

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALTY: Knowing the Body of Christ

Pastor Paul Rohde

April 11, 2005

*Genesis 2: 25 The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.
Genesis 4: 1 And Adam knew his wife and she conceived and bore Cain.*

When I taught confirmation, I began discussions about sex by counting to 3 and having every one say “SEX” together. 1-2-3-SEX. I had done that one evening and was then discussing with my 8th graders the degree of intimacy appropriate for the level of relationship. So, how much touching on a first date, going steady, engaged, and so on. We were about 20 minutes into this discussion, when one of my students raised her hand and said, “Pastor Paul, are we talking about sex?” I responded, “Well, yes, Jenny, we are. And have been for several minutes. She was incredulous, “Why on earth would we talk about sex in confirmation?” It may be the only time the Holy Spirit gave me utterance. I responded immediately, “Because it was God’s idea, Jenny. I would never have thought of it myself.”

The first time I experienced sexual intercourse, I was astounded that’s all it takes to make a baby. I compared it to writing a paper or learning a Beethoven sonata—somehow being participating in the creation of a human being seemed like it should be as or more difficult. But it wasn’t.

Twenty three years of marriage later, I am still astounded at how complex is the “knowing” of our own and another’s humanness. There are so many nuances, shadows, surprises, and mysteries in the making of love. I am in awe.

In this introduction to our series “The Body of Christ: spirituality and sexuality” I’m going to attempt to respond to the question, “Why on earth would the chapel, Augustana, consider sexuality and spirituality?” I’ll lean mightily on the texts. The Bible’s word for sexual intimacy is *to know*.

We’re a college, so knowing is important. We’re in favor of thinking—about this and every subject. I read somewhere that the largest sex organ in the body is the mind. I pray that before we claim to know, we will think, engage our minds as well as our spirits and bodies.

This little verse from Genesis makes it very clear that *knowing* is more than cerebral. To illustrate, it’s one thing to know about estrogen and testosterone, what they are and how they function in a way that will get you points on an anatomy test. It’s quite another

thing to know they are part of you. They are gift—great gift. And great challenge and mystery, too.

It is not escaping the attention of thoughtful people, that spirituality and sexuality alike both need and offer integration. Heart, soul, mind, strength, and neighbor. . . united in love. I hope our conference will stir knowing ourselves and one another, the gifts and mysteries of sexuality and spirituality and how they're connected.

And Adam knew Eve and she conceived and bore a child. I think *know* is a beautiful word for sex and spirit. And Adam knew Eve. And Eve knew Adam. It is so much better than our cultures' words, *have* or *get*. We *have* sex or we *get* it, reducing the mysteries of love and life to an it. I am just as disgusted when these possessives are used for God. There is a huge difference between *knowing* God and *having* God. Dr. Seuss called it "thingification."

It came to me this morning when the sermon was being reborn that my appreciation for this language is no doubt connected to the fact that I am married to a very independent, not to mention competent woman. She is not about to be HAD. I don't just respect her for it, I love her for it.

We have a conference on sexuality and spirituality to deepen appreciation for knowing. Knowing ourselves. Knowing one another. And Knowing God.

The second verse from Genesis takes this a step further. "And the man and his wife were naked and they were not ashamed." To know ourselves and one another in relationship, is to be open, vulnerable and exposed. . . and not shamed. The writer of Genesis knows something about the intricate weaving of trust and promise. Being known is both beautiful and terrifying. We are utterly vulnerable and only then utterly free. I hope this week for a thoughtful exchange for all of us—to know ourselves, to know ourselves in relationship, to know ourselves open, vulnerable, and cherished both in relation to God and one another.

Why would the chapel, chair of moral values, Augustana have a conference on sexuality and spirituality. In characteristic understatement our informed, thoughtful, integrated discourse on the connections has been limited. I'd argue that whether the words are prohibitive or promiscuous, they're equally limited.

Lots of what gets said is prohibitive, keeping sex out of all the wrong places. I'm not against that. I just wonder if we're making the assumption that if we prohibit it in the wrong places, it'll come automatically in the right places. I seek for us in this conference to know something of knowing and being known. . .as sacred, affirmed, beautiful, good.

When I say limited in the promiscuous, I mean assertions about sex [or spirit] that are so eager to affirm they are not at all honest about how vulnerable we are. The text says "not ashamed." While I've preached from Genesis and God's creative intent, I could as easily preach from John, where Jesus encounters those broken and brings healing. Glib

affirmations that are not clear about vulnerability are as limiting and shaming as any prohibition.

Why would we have a conference on sexuality and spirituality? A simple, factual response is the Philip Knutson Endowment, which gave us a grant to do so. Phil Knutson was a scholar and pastor, became the Director of Theological Education in the ELCA, and was passionate that young people have opportunity to explore ideas faithfully and critically. Phil Knutson was also gay. When at his diagnosis of AIDS he committed suicide, his estate established grants so that young people could explore significant questions. . . and understanding would promote life. Sexual life, spiritual life, integrated life.

My interest in this conference is emphatically not about sexual politics. My interest as pastor to this community is the health of souls. The health of souls that in God's imaginative creativity, live in bodies. The health of souls that live in bodies that estrogen and testosterone. The health of embodied souls that yearn to be open and not ashamed. Yearn to be touched and for whom touch will be a gift of life and love.

It's God's idea—I would never have thought of it myself.

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

ELCA SOUTH DAKOTA SYNOD ASSEMBLY. Two students, one male and one female, are needed to represent our student congregation at the **SD Synod Assembly on June 3 and 4**. The event includes worship, learning, and discussion and resolutions considering decisions about the wider church. See Pr. Paul if you are interested or willing to attend.

CAMPUS MINISTRY OUTREACH BAND - Applications are now being taken for the new Outreach Band for next year. Application are available on the Narthex table.

BANQUET - Volunteers are needed to serve the Banquet (the downtown soup kitchen) on **Thursday, April 14th at 5 pm.** Please sign up on the sheet posted on the Narthex table.

THE BODY OF CHRIST: SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY

April 11 - 10 :00 am chapel sermon Pastor Paul, Knowing The
Body: Spirituality and Sexuality

April 13 - 10:00 am chapel sermon Ann Pederson, Giving the
Body :Spirituality and Sexuality

April 14 - 10:00 convocation, 3:1 room Dr. Dan Spencer, University
of Montana, the Body in Pain: “Broken and Being Born”

(The series is sponsored by the Stanley L Olsen Chair of Moral Values, the chapel of reconciliation with a grant from the Philip Knudson Foundation at St. Olaf College.)

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Tuesday	Koinonia, 10 am - NABS if providing treats
Wednesday	Holy Communion, 10 am - Ann Pederson, Reli.
Thursday	Chair of Moral Values lecture, 10 am - 3-1 room Dan Spencer, U. Of Montana - “The Body In Pain”
Friday	Worship, 10 am - Sarah Harrold, Senior Speaker