

Opening

- Informal Sharing (Chit Chat)
- Welcome and sharing of why we are here. Such as;
 - Companions – friends with whom we break bread – sharing our journey
 - Hold one another accountable to the Rule of Life
 - Pray out loud for one another
 - Share openly and honestly our hurts, hopes, questions and comments
 - Hold one another's sharing as the confidences of a friend.
- Simple Prayer asking God to be present with us.

This Week's Scripture

Mark 14:32-42

32They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. 34And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." 35And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." 37He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? 38Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 39And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. 41He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Commentary

The story of Jesus and the disciples in the garden after the Last Supper is a particularly touching scene. It reveals the inner struggle and pathos of Jesus along with the bone weary humanity of his closest disciples.

Jesus is struggling with these last few hours, striving to see God's hand in the tragic events that are unfolding around him. He clearly would prefer that God find another way to resolve the stand-off between human sin and God's embrace of humanity. But, it is the very depth of his faith that enables him to accept this as the way of God, even though it is clearly not his will.

And, as Jesus is making this struggle between the forces of light and dark, death and life, his disciples are simply struggling to stay awake, and losing! The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Paul writes that we do the very thing we do not want to do because our flesh feels separated from God and is unable to fulfill the desires of spirit.

When the flesh is unable to draw upon the strength of the spirit, it inevitably yields to temptation and falls into sin. In this case, an inability to fulfill the smallest command of Jesus, to stay awake.

Discussion Points

Our bodies, our flesh are captives to the senses. Our bodies can only experience life through the physical senses. Thus when it is weakened by weariness, disease, or desire, it is held captive by those sensations. When our back's hurt, it affects the way we live our lives. When we are hungry, we are prone to do whatever it takes to feed the body.

How does the body gain such power over the human spirit?

We have all had days when we just did not have the energy to do what we needed to do. But, in those times when we did it anyway, how did we motivate ourselves?

What role do ideas like hope and trust have in helping us do what needs to be done, in spite of how we feel?

How can a strengthened mind or soul help the body to find the resources it needs to accomplish what it needs to accomplish?

Sharing

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- Build a prayer list for your group – start with concerns about others, then share prayer concerns about ourselves and our family.
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1 Corinthians 6:12-20

12 "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. 13 "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. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. 15 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! 16 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." 17 But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18 Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. 19 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? 20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

Commentary

Making decisions between right and wrong are hard. Sometimes we would rather have someone to make those decisions for us so that all we have to do is follow orders. That way, if we err, it is their fault and we are safe from punishment. In the time of Paul, many used the Law as a way of avoiding their responsibility to be moral agents, to make the right choices. But, as Paul states in this passage, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial." This is no where more clear than in the issues of how we use our bodies as gifts of God.

Fornication, while it has a definite sexual overtone to it, really refers to using the body for purposes that lie outside of God's intentions. We are given a physical presence in order to be able to embrace the wonders of God's creation, to celebrate what God has done in creation through life-giving relationships with people and other parts of creation. However, whenever we use our bodies (or others) simply for self-satisfaction, we engage in fornication.

We are called to glorify God with our bodies, to celebrate God's creative purpose. Yes, it may be legal to smoke, but does the destruction of our lungs in order to satisfy a craving

glorify God? Smoking, when it seeks to satisfy our yearnings of the flesh at the expense of God's gifts, is fornication.

To embrace health is to recognize that we are given a physical presence that we might know God and God's creative purpose. This body is the temple where we worship the holy presence of God in our lives. Thus, we embrace health of the body as an important part of our spiritual journey.

Discussion Points

What some ways that we have misused these gifts of our bodies that might be called "fornication?"

How would embracing health as an essential element in our spiritual lives help us to avoid some of the temptations around us?

Embracing health is simply another way of accepting stewardship for the body that has been given to us by the grace of God. How does this understanding help us to accept our bodies just as they are? How does it help us accept and deal with the changes that take place in our bodies as mature and age?

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1 Kings 3:5-9

5At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." 6And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. 7And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 8And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. 9Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

Commentary

A second gift that comes to us is the gift of the mind. We can use this gift for God's purposes or simply to serve our own ambitions and desires. It takes a clever salesperson to sell snow blowers to people in the tropics. It takes a well disciplined mind, a mind that embraces wisdom, to refrain from selling that snow blower just because they can and, instead sell something that will be of real service to their clients.

King David was quite a clever fellow. He did what no one before or after him could do. He brought the Israelites (northerners) and Judaites (Southerners) together as one people. In fact, he was such a natural leader, that when it was time to pass the crown of the united kingdom to his Son, Solomon was nervous. He was no David and he knew that he would need all the help he could get in serving God's people well. And so, when asked by God what he wanted most, Solomon asked for the gift of understanding so that he could discern between good and evil. He sought the gift of wisdom, Godly understanding as one who feasts regularly on the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil.

Solomon sought to embrace wisdom so that he might serve God well as the King of God's people.

Discussion Points

Wisdom is that capacity to see things from God's perspective. It enables the human spirit to see beyond the horizon, beyond the limited human experience and to offer to the human will reasons to do the right thing according to God.

Often doing the right thing is made more difficult because it seems to conflict with our short-term needs and desires. Can you think of times when you yielded to temptation and did something contrary to God's will because it was easier or served an immediate desire or need?

How easy would it be to choose against our own short-term interests when we cannot see any long-term benefit even though God has said it should not do it?

Place yourself in the woman's place in the Garden of Eden. God told the man that they should not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for on that day they will die. The woman heard this from the man, not from God. And so, when she meets the serpent, he says "You will not die! Besides, the fruit really looks good, doesn't it?" She had to make her decision based on a hearsay long-term consequence that flew in the face of her short-term desire. Can you really say that you would walk away from that tree without tasting the fruit? Doing so requires that we have the gift of wisdom, God's perspective, in making our decision.

How would embracing wisdom change the way you live your life, day by day? What steps might you take in making your choices in life?

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Romans 14:13 - 23

13Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. 14I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. 15If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. 16So do not let your good be spoken of as evil. 17For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval. 19Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. 20Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat; 21it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble. 22The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God. Blessed are those who have no reason to condemn themselves because of what they approve. 23But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Commentary

The ancient yearning for peace has been our constant companion since the earliest days of human consciousness. Peace, shalom in Hebrew, is a sense of well-being, a sense of fulfillment and completeness to life. Peace is not merely the absence of conflict. Rather, it is each part of the body contributing what it can to the overall health and prosperity of the body.

In his Letter to the Romans, Paul is concerned that the church is tearing itself apart. At issue was the role of the Jewish law in the life of faith, especially for non-Jewish Christians. But, he reminds them that it is not simply about following the law. It is about the testimony we make with our lives. He writes, "If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died." Do not eat meat offered to idols if it will destroy another's faith.

Peace is more than doing what we think is right, it is about being what God expects us to be. Peace is about living in harmony with all for the benefit of all.

Embracing peace means that we are seeking to be linked with our God and God's people on a deeper level, the level of the soul.

Discussion Points

There are many things that divide us from each other and from God. We are divided by opinions and by our own conviction that our opinions are better than anyone else's. We divide ourselves up based on external appearance and status. We engage in intergroup conflict because we feel that our ways are better than their ways. And yet, in the midst of all this conflict, we yearn for peace.

How would God describe peace for human beings?

How well does God's yearning match your understanding of peace?

To embrace peace is to seek to be part of God's community of faith. What can you do this week to embrace peace?

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