

Living Single & Celibacy

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

This morning loved ones, could we talk about celibacy? And that's the single unmarried state to which God has called many of us. And I would really hope that after our question and answer time, and discussion, many of you will feel freer to accept that call and see how beautiful it is. The fact that it is for many of us, is plainly indicated by Jesus, if you'd like to look at his words in Matthew 19. Matthew 19:9-12 loved ones, "And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.' The disciples said to him, 'If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.' But he said to them, 'Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.'"

What I'd like us to do therefore, is discover why this beautiful gift that God has given us has been ignored so often by those of us who call ourselves Christians. And I hope that after the discussion, many of us will feel that we're able to do something to restore it, at least here in our body. Now loved ones, society has taken off in two extreme directions on celibacy. You can see that yourselves. Monasticism and asceticism have led many people to throw themselves into celibacy for the wrong reason. But at the same time, marriage and family life, and the popularity of marriage and family life, have forced many other loved ones to throw themselves into marriage for the wrong reason. And so what we need to see is God's balanced attitude to celibacy and we need to try to recover it for our own lives.

Now there is a basic principle of life that will guide us in our approach to this whole issue and it's given in Jesus' answer to one of you dear lawyers in Matthew 22. Matthew 22:35, "And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.'" That's the principle that will guide us safely, really.

Now you remember that Jesus was unlike every other human being who ever lived. You remember that he gave the world the most perfect teaching it has ever received and you remember that even his enemies acknowledged that he lived the most perfect life that has ever been lived. But the great fact that convinces us here this morning that he has come directly from the heart of the person who made us is that he came back to earth and lived again for about a month after the Romans had very efficiently and completely killed him. And it's that fact plus the other fact of his perfect life and his perfect teaching that makes us believe that he is not just like any other human being, and he is not just like any other great religious teacher but he is out on his own. He is unique. He is different. And when he speaks our Creator speaks, and his words are our Creator's words.

And that's why in the light of that principle that he shared there, we believe that he's saying, "Love me, your God who has made you with everything you've got. Don't split up your love between your wife, and your children, and your friends, and your business associates, and your job, and me. Don't do that. You're misunderstanding the nature of love if you do that. Love is not just your attention, or your interest, those you split up among us all. But love is the person that you put first in your life. Now, I am your God who made you. I want you to love me with everything you've

got. I want you to put me completely and absolutely first.” And that’s what Jesus is saying loved ones.

I think a lot of us right there I’m sure, realize in our own consciences that we have had a very selfish autonomous attitude to our love haven’t we? Because probably most of us deal out a little of it here to the wife, a little of it here to the children, a little of it to our friends, and then a little to God and of course, God is saying something completely different from that. He’s saying, “Love me with all your heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. Give me everything you’ve got.”

Now many of us I think have not realized that and we still think of love as something that we are in control of and yet you know that when you have experienced something that you would undoubtedly call love, you know that it has been a zealous thing. A fully enthusiastic thing so strong that you could not deal out this here, or there, and everywhere, it was something that took possession of you and God says we’re to love him with that kind of attitude.

Now actually, it’s very logical isn’t it? It’s really very logical that we should do that. If one of us here was to give up one of our kidneys for you to replace your ineffective one, you know what kind of attitude you would have to us. You know it, it would be a very complete gratitude. Now if you knew someone who had given you things that nobody else could give you, arms, and legs, and eyes, and a brain that is able to connect beauty with happiness, and that one was not just giving you a box of chocolates or flowers to express his love, but he gave you millions of trees, and rivers, and lakes so that you could enjoy the body that he had given you. And he gave you a resilient body that was able to spring back again and again after being tired. You know, if someone gave you all those things, you know you wouldn’t exist if you hadn’t those things. You wouldn’t even be here to do anything if you hadn’t those things so it’s very logical that you would give to that one all of your love absolutely.

But then if that dear one, so you could experience the life and the love that flowed through him died so that your poisoned selfish in turned personality could be destroyed and you could be filled with the same outgoing freeing life and love that he had, if that person metaphorically gave up not just one of his kidneys but his only kidney so that you could live a full life, you know it’s utterly logical to give to that person everything you’ve got. Nothing that anybody did, wife or child, or anything is equal to that kind of giving.

Now loved ones, that’s maybe worth pondering about. And I’d ask you just to stop there maybe and would you look at a verse that says that? It’s 1 John 4:19, and as you’re turning the pages just let the truth of that come home to our hearts. 1 John 4:19, and that’s it you know, “We love, because he first loved us.” You know, it’s an incredible perversion of logic isn’t it, and of hatred to God, to continue to argue that we happened by chance, so that somehow we feel we’re self-made men and women and we owe nothing to anybody. It’s an incredible hatred to God and an incredible perversion of logic. Its unbelievable irrationality to take that attitude really, isn’t it?

The most logical thing in the world is when you come into a beautiful garden, or you’ve come into a beautiful art gallery to think or wonder who did this. And it’s the same when you go to that gallery down in California, you know, of Ghetty’s (the J. Paul Ghetty Museum), you go in there and you think, “Who could have made all this?” And you immediately think of the person that was behind it and so it’s the most logical attitude when you come into a beautiful world like ours and the most rational thing to do is give everything you’ve got, all the love you have to that dear person. And

yet we're so selfish aren't we, that we actually find it impossible to give disinterested love to this Creator. I mean, we should be able to do it.

We should not love him now because we're going to get anything out of him because we've got all out of him that we can. He's given us everything and so it should be possible for us to love him with self forgetting love, but the strange thing is we can't. Isn't that right? That there's something in us that prevents us loving him with fully disinterested love so what should we do? Well loved ones, will yourself to express in your life what perfect love expressed in Jesus' life. That's the first step you can take. In fact, in a way it's the only step you can take towards giving perfect love to God. Will yourself to express in your life what perfect love expressed in Jesus' life.

I can number them. One, think of your Creator, think of him. Don't think about him, think of him now as he created you and think of the thoughts he had when he made you. Think of what he was planning when he made you. First, think of your Creator. You can't love him at all unless you think of him and all of us can do that. All of us, when we're walking to work in the morning we can think of him. In a personal way he made me, he actually knows the bump in my nose, he knows my hair, he knows my feet. Think of him.

Secondly, meditate on what he's thinking, really. Think, "He's alive and he's thinking something at this moment." And think of what he's wanting at this moment. Think of what he's wanting. Think of what is important to him at this moment. You know, we're such silly little monkeys, aren't we? We're all taken up with getting our little nuts in and our little car has got a little flat, and oh we're just all wrought up about that, so dumb. The car will be on the scrap heap in three years' time. But instead, think about what our Creator is thinking at this moment. Think what he's thinking. Meditate on what he is thinking, be interested in the things that he is interested in, be concerned about the things he is concerned about. That is, treat him as a real person as you would your own loved one at home.

And then, direct your will to do the things that he wants you to do. Direct your will to do the things that he wants you to do and to speak the words that he wants you to speak. If you say, "How would I know?" Your conscience, your conscience tells you all the time what you should do, what you should say. Direct your will to do those things. You'll never come into a love relationship if you don't act and do something. Direct your will to do the things that he has shown you that he wants you to do through your conscience and through your study of the Bible day-by-day. Direct your will to do that.

Then fourthly, the heart of the consecration that is ours in order to bring about perfect love to God, this is the heart of it, do those things more for him than for anybody else. Do all those more in connection with him than with yourself or your wishes, or your friends or their wishes, or your peers and their wishes, or your boss and his wishes. Do all those three things. Think about him, think about what he is thinking. Meditate upon the things that he's interested in and concerned about. Direct your will to do those things that he wants you to do that he's showing you through your conscience and the Bible that you should do, and then do that more than you do for anybody else. More than you do for your wife, more than you do for your children, more than you do for yourself, more than you do for anything else. Put him above everybody else.

That's what it means love with all your heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. And then last of all loved ones, regard your own plans and preferences as nothing. That's what love is. Love is not – its bluff that love yourself. It's bluff. We are such miserable little selfish creatures that if

somebody tells us to love others as ourselves we know who will get the worst of it and it's not us. Loving God means turning from yourself completely, not dealing out a little bit of love to your wife, not dealing out a little bit of love to yourself, forgetting yourself.

Fifthly, regard your plans and preferences and your wishes as destroyed with Jesus on Calvary and regard yourself as dead as far as anything that you ought to have or ought to do is concerned, and regard your personality as available to God for his use. Now loved ones, those are the only human steps that you can take towards loving God and after you've taken them all you're not yet loving God with a selfless love because you cannot do that on your own. But yet you have to take all those steps which involves full consecration of yourself to God. That's what it is and that's why Jesus says, "At the end we're unprofitable servants," because after we've done all that we're still not able to love him on our own power with unselfish love.

But, when you do that a miracle takes place in your heart and I'll show you it. Acts 5:32 and it is really a miracle. Acts 5:32, "And we are witnesses to these things," and then the miracle, "And so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey them." The moment you set your life out that way and dispose your love in that way, a new miraculous creative life of the Spirit comes from God to you. It's a gift. It's a selfless gift and it comes inside you and creates in you the whole attitude of love that Jesus has for his Father which is supernatural and beyond anything that we can produce ourselves. And that's real love.

Its Romans 5:5 loved ones. The Holy Spirit comes into us and then Romans 5:5 takes place. Romans 5:5, "And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." In other words, once you dispose your will in the way we've shared, God then gives you the Holy Spirit who alone can create selfless, self-forgetting, complete and sacrificial "Agape" love within you and then you're able to love God with all your heart, and soul, and strength, and mind and he creates in you a selfless love but only, you see, if you're willing to direct your whole life to him.

In other words, if you're not willing to let the Holy Spirit express that kind of complete love through you, then God will not give it to you. But when you show yourself as willing, not just by saying but by beginning to dispose your life in that way and to dispose your life to please God above everybody else, then God gives the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit begets in you that love. And then, immediately you begin to sense God's deep appreciation and recognition of you. You do. You begin to sense that the God of the whole universe loves you, and appreciates you, and recognizes you and you begin to enjoy your fellowship with him day-by-day, and you begin to sense that you are important to him and that's all that matters. And suddenly loved ones, your life is filled with warmth and not coldness.

Your life is filled with fullness and not emptiness. You feel completely satisfied instead of being constantly frustrated. You feel always in the company of the kings of kings instead of feeling lonely. You always feel full and not empty. You feel satisfied with a warm personal living relationship not an acceptance of some abstract truths. And then at last, you're free to take part in the beautiful planned love that God has for all the others who have allowed themselves to be crucified with Christ and have exchanged self for Christ and then there comes about the whole beautiful plan that God has for men and women.

You remember, it says in Genesis 1:27 that God made us in his image male and female created he us. And then you're free to begin to find that you don't need anything from other people, you're getting

it all from your Father. You're getting all the warmth and satisfaction from him that you need, you're getting all the security that you need from him, you're getting all the recognition that you need from him, and now you're free from getting those things, that security, and that significance, and that happiness from anybody else and you're free at last to look at men and women for what they are, dear optional extra gifts that God has given to you in the world. And you're able to begin to take part with them in a great love relationship no longer looking to them from what you can get from them. No longer the insecurity of the hunters and the hunted.

That's what spoils the man/woman relationship whether it's at high school, or university, or later on with updykes couples. That's what spoils open love among us, you're not sure if they're hunting you. You're not sure if you're the hunted. You're not sure if you should be running or if they're chasing. And suddenly you're freed from that and you're freed at last to regard each other as dear sons and daughters of a Father who is giving you all you need and from no human being can you get what you're getting from that dear Father, and at last loved ones, there begins to take part that beautiful whole confident closeness to one another that comes from being freed from selfish ulterior motives.

That's what holds us back, isn't it? That's why we're inhibited. That's why we're so slow to put our arms around each other and to be close to each other, because we're not sure what the motive of the other person is and we feel guilty at times in our own consciences because of our own selfish motives because whether we want to marry the person or not we're so often trying to get something from them. And suddenly you're freed from all that and you're getting it all from the Father and at last you're able to be free and open with each other, and able to come into the deep intercourse that God wants us as men and women to have with each other because there is a beautiful intercourse that is spiritual, and that is intellectual, and that is emotional, and that is volitional as we begin to bring our lives into harmony.

The kind of harmony we sensed in that song at the prayer time and suddenly there comes to us a great satisfaction, a great sense of completion and fulfillment what we were really made for and we begin to experience that together as a family. And loved ones, it expresses itself physically. It does. As we mature by having our psychological personalities come under the control of our spirits so there is a beautiful expression of this in the physical realm and you can see it as it was in the New Testament church in 2 Corinthians 13.

2 Corinthians 13:12, "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you." And at last you know, there are pure embraces, it's not a touch me not fearful relationship. At last there are pure embraces and there are clean unselfish kisses, and there are warm handshakes that make us feel the family we were always made to be, and running through it all is a great sense of confidence. A great sense of being free from using the other person and really as in Jesus' company so it happens with us, because it did happen in Jesus' company, we begin to relate to each other brothers and sisters, here in the body as mature husbands and wives relate to each other. And we have every intercourse that they have outside the sphere of child bearing. We have all the intercourse with each other except for that because we are not called to be together in that husband wife relationship, but we're called together as dear brothers and sisters.

And so there are at last no frustrated spinsters in the body of Jesus, and there are no lonely bachelors, and you have the confidence that there will be dear hands to dress you for burial that throughout your life together have expressed kindness to you and love. And you sense at last that when that day comes there'll be strong arms of brothers to lift you, and to bring you before the

Father, those strong arms that have protected you throughout your life here in the body and no longer do you feel, "I have to have my own husband. I have to have my own wife." And then there takes place a beautiful community of singles who are at last free to be called by God to marry when he calls them.

But at last they're free to be called by him to marry. They no longer marry because they need somebody to be close to them, or they marry because they need somebody to express affection to them, or they marry because they don't want to be left on their own when they grow old, or they marry because they desperately want to be close to somebody. But at last we begin to marry, those of us who are called to do it, because God has called us. And even then the marriages do not steal from the body, they do not make the rest of us feel out of it or feel that we have to get our own partner too to enjoy that kind of happiness but the marriages actually share the same closeness of brother and sister relationship and we go to each other's homes not as going into some citadel or fortress that two people have got together to protect themselves and ensure their futures. But we go into them as our homes, as our homes of our brothers and sisters who are as close to us as they are to their wives and their husbands and who increasingly as the years pass and you loved ones have passed on in years, you know that really it's the same closeness and relationship that we have to our wives, and loved ones, that's God's plan.

And then at last we don't ostracize each other by being married. At last we're free to be married or not married and the beauty of it is the loved ones are no longer driven to homosexuality and lesbianism. Because isn't that it? That's what drives us isn't it? It's the coldness, it's the distance from each other, and it's the prudish correctness that we've experienced in so many of our churches. It's that coldness and harshness in the office on Monday morning. It's that hardness as you walk down Nicollet Mall (in Minneapolis) that's what eventually drives you into a desperate desire for somebody to love you, isn't it? And at last of course, in a body of Jesus that's eliminated because you are loved and you know you're loved.

Suddenly of course it releases us all because we're released at last, some of us to sew, and some of us to saw wood, some of us to cook, some of us to repair cars, some of us to express ourselves in masculine gestures, and some of us to express ourselves in what we in society call feminine gestures, whatever those are. But at last we're freed from that and no longer is a guy, or a girl alienated or ostracized, or victimized because they don't measure up to society's false standards of what a man and a woman is. And loved ones, really that's God's beautiful plan and it takes first of all a coming to a real experience of God's love in your own life so that you're not demanding from others, and then a willingness to let that love flow through you and begin to break up these terrible attitudes that we have to each other.

Of course it's beautiful because when a wife does die then a husband doesn't feel lonely. He misses her and looks forward to meeting her in heaven, but doesn't feel lonely because they've always been close to so many in the family and there's always somebody to see you off on the great journey and you're never left on your own and that's the Father's plan loved ones. And really at last we're free to be what we are so praise God.

Now loved ones, are there questions and especially points that maybe aren't clarified in the whole vision of the truth? Yes, I do agree with you that there are other loved ones that go into overt homosexuality which I would say was getting the same satisfaction for our sexual organs in relationship with the same sex as we get incidentally from relations with the opposite sex. And there are loved ones who go into homosexuality and lesbianism to satisfy the body. They're just as

wrong going into that as any husband or wife is here who is primarily concerned with the surge, or the exhilaration, or the thrill that goes through their own bodies rather than preoccupied with the wife, or the husband themselves as real people? So, they're just as wrong as we are who don't engage in physical intercourse within marriage in the balanced way God has intended. They're no more wrong, I'd point that out, they're no more wrong they are simply preoccupied with the body and preoccupied with getting a physical thrill that they hope will give exhilaration to their emotions and hope somehow will bring a unity and integration to their spirits. And I agree with you, I think that that is what God is opposing. That is wrong.

But I think on the other hand that there are many loved ones who go into what the society calls homosexual and lesbian relationships really because they are desperate for love. Desperate for warmth and kindness and then it drifts into the physical expression. That is a physical expression beyond what is legitimate for man/man relationships. So, I do agree with you that I think there are loved ones who are in homosexual and lesbian relationships for the physical thrill. Many others are into it because they have missed love.

It's not right. I agree with you, it's not right all I'm pleading is that the poor souls have been driven into it by often hardness. I'm with you, we didn't get into it, I didn't get into it, I know that but then all of us are in different situations in regards to different sins. So, no I'm against homosexuality and against lesbianism, but loved ones that isn't the issue. The two loved ones came up at the end last Sunday morning, and were just concerned because they were involved in it and oh their dear hearts cry out for love. They don't cry out for label, condemnations, but for love. So really what we are to do is have the highest standard, Jesus' standard of purity among husband/wife relationships, man/woman relationships, man/man relationships, woman/woman relationships, but at the same time have the height of warm, fragrant, kindly understanding, gentle love and if that is present the other is not needed, really.

Okay, I asked my own question. Is that alright? Okay. Shall we pray?