

David Foster Wallace was a brilliant writer known mostly for his massive novel *Infinite Jest*. If you've actually read it, you've climbed the literary equivalent of Mt. Everest. He's also known for a commencement speech he gave at Kenyon College in 2005. He began with this story: *There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, "Morning, boys. How's the water?" The two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, "What the heck is water?"*¹

He elaborates his point, saying, "The exact same experience can mean two totally different things to two different people, given those people's two different **belief templates** and two different **ways of constructing meaning from experience**."

And then he confesses, "*A huge percentage of the stuff that I tend to be automatically certain of is, it turns out, totally wrong and deluded. I have learned this the hard way, as I predict you graduates will, too.*"

This was his way of talking about the cliché that a great education will teach you how to think. But he said he was more concerned with what we should be thinking about - in particular, the things we might not be conscious of. David wasn't a religious man. It turns out he was miserable and finally, suicidal. But he went on to say that none of us are really atheists. We all worship something. And this is what we need to be thinking about - the unconscious ones. He says...

[*"In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship - be it JC or Allah, be it YHWH or the Wiccan Mother Goddess, or the Four Noble Truths, or some inviolable set of ethical principles - is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you."*

He concludes that point, saying, "On one level, we all know this stuff already. It's been codified as myths, proverbs, clichés, epigrams, parables; the skeleton of

¹ (<https://fs.blog/2012/04/david-foster-wallace-this-is-water/>)

every great story. The whole trick is keeping the truth up front in daily consciousness.

Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful, it's that they're unconscious. They are default settings.”]

They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day, getting more and more selective about what you see and how you measure value without ever being fully aware that that's what you're doing.”

He says..“...the so-called real world will not discourage you from operating on your default settings, because the so-called real world...hums merrily along in a pool of fear and anger and frustration and craving and worship of self.”

He concludes, “We have to keep reminding ourselves over and over: ‘This is water.’” He doesn’t tell them how to do this, except to suggest that they will need to try to choose some “capital-T” truth.

For 2000 years, the Christian story has been interrupting unconscious swimmers with the capital-T truth about where they're swimming and what's at stake. In Biblical terms, John 1, Jesus is light breaking into darkness, clarifying the confusion about who we are, where we are and what's wrong - challenging ways of constructing meaning from our limited experience.

According to John... 9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

What's unique about Christianity is that the Truth took on flesh, came into the darkness and actually suffered the consequences of a world living in its own sneaky, toxic truth. In what he suffered, Jesus showed us just how deadly the water really is. In his own bodily life, the God of the universe offered us awakening and salvation. He called humanity out of a delusion. And he necessarily gave us the right and power to come out because, truth is, we couldn't have known it or chosen it on our own.

What David Foster Wallace is describing is water particular to our times - an environment where individuals get to decide on their truth based on their own experience, deaf to old fish like Scripture, tradition and reason, the goods of this great cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 11. Humanity narrows its aperture based on what the present and immediate circumstances or feelings say is true. Or frankly, *what we want to be true*.

Following Jesus, on the other hand, is an embrace of truth about ourselves **from beyond ourselves** - beyond a sea of subjectivity. Hebrews 13 says Jesus is the truth that doesn't change no matter what sort of water we swim in or how unaware of it we are. All that to say, there's no way any of what I'm about to say is going to make sense to you if you're unwilling to think about the water.

This is my fourth and final sermon in Hebrews 11-13, the final chapter. Thirteen begins with what the Greeks called a "peroration." The argument is made, now what should we do? That's the peroration. What's the moral vision?

Here's the summary, some of which I'm going to unpack: Faithful Christianity is a life of hospitality, empathy and mutual concern. It's also the acceptance of God's loving constraints for sex and for material wealth and possessions. For our good. For the common good. To glorify God.

This glory and goodness is possible for one reason, verses 5-6: Christ is with us. He is our helper who doesn't change. And in verse 7, that's what their leaders, the old fish, have been saying and living all along.

First of all, brotherly love and love of stranger. In the Greek, *Philadelphia* and *philiaxenia*.

This is a family of mutual life. Don't forget it. Keep it going, he says. And it's an open and hospitable family. He's probably alluding to the story of angels visiting Abraham and wants to ensure they maintain a culture of welcome for people not like them. God may be sending people. Suffice it to say, the Church need not be insecure about its borders. We continue to demonstrate that we're looking for and already living as an alternative city, living as a lasting Kingdom of *philiaxenia*, not a temporary xenophobic kingdom. So we continue to demonstrate what's far better about the transcendent Kingdom than temporary, immanent kingdoms. And where compassion for the stranger may be lacking in regard to earthly kingdoms, we live it into that void.

Verse 3. Many of their brothers and sisters were languishing in prison for their faith, awaiting trial or execution. Imprisonment wasn't their penalty. They were on hold. In that time, they weren't given clothes or food. That's how Roman

prisons worked. **But in calling them to the mutuality of having a body, his point is, “that’s basically your body in there.”** Feed and clothe it. It’s the unchanging principle of empathy, what should guide our hearts and hands. To remember wasn’t just to recall, but to act. To pray, but also go.

Verses 4 and 5. Materialism and sexuality. It’s interesting, but not surprising that I so often get the question: “What are Village Church’s views on sexuality.” But I don’t think I’ve ever gotten the question, “What are Village Church’s views on materialism?” In case you’re wondering, I preached on that just 4 Sundays ago. Give it a listen. It’s important.

In the ancient world, sexual immorality and materialism are often tied together. To the ancient mind, lust and greed are made of the same stuff. They are disordered, selfish loves prioritizing personal fulfillment over shared interests. They complicate the spiritual purpose of our relationships and our resources. They both affect community. We should take it seriously that over and over, in the call to live out faithfulness to Christ, these two tend to be top of mind for the apostles - especially because they ended up evangelizing in somewhat different cultural waters than Jesus.

I think it’s particularly important in 2019 to consider how the love of money has shaped our culture and nation. We need to reckon with the economic legacy of America, which was and is both enslaving and enslaved. It’s remains a massive blindspot. This new nation founded on God-given liberty and equality included the enslavement of millions of other human beings to build the better world they imagined. Exactly 400 years ago, the first African slaves arrived in North America. Exactly 244 years ago, if the Church in America was intent on honoring God in the receipt of our independence from tyranny, the last slave should have been freed in the name of liberty and justice *for all* - in the name of Jesus, no matter the economic consequences. We are implicated. Until we as a nation are actually ready to tear our clothes over this, we will be destined to keep drinking the dregs of our own corrupted love, enslaved to our economic obsessions, and marginalizing our brothers and sisters of color in the rhetoric of our prosperity politics, arguably our real god. America is not the kingdom we seek. If any people ought to be able to live above the trap of our current political division, sounding a clear prophetic voice, it’s the Church. If we won’t, then who will?
This is water.

Frankly, the Church often seems much more concerned with sexuality than economic justice. And we don’t have that right. They are of one piece if Christ-centered community really matters.

As I said a few weeks back, Jesus himself preached more about money and possessions than any other moral issue. The sexual ethics in Jewish culture were pretty well established around marriage and fidelity. But whether rich or poor, worried or well heeled, they all needed the message about wealth, generosity and trusting in God's abundance. Jesus did talk about lust, marriage, divorce and adultery. And he affirmed both marriage and singleness for devotion to the kingdom in Matthew 19, which is key.

Shortly after Christ ascended, the Spirit was fulfilling the promise to bring all nations into the Church, beginning in the Roman Empire. **So the emphasis on sexual faithfulness was much more pointed and deliberate. The apostles translated their sacred views of marriage to a people who spoke a far different cultural language when it came to sex.** That's what's going on in verse 5.

"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous."

This isn't two ways of saying the same thing. This sentence is an ancient structure called a chiasm (also called ring structure). You have points A and B and then two more that refer back in the same order, A1 and B1. If we break it up into two sentences, this is how it reads: Honor marriage (A), for (A1) God will judge the sexually immoral. Let the marriage bed be undefiled (B), for God will judge the adulterous (B1).

His points are basic. First - Moral sex is marital sex. Second - Marriage is monogamous. New life in God's mercy means an active embrace of these truths. A change. To depart from these is to invite judgment. A wider survey of what the Scriptures teach tells us these aren't simply rules, they are care. Boundaries. Sex involves emotional vulnerabilities and soul-level connections that are beyond us to understand fully. **Only covenantal commitment can protect and empower the connections we make.** To boot, marital faithfulness protects a basic building block of society - family - the context for new life and its nurture. This was foreign to many in a world increasingly swimming in the waters of Greco-Roman culture.

For Christians, marriage is a sacrament. A visible sign pointing to something bigger and better and more lasting, though not immediately visible. A deeper grace. Something spiritual. In Ephesians 5, Paul says, *"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her... so that he might present the church to himself in splendor. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies...a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,*

and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

So the Church has always seen marriage as one way of displaying a deeper truth. Christ faithfully loves the Church and the Church is to love him because, as Paul says in verse 30, *we are members of his body*. Faithful marriage images God.

In God’s eyes, marriage is way more than a legal arrangement, romantic love or sexual connection. It’s where two lives and bodies become one in his eyes. And sex, in which two beings can, under the best circumstances, participate in making another one, is physical participation in a spiritual union.

Here’s what the Anglican marriage ceremony says, drawn from some of the oldest liturgies of the Church:

*Almighty God established the bond and covenant of marriage in creation as a sign of the mystical union between Christ and his Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and it is commended by Holy Scripture to be held in honor among all people.**

It then lists the 4 goods of marriage: *The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind was ordained by God: for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord; for mutual joy, and for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; to maintain purity, so that husbands and wives, with all the household of God, might serve as holy and undefiled members of the Body of Christ; and for the upbuilding of Christ’s kingdom in family, church, and society, to the praise of his holy Name.*

However the cultural winds are blowing, the overwhelming majority of psychologists and family therapists believe children need both a father and a mother committed to lifelong marriage for their development. The statistics are compelling.² And sad. That’s an important point, but not one I can elaborate on today.

Marriage is good insofar as it’s a concession to the present. And it’s also good, so long as society needs to be stabilized by commitment - as long as children need fathers and mothers who are committed. It shows us, in our chronic nearsightedness, the covenant God has made with his people, to one day sweep them off their feet into a loving security and abundance we can hardly imagine after living in this world.

² Some great info and links: <https://gillespieshields.com/40-facts-two-parent-families/>

So this marriage covenant is one way human beings speak of God in their lives and relationships. Singleness is another way to glorify God in our devotion, the way Christ and most of his disciples lived. *More on that later.* **But suffice it to say, marriage between one husband and one wife is the exclusive way we glorify him sexually, given the depth of its meaning, purpose and potential.**

A common objection is this, “But isn’t our sexual and relational landscape so different now? What about other kinds of love and marriage?”

Four centuries before Jesus, Plato wrote what is called the Symposium - a Greek philosophical exploration of *eros* - the Greek God of love and sex, from which we get the word *erotic*. Plato tells a fictional story of 8 philosophers, including Socrates, who are at a party drinking and discussing *eros* and what it has to do with beauty and wisdom.

They all give speeches long into the night, leaving no stone unturned. And in their dialogue you find all the forms of attraction and desire that are familiar to us today, including unbridled youth as well as same-sex attraction and same-sex marriage. **In other words, nothing is new about sexuality except the way we have sought to understand and explain it in our day. Everything we see in our culture existed in in the Greco-Roman world, into which the Gospel was going.** So the author of Hebrews, in harmony with so much of the NT, is saying, “This is water.”

What I’m about to say is very important: Our understanding of sexuality doesn’t come from how we read Scripture today, but from how it’s been read and interpreted for 2000 years by the Church. It isn’t the opinion of this preacher. It’s the history of Christian faith, the shoulders we stand on if we call ourselves Christians. So if we identify as Christians, then we need reasons for our beliefs about this and all matters. Being a Christian is an appeal to some capital-T truth. For 2000 years, Christians have relied on Scripture, tradition and reason for capital-T, while making some room for the experience of every era.

If we automatically assume the present day and the water of our experience is enough of a sample size for reality, then it’s easy to dismiss the past. *But I think that’s a huge mistake. Point is, our beliefs on sex and marriage are the result of the whole history of the Church and, in fact, the overwhelming majority of Christians on the planet today.* To deviate from this view - from Scripture, tradition and 2000 years of reasoning - is to depart sharply from the Church itself.

So then where does the difficulty and confusion in the Church come from?

At least 2 problems:

- 1) We departed from the Gospel because modernism and then postmodernism after it promised us more.
- 2) We departed from the Gospel by marginalizing single people.

A popular band in the 90's called Weezer wrote what they called, "The Sweater Song." Remember it? The line that sticks in your head all day goes: "If you want to destroy my sweater, just pull this thread as I walk away." It goes on, "Watch me unravel, I'll soon be naked, lying on the floor, I come undone." It's a picture of an undone sweater leaving a naked undone person. A metaphor.

The trustworthiness of Scripture and even the literal resurrection of Jesus were beginning to be pulled on after the Enlightenment took root and modernism kicked in in the late 19th century. Then postmodernism arrived in the 20th. **They were two sides of the same coin that said, "Here and now is everything."** For modernism, the here and now of science, technology and reason meant religion and tradition were no longer necessary. Reacting to that, postmodernism said the here and now of our own individual truths are everything and any appeal to either tradition or empirical truth - to anything - are just power plays. It became the false choice between science, technology and reason OR whatever "lower-case t" truth works for me now. Both sold and are still selling the promise of progress and peace. We're still waiting for them to make good on it.

So here's how it went when Christians bit the progress hook: "Well, the Bible says all these things that simply can't be true or trusted. We know now from science, this isn't possible. We know from our cultural experience that teachings like that simply aren't acceptable now. We need to listen to culture to know what culture needs from us."

American Conservatives, mostly Protestant, reacted, thinking they needed to defend against evolution and such, and ended up playing by modernist rules. Never mind the fact that for nearly 2000 years, the Bible wasn't read as a science book or a perfect chronological history or even a book that revealed all its mysteries when we systematize it.

I'm going to give you a quick summary of how this has affected the Anglican world. You can read more details in my longer notes if you like. In 1998, what's called the Lambeth Conference of all the worldwide Anglican bishops was held in Canterbury. During that, they passed a resolution on human sexuality stating that "in view of the teaching of Scripture, the Anglican Communion upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union" and that

it could not "advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions."

[Additional Anglican history: Within 5 years, Canada and the US rejected this by blessing same-sex marriages and eventually, consecrating Gene Robinson, an openly and actively gay bishop, in 2003. In October of that year, the bishops from around the world met again and released a statement saying, "**We must make clear that recent actions in New Westminster and in the Episcopal Church (USA) do not express the mind of our Communion as a whole, and these decisions jeopardise our sacramental fellowship with each other...This will tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level and may lead to further division...**"

The following year, the Communion published the Windsor Report, which recommended a moratorium on further consecrations of actively homosexual bishops and public Rites of Blessing of same-sex unions. It also recommended solidifying the connection between the churches of the Communion by having each church ratify an "Anglican Covenant" that would, in part, commit them to consulting the wider Communion when making major decisions. It also urged those who had contributed to disunity to express their regret.

This never happened. The national Episcopal Church proceeded and, in the process, began to marginalize leaders and diocese and parishes in America who stood with the rest of the world. And so here we are today.]

So, over a span of roughly 6 years, 3 resolutions were passed and ignored by the Episcopal Church USA and Canada, who blessed same-sex marriages and ordained and consecrated homosexual leadership.

In short, the overwhelming majority of Anglicans worldwide support what has been upheld for two millenia about marriage and sexuality. But Western and American exceptionalism plowed on, disregarding the rest of the world - a deeply ironic move for a so-called inclusive and eclectic bunch. You might even call it ethnocentrism. But here's the thing: If you've already abandoned history and Scripture, it's not a big leap to abandon the people who have understood themselves in that particular light for 2 millenia.

Frankly, they will suggest that there is still a sweater there, but you will be hard pressed to find anything that can cover you - because the pulling still hasn't stopped. **The ACNA exists not because the thread of Biblical sexual ethics got pulled on by the Episcopal Church, but because deeper threads had already been pulled that, as they kept walking, simply arrived at this one.**

We're not just talking sex and marriage. We're talking Scripture as a whole and, therefore, the Christ of Scripture who is endlessly reinterpreted.

This is water.

The Second Problem

For those who are unmarried, whether for a season or for life, your own lives serve as a sign of Christ's singular devotion to and desire for God. **Your lives image his desire to serve others.** Paul's elevation of celibate singleness in 1 Corinthians 7 assumed that the Christian community would be a family to them and that they, too, would be spiritual parents to children, children to the childless and aging, empathetic friends to the lonely and unmarried - part of the body and community with a vital role that only a single person devoted in this way could play. In fact, Paul preferred it and thought it necessary.

Over time, single people devoted to the Lord and the Church, like Jesus, his disciples, Paul and untold thousands after them, either ended up as clergy, in cloisters and monasteries or became cultural oddities when marriage was elevated beyond its Biblical place. In a religious order, single people serve the broader church behind the scenes and through prayer. They serve one another. That's wonderful. But that was one way our imagination for singles got stunted. We should have an imagination for the singleness Paul celebrated among the whole congregation. When traditions develop apart from Scripture we have a problem.

In America, after 2 world wars, marriage and children became the ultimate ideal for rebuilding, and the Church is implicated in this. Being single is often still stigmatized in this legacy of so-called prosperity. But again, this is not the Church's legacy. In forgetting ourselves, we have forgotten the dignity of the set apart single, treating them like second-class citizens whose lives are on hold until they finally marry. Frankly, we need to repent and relearn. To the singles of Village Church, I want to say today, "You are not incomplete without a spouse. We are incomplete without each other."

A related sidebar: The Church has an opportunity to provide comfort and community in a world, particularly in the West, suffering an epidemic of loneliness. "In the last 50 years, rates of loneliness have doubled in the United States. In a survey of over 20,000 American adults, it was found that almost half of respondents reported feeling alone, left out, and isolated. Further, one in four Americans shared that they rarely feel understood, and one in five people believe they rarely or never feel not close to people."³ We find ourselves coping

³ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/modern-mentality/201807/what-you-need-know-about-the-loneliness-epidemic>)

in all sorts of ways and building or relying on a narrative that promises to lift the burden. But it's not lifting. We need each other. And the Church needs to recover its DNA of welcoming diverse stories and struggles to this Table of grace that unifies us in our shared longing for Christ, whether married or single.

Think with me about the implications of elevating coupling, romance and marriage to an ideal for all, beyond its rightful place as God's gift **to some**. In doing so, we inherently say that attraction and its fulfillment is ultimate for all. And that singleness and sexlessness is a curse, not a calling or a blessing. That's the exact opposite of Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 7 and the emphasis of Jesus' life. By extension, we make no room in the Church for people whose attractions are complicated and, apart from a particular move of God, have little or no hope of experiencing what we say is ultimate. In our culture, to this day, being sexless and unmarried is treated as injustice or unfairness. And we are implicated in that, as well.

In Matthew 22, Jesus is confronted by a religious ruling order called the Sadducees with an odd question about whose wife a woman will be in the resurrection if she was married to 7 brothers who all died. They didn't believe in the resurrection and wanted to trap him. Here's his answer: "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." (Note: Jesus thought the Scriptures were really important, too.) He continues, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."

Think about that: There will be no marriage in the new heaven and earth. And that means something. It means our union will be complete in God when these bodies and our relationships, often broken and disordered, are resurrected anew. There will be no need for the signpost of marriage and its rigors, nor the need for the strength to direct our longings toward God as single people. The fullness of God's promised reality will be ours.

The Church must lovingly allow for the fact that not every person, not every professed Christian, is going to experience attraction that naturally moves toward traditional marriage. Not every Christian is going to marry or have sex. And we should pray about this. Not simply swim along.

This means we need to imagine the Christian community as a place where love and friendship can support everyone and, unless the Lord intervenes, may never experience attraction for the opposite sex. In fact, some may spend their whole lives submitting their sexual affections to God, which is our calling as well - but through celibacy. It's on us to ensure they can do that as full siblings in the family of God, not second class citizens.

The fundamental question for the church is not, “Is this behavior or lifestyle, among all other deviations from the standard, acceptable?” That has been answered in the exaltation of marriage itself as the place for sex.

The fundamental question for the church is, “How are we going to include people who do not identify as heterosexual and/or may not have an imagination for marriage and family?”

We need to know that the presence of those we now deem sexual minorities was a given in the early Church. Romans 1 and its preceding argument make it clear that this was the former lifestyle of some. But there was a valuable place for all in the redeemed family, seeking intimacy with and the beauty of Christ together, being a true family to one another in the struggle, unique to each person but shared by all.

The Church has gone through some awful seasons of missing the point. St. Augustine was so down on sex that he thought no one should ever have it - even when married.⁴ To his mind, you just can’t devote yourself to God with such a strong distraction. But his sentiments didn’t last because they weren’t Biblical and he reluctantly recognized the shortcomings of his view. That has cropped up from time to time and been put down, as with so many other areas of inconsistency and compromise. What that should tell us is that we’re susceptible. And so we do need a standard, with older fish helping us see.

So the earliest forms of Christianity brought along the boundaries of marital love for the bodily life. In summary, as Paul put it, marriage between a man and a woman is good. And singleness is also good, devoting one’s desire completely to Christ. In both cases, one’s sexual expression is constrained to faithfulness to God - whether in lifelong monogamy in marriage, lifelong celibacy, or a season of celibacy until marriage. To the early Church, it wasn’t about repression, but a turning of one’s desire continually to God. Because for Christians, Christ is our greatest longing. And we want nothing to shortchange that.

Rachel Gilson is a writer and speaker who shares the story of how she met Jesus as a freshman at Yale and how meeting him changed her understanding of her own same-sex attraction. She admits to being very promiscuous until then. In a recent piece she wrote that white-knuckle asceticism as repression and avoidance are not the ways she lives out her sexuality now. She says “they are ultimately human-centered responses” to the call to celibacy. She continues,

⁴ Confessions 2.2, 3.1 - From Rodney Clapp’s “Tortured Wonders: Christian Spirituality for People, not Angels”

Summary: <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/s/st-augustines-confessions/critical-essays/augustines-view-of-sexuality>

*"They stuff desire down, suffocate it, banish it, and yet rarely succeed at engendering true purity. By contrast, Christian asceticism reminds us that we are not stronger than desire. And then it invites us to cast our gaze toward the One who is. It asks the Christian to follow the sight line of desire—like looking down the barrel of a gun—and train it on what **all desire is ultimately satisfied by**: the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."⁵*

This is no easy thing. In the last century, the technological advances and cultural trends of our time have freed sex from responsibility, increased its recreational allure and leveraged its marketing power. The internet alone puts it a click away, allowing something deeply personal to be experienced impersonally. Everything is sexualized. When we could and should be living into all the other facets of our humanity and community, this one is constantly hijacking our self-awareness and sense of identity. This is what's different in our day. This is the world we've made. This is water.

To be sure, the natural working of glands in our bodies participate in making us desirous creatures, that we might be able to use those desires to speak of the glory of God, whose image we bear with our bodies. He has given us ways to live out that longing: constraints - like the edges of a canvas that allow brushstrokes to be one coherent work of art. But these are only temporary pictures, part of a larger work of beauty.

Preaching the Kingdom and calling people to radical obedience, Jesus wasn't a moral teacher. He wasn't a spiritual leader. He was the Son of God. He didn't come asking what would make people feel comfortable. **He came asking why they were comfortable with so little - with only the temporary to satisfy.** And he came calling them to set their affections on a higher reality - on the one who can truly satisfy, to have life which is truly life (John 10:10).

The ultimate aim of every heart awakened by God is to be united as one with other hearts who desire to be married to God - increasingly in this life and fully in the life to come. **If we begin with that definition of love and that meaning for our lives and work backward, everything else falls into a different light. And then we as the church must reckon with how we're going to foster that kind of culture.**

⁵ https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/august-web-only/sexuality-sexual-temptation-repression-sure-fire-failure.html?utm_source=ctweekly-html&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=26592163&utm_content=668869922&utm_campaign=email

So how should we live together as a people, some of whom have same-sex attractions?

One answer has been to make sexual minorities a pariah, an issue, cogs in the wheel of an agenda. This is a heresy of evangelism, denying that salvation is for sinners, not saints. So that's not an option.

The other answer is to explain homosexuality in terms of a simple difference and to flatten love out into romantic and sexual companionship to which everyone is entitled. Historic Christianity has concluded that this attraction is one of so many ways human lives and desires are affected by our separation from God - what some might call the Fall. So to live according to this difference, as though it's good, is trespass. What we call sin.

The third answer is the Biblical one, and it comes with inclusion and embrace, not exclusion and distance. We are all longing to be known, touched, loved and whole. We are all longing for God. We are all called to enter this longing together, bringing everything that challenges it.

Rachel Gilson concluded her article this way, "All of us, paired off or not, find our thwarted desires consoled by Christ and provided for by him. We each find in his church myriad "yeses" to desire as we wait for the new heaven and the new earth... In the end, sex is a gift, but it's not the point. As Christians, we can mourn its loss or celebrate its presence. But... Jesus must be our vision, our great yes that comforts the smaller *no's*. Until he is enough, no other yes or *no* will be sufficient."

I was listening recently to a podcast interview with an intersex person and missionary named Christian.⁶ Christian was born with all the sexual organs, internally and externally, of both a woman and a man and thus identifies with both. He shares the organs of early twins in the womb in one body. (His is a very rare condition called chimerism, though intersex conditions effect 1 in 2000 people, more than cystic fibrosis.⁷ Many of them are invisible and go undiagnosed, such as the presence of a gonad or an endocrine system of a man in a woman's body.) Thus, the pronoun "they" is his reality for now, but he doesn't mind being called either he or she.

Christian's struggles in the Church have been profound, not certain of who to sing with when parts are divided for men and women or, more profoundly, whether a man or a woman would be a prospective spouse. But Christian said,

⁶ *Theology in the Raw*, Preston Sprinkle, #755, June 10, 2019

⁷ http://www.isna.org/faq/ten_myths/rare

“I trust that Scripture speaks of me and to me and I want to honor God. I’m just trying to figure out what that means for me.” The host of the podcast, Preston Sprinkle, asked, “How can you know the answer?” And Christian said, “My church family is helping me. I’m making that decision with them. It may end up that I’m called for the rest of my life to celibacy. But that’s what grace is for... I want Jesus more than anything else.”

If that story messes with you a bit, good. We’re on our way to empathy, compassion and a place for everyone in the radical call of following Jesus. Christian’s challenge to his Christian listeners was this, “Walk with me.” For those of us struggling to imagine how we can love our LGBTQIA+ friends and family into the faith, it’s going to have to begin with a church that says, “I will walk with you as we long for Christ together.”

The hope we can offer as we walk with friends and family is something better than the fragile certainty of our times. We live in a time when Darwinian evolution, when it seemed to be firmly ensconced as the authority governing scientific and historical education, is coming under fire from prominent former proponents like Yale mathematician David Galanter. Our version of certainty is anything but. We literally don’t know which way the wind is blowing. Even today Hurricane Dorian keeps us guessing about its path. For over a week now, the scientific models all point to a *probable* point of landfall. Then *probable* is reduced to *possible*. And then the possible moves by 400 miles and 45 degrees.

In uncertain times, we the Church are neither wringing our hands, nor waffling in our ancient, but timeless commitments. We’re safe to keep relying on Jesus, who never changes. Christians should be the last people sowing anxiety and fear about the future of the world. We do want a world that is increasingly just and anchored in the reality of grace and truth. But speaking out about the ills of our society is far less important or effective than living into the love of a community being renewed by grace. Our allegiance to the cross is only as real as how we live it out in the space we occupy.

Your bodily life - our lives together - can do far more in the world than your opinion or even your vote. You vote every day for the world you want - for the world Jesus wants. You do it when you step out your front door, when you spend your money, when you interact with others, when you live out intimate relationships - and when you return to the Lord to be reminded of the water. That’s the legacy of a Church living in the world and all its corruption, but living on the life of Jesus.

I know many of us struggle to imagine how we can love our LGBT friends and family and still believe what we do. In many cases, they tell us we don’t love

them if we won't affirm their lifestyle. But that doesn't mean we don't. It means the love we have for them might not make them or even us feel good. Like all authentic love, it will challenge the comfort we find in what can amount to codependency, just trying to fulfill and be fulfilled by one another with approval. The real question is, if the love they demand is the only love they can receive, who will ever love them enough to ask about the water? Who will hold out the ancient truth and its welcome? Who will pray *for them* until the hopeful day you get to pray *with them*? Who will tell them they are really just like the rest of us, our longings but a drop in the ocean - a sign of a greater longing for the unchanging God?

CLOSE - The authentic Gospel can imagine any story being welcomed into its own transforming Story. The Gospel prizes patience and thinking of each other, regarding each other, according to the Spirit as we live out our longings in needs of grace. The Gospel isn't afraid to lovingly tell the truth, either, because it is Christ who helps us by making our words alive with love and hope.

Back in chapter 4 of Hebrews, this ancient preacher gave them this great hope...

15 "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Who is this we and us he's talking about? Whose weaknesses can Christ sympathize with? Whose needs can he meet? To whom is he giving mercy, grace and help?

If we are going to make sense of this - of the Gospel - of the message of Hebrews and of the call to a holy life, then we must really mean we. We know Jesus faced the temptation to shortcut his way to power, to have all the world's wealth, to skip the cross. But because we believe he was God in the flesh, fully man, he was indeed tempted in every respect. We don't know the thoughts that went through his mind. We don't know how he experienced physical attraction. But he surely did. We get glimpses of the loneliness that came with living not only a single, but also a singular life set apart to God. He was human like you and me. And when cut, he bled. In fact, he bled more than any of us can imagine.

So when we in faith receive the bread of his body today and the wine of his blood, we are brought back to the capital-T truth that we not only need a Savior, but we have one. Not just for one day far away, but for today. We have the help we need to live lives of empathy, generosity and purity, knowing that every

longing for good and satisfying things is only a shadow of the longing we have for God. We have the acceptance and forgiveness we need when we fail, trying to find the fullness in empty things.

And when we open our empty hands, void of all righteousness and goodness, we receive a taste of that great banquet that awaits us. To be sure, we will hunger and thirst in this life. For things. For people. But the end of all desire is God himself. And in Jesus, because of Jesus, we can seek him and find him, for he is not far off. In fact, he will never leave us nor forsake us.

Us means us. We means we. This, friends, is *our* water.
Let *us* walk together.