

# **The Call To Have A Good Body**

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Damascus United Methodist Church

**I Samuel 3:1-20; I Corinthians 6:12-20; St. John 1:43-51**

Second Sunday After the Epiphany/Human Relations Day – January 15, 2012

The “Call to Have a Good Body”- now how’s that for a sermon title? I read the lessons for today several times, and decided that Paul’s words to the Church at Corinth deserve our deep consideration. It is his words from this sixth chapter of Corinthians that I heard as a teenager that in many ways have become the “litmus test” of my judgment about how to treat one’s body. Do you remember them? Verse 19 reads, “Do you 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?” In many ways I believe this Pauline conceived metaphor is the perfect simile for taking care of your body forever.

Let’s delve in a little deeper to the Corinthian text. At the time of Paul’s writing, and with the Greek influence so much upon the thinking of the cosmopolitan city of Corinth, dualism of body separated from mind and spirit was part of people’s thinking. That is, religion is chiefly connected to mind and spirit, and our body operates on its own impulse, need and function. Therefore, the mind and spirit may be seen as having little power over the great hungers and demands of the body. So, therefore, abuse and misuse of one’s body can be rationalized based on this dualism, these two essences of the human condition constantly struggling with each other for who’s on top so to speak, or who’s in charge. This concept is still rampant today, expressed in terms like, “Just look how the body takes over;” “You think I wanna behave the way I do?” Or in the typical spiritualized comment viewing the body as being evil, “The devil made me do it.” Some people label this dualism as part of latent gnosticism in our American society. But I am not going there. Let me put it this way. Many people consider religion to be a matter of the heart or spirit, hardly affecting the body. Add to that, the typical misunderstanding that many Christians have a freedom from the law because of Jesus’ dying, saving act on the cross, one

can arrive at this often expressed, “Now I can do anything I want, as long as I don’t hurt somebody.” Paul speaks a bit to that issue at the commencement of this passage today. He says “All things may be lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial for me.” (vs. 12 of I Corinthians 6).

Let’s take that concept to an even more blatant period. The Old Testament lection from I Samuel speaks about Israel around the year 1000 B. C. It is described as a period of wanton spirituality- not much of the word of God spoken or revered and very few visions according to the Good Book. Eli, the chief priest, has been so-so as the leading priest. In fact when Hannah, the mother of Samuel, came to God’s temple in deep prayer, Eli accused her of being drunk, and said in effect, “Don’t come to the House of God to get de-toxed.” That’s how out of touch with spiritual outpouring he was. On the contrary, he let his two sons Hophni and Phinehas, called to serve the people as priests, have sexual relations on the doorway of the Tent of Meeting. His rebuke was so limp, they ignored their father and continued their debauchery in the holy community.

We remember the calling of Samuel in the night in Eli’s tent as this warm story of God after three whispers to Samuel being identified by Eli as the Lord addressing the young lad. That’s lovely, but ignores what the call to the young lad was all about. Eli had been in spiritual “lah-lah” land, if you will, not hearing the Lord, and the young prophet Samuel is being summoned to tell Eli that he and his sons Hophni and Phinehas are about to be destroyed and replaced because of Eli’s irresponsible conduct and the sons’ outright evil deeds. The line that is offered about the behavior of these men is one that reflects much of what could be said about dualism. “Everyone did was right in their own eyes.” What we see here is the excuse that often comes with that dualism. “Boys will be boys.” “I know they are in the church, but you know when those hormones take over.” Whatever is done to dismiss the gravity of the disconnect between the call of God upon our lives and the outplay of our actions with our bodies- Paul commands us to stop the dualism and calls us to accountability to God.

Jesus in the Gospel of John is looking for apostles. Philip is called by the Master and Philip tells Nathanael these precious words, “We have found

him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael asks, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip invites his friend, “Come and see.” When Jesus sees Nathanael coming, he says of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” That is to say, “Here’s a man without any dualism, but a wholeness and goodness.” Nathanael says, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answers, “One day, I saw you under a fig tree,” an idiom suggesting Jesus had seen and known his wisdom and goodness earlier. Nathanael exclaims, “Teacher, you are the Son of God and the King of Israel.” Jesus sees even beyond Nathanael’s present goodness and integrity and responds, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these. In fact, truly, you will see heaven opened and the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Jesus knew a good body when he saw one. He knew persons who were not entrapped by their dualisms that held them captive to their urges, physical needs and expedient behaviors. Nathanael was a whole man who was attempting to be faithful to God, and was not disposed to the winds of the moment, the pleasures of instant gratification, the variances of who’s watching and who’s favor must I gain. Nathanael in his simplicity only wanted to be at one with the One he named the Son of God.

So it must be for us. Our point of departure is that our bodies are like Jesus’ body, the temple of God, and we are meant for resurrection and eternal life, and not for dwelling in the abyss of fornication and habituating with the lowest forms of existence. Jesus’ invitation for all humankind is the same, “I want you to be a beautiful body wrapped in my love since creation, and ready to live fully in my family.” His unmitigated grace makes this possible for us all. Amen.