

Proverbs 5.15-23

- ¹⁵ Drink water from your own cistern,
flowing water from your own well.*
- ¹⁶ Should your springs be scattered abroad,
streams of water in the streets?*
- ¹⁷ Let them be for yourself alone,
and not for sharing with strangers.*
- ¹⁸ Let your fountain be blessed,
and rejoice in the wife of your youth,*
- ¹⁹ a lovely deer, a graceful doe.
May her breasts satisfy you at all times;
may you be intoxicated always by her love.*
- ²⁰ Why should you be intoxicated, my son, by another woman
and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?*
- ²¹ For human ways are under the eyes of the LORD,
and he examines all their paths.*
- ²² The iniquities of the wicked ensnare them,
and they are caught in the toils of their sin.*
- ²³ They die for lack of discipline,
and because of their great folly they are lost.*

Father God, we study your word this morning, please would you enlighten us by your Holy Spirit, that we may know and live in your good plans for our lives.

In Jesus name, Amen.

Last week I was listening to Radio 5 and there was a discussion about sex education in schools. Its not compulsory and varies greatly from school to school.

It seems that our children are facing a crisis. Many are getting their 'sex education' from porn sites on the internet; giving them a completely distorted view of sex and sexuality which often ends in tears as boys expect girls to behave like hard core porn stars and girls get hurt.

As a church we have not always been good at talking about sex.

In years past we may have been rather puritanical.

Since the Sixties we've largely given up and blown with the winds of the permissive society.

People come to church with all sorts of sexual experiences.

Most of our wedding couples will now be living together.

We are conducting an increasing number of remarriages, recognising the Christian principles of both the sanctity of marriage but also the possibility of forgiveness for past mistakes and a second chance.

People come to church experiencing same sex attraction as well as heterosexual attraction.

Some people are single by choice; or through never having found the right partner; or through marriage breakdown.

Others are widowed and mourning the loss of a close intimate relationship

Others come to church having suffered, or still suffering abusive sexual relationships or worse.

Some are trapped in destructive sexual behaviours.

As a church we believe passionately that whatever your past or present circumstances, God has a good future for you through his son Jesus.

Jesus spent much of his time with people whose past was, to say the least, dubious.

He never condemned, but rather offered understanding, forgiveness, a fresh start and hope.

Think of the woman caught in adultery whom Jesus refused to condemn, but to whom he said, "go and sin no more".

Or the sinful woman who anointed his feet to whom he pronounced forgiveness of her sins.

As a church we accept people whatever their past and present experiences but seek to help people find God's best way forward.

That being said, God has given us, in the Bible, some very clear guidelines about human sexuality.

And we need, as a church not to be afraid to share these and model these.

How much better is prevention than cure; of finding the right way first time rather than after many years of frustration and hurt!

In just a moment I'm going to talk about Proverbs 5, and the relationship of husband and wife.

But before I do, I want to affirm the single, celibate life. Jesus was the most complete and fulfilled human being – and he never married and never had sex.

St Paul chose a single life so that he could be dedicated to God and his work. He affirmed that choice in others.

You don't need to be married to be happy, to be fulfilled or be complete.

I think the mistake of the Roman Catholic Church is not to encourage priests to a life of celibacy if that is their calling; but rather to require celibacy of all priests so that those not called to a singleness must either give up a calling to ministry or give up a calling to marriage.

And so, to Proverbs 5, and the advice of the Teacher about marriage and sex. And its hard to imagine a more beautiful and positive view of marriage and sex than the one he presents.

Vs 15: "Drink water from your own cistern"
Or perhaps to use a modern idiom – "don't play away"!

God's best plan for sex is that it should be enjoyed exclusively within the context of marriage. St Paul is clear in 1 Corinthians 7 that making love creates a bond between man and woman; its more than just a physical act, but an emotional, even spiritual act. Creating this bond before marriage; before the ultimate commitment of pledging lifelong love and faithfulness; puts more weight on a relationship than it is designed to bear. But once the covenant of marriage has been entered, then making love completes and strengthens the bond between husband and wife.

I would always say to any couple; save sex for marriage. There is nothing to be lost by waiting and everything to be gained. Happy is the couple who can explore sex together, free from the experiences and comparisons of previous relationships. Happy is the couple who can throw themselves with abandon into making love, secure that they are, and will be, the only one with whom their partner experiences such intimacy. And happy is the couple free to learn and make mistakes, knowing that they are totally loved and totally secure.

Vs 18: May you rejoice in the wife of your youth

Vs 19: May her breasts satisfy you always and may you ever be captivated by her love.

Yes, I know that this is written from a man's perspective; but again St Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 writes that sex is for the enjoyment of both man and wife.

Wives can equally take rejoice in their husband and find satisfaction in them!

Augustine did the church a great disservice by equating sex with the transmission of original sin.

The bible portrays sex, making love, as a beautiful thing.

Strangely, I suspect that one of the least know commands of the bible is that of St Paul in 1 Corinthians 7.3, where said Paul says to those who are married: “make sure you have sex regularly with your husband or wife!”

“You can abstain for a time for prayer, if you wish, but otherwise you need to be at it!”

Why would St Paul say such a thing?

Because the marriage relationship needs time and effort if it is to flourish; and this applies to making love as to other areas of married life.

We live busy lives and its easy for important things like enjoying (working on) a marriage to get pushed out.

Making love, even when we are tired, or cross, is an act of self-giving which builds relationships.

It also helps guard against the temptation to stray.

Verse 20: “Why be captivated, my son by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man’s wife?”

We are all human. We are designed to find other people attractive. And why not? There is something of God in each human being. The human body is a beautiful thing.

But when that natural draw to beauty becomes something more; to find satisfaction in someone other than our marriage partner, then we are facing a temptation which needs to be resisted.

The teacher appeals to common sense: why look elsewhere when you already have what you want in your husband or wife?

The grass on your side of the fence might need a little TLC but it is certainly not greener on the other side.

We need, says the teacher, to be disciplined. Verse 23:

“[The wicked man] will die for lack of discipline.”

It has been said that the man who tries to make up his mind on the field of battle is lost.

If we wait until we are undergoing a time of temptation to decide what we will do, we will give in.

Rather, we need to know what we believe, set boundaries and pray for the strength to keep to them.

Finding others who can we talk with, ask for support and who will gently ask how we are doing are good ideas too.

For, finally, verse 21: “For a man’s ways are in full view of the Lord and he examines all his paths”.

Few of us now have a sampler above the mantelpiece with the words “The Lord is watching” embroidered on it.

But it would be good to keep in mind that our Lord is watching our every thought and word and deed.

Originally gardens were often walled.

The walls were designed to keep animals and even humans out – to protect the precious plants inside.

But the walls around a garden also helped plants to flourish by providing protection from the wind and heat from the stone walls allowed plants to grow which needed warmer temperatures.

In Song of Solomon 4, the Bible’s love poem, erotic love is described as a garden.

Making love, in the context of marriage, is a precious gift from God. It is to be held in honour, cherished, protected and enjoyed, because it is so special.

Too often, as a church, we have gained a reputation as prudes and kill-joys.

Oh! how we have failed in our task: to model the goodness of God, his generous provision of so much to be enjoyed and the right way to use these his gifts.

We need, as Christians, to show the world a better way to live than the hedonistic individualism which results in so many damaged lives, as we enjoy life in all its fulness as God intends it to be.