God in sin, that is, portrayed as a terrible betrayal of love in shameless adultery. Sin, is truly awful, it is a dreadful betrayal of love and trust, and like the positive can be ecstatic joy, so the negative, can be devastating pain.

We can read in Ezekiel and Hosea the depth of this pain as God challenges his people about their betrayal of his love and their unfaithfulness in cavorting openly with others.

Marriage, in God's revealed understanding requires difference, to truly pre-figure the glory of Christ and the church. The Bible uses the expression, 'to know', to describe the sexual act – there is an intimate knowledge of another. In biblical understanding this is a remarkable thing, that two beings of difference – male and female – can 'know' each other and become a new one. This is both about human sexuality, but is a hint, a foretaste, a glimpse of the intimacy, and ecstasy between Christ and the Church – you and me living in the full knowledge of God!

This is where my understanding is at the moment. This does not give me or any of us, the right to make demands of others. God loves us all, and shame on me if I don't love and care for all that God has made, including those differing from me – we are all broken and lost – we all need to know the kindness of God that leads to repentance, and all of us need God's grace, to be able to make our way home – back to God and the deep passionate intimacy of a relationship with our Heavenly Father.

So, our sexuality, the passion and joy, are a foreshadowing of the glorious future God has for us – the marriage of Christ and his people. (Revelation 19:6-9.) We are at this moment in history, like walking down the aisle towards our beloved. He is smiling at us, and so, where are we looking?

All beauty points toward the one in whom all beauty is found – be careful, as we said last week to seek the gift-giver the perfect and true object of our affection, and not be distracted by the 'gift'.

Sexual pleasure, however wonderful, is only a hint of the better to come. Marriage is exalted in our society, but singleness in equal measure in scripture. Apparently Abraham Maslow identified Jesus as one of the very few self-actualised people to ever have lived, but, Jesus himself was single!

Ed Shaw says, 'none of us kick ourselves, having enjoyed a good film for not having seen the trailer, why would we kick ourselves in heaven for never having had sex on earth.'

If you have failed, and betrayed God's trust, and perhaps even the trust of others, then respond as encouraged in 1 John 1:8-9.

Prayers: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:4-6)*



- Pray for this day, and the coming week.
- Pray for justice, mercy, peace, and hope.
- Pray for individuals, neighbours, and for family & friends.
- Pray for the Church.

Collect: First Sunday after Trinity:

O God, the strength of all those who put their trust in you, mercifully accept our prayers and, because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without you, grant us the help of your grace, that in the keeping of your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

The Notices: We are now holding services in the building on Sundays at 8am and 9.30am, and are live streaming the 9.30 service. This Paper Service will continue for the moment and is generally available the week after the service.

- Tea and Chat and Bowls: Wed. 20th July at 2pm, Church Hall and Church.
- Coffee & Questions: 27th July at 11am, Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise for Harvest, Sunday, 2nd October, 3pm – 4.30pm
- COGS Tots: 2nd Mondays. COGS Tinytots: Monday mornings.
- Messy Church: Second Sundays of the month.