

January 14, 2018
Second Sunday After Epiphany

“In His Body”

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Myrna Herzog was not happy. Herzog, director of an Israeli classical music group, was forced to surrender her viola, a musical instrument kind of like a large violin and one which was built in the 1600s and valued at more than \$200,000. She was forced to allow it to be placed in its case in the cargo hold of an Alitalia flight from Brazil to Israel because there were no seats available for her to purchase one for the viola. Upon arrival in Tel Aviv, to say the instrument was damaged doesn't go far enough. It was destroyed. The case was wrecked and the body of the viola was literally smashed in two.

We can understand Myrna's anger. Her precious, priceless treasure had been abused and mistreated. They had no right to do such a thing. Someone should pay. Someone at least should lose their job, and maybe even be prosecuted for a crime.

Any of us with some years behind us have been there. Maybe you've loaned somebody a valued tool, appliance, vehicle or even a camp down the bayou. You get it back and it's a mess, broken or damaged. Somebody has taken what is yours and violated it. It rightly makes us upset, because it wasn't theirs to abuse. It's ours. How dare they? They should be punished.

Do you think Jesus Christ ever feels the same way about us—His people redeemed by His cross and empty tomb? Does Christ look down and see us partaking of sin in our body and say, “What do you think you're doing. That's mine! Show some respect!”

The point St. Paul is making in First Corinthians here is summed up nicely in the final verse: “*You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*”

Your body is not your own. It never has been. Psalm 51 says “*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*” From the beginning you were enslaved to sin, death and Satan. Your body was doomed. Pretend as much as you want about personal freedom, individual rights and self-determination—in the end sin, death and Satan would hold eternal sway over that body of yours.

Jesus Christ changed all that. He became humanity in a human body so that through His perfect life, death and resurrection He would ransom all human bodies and claim them for His eternal kingdom. Now all who believe and are baptized will be saved. Our bodies are freed from the death, devil and sin—but not freed to be ours! We are freed to be Christ's beloved possession forever.

This is the point St. Paul is making. He parrots a saying of the day, “All things are lawful for me.” It was a saying the Corinthians, maybe even the Corinthian Christians, used to justify despicable behavior, presumably involving prostitutes and other sexual immorality. Paul says maybe all things are lawful, but not all things are helpful and some things put you in danger of once again being enslaved to sin and mastered by Satan!

Then He pounds home the simple truth: “*The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!*”

He is saying that when you take your body that is redeemed by Christ and subject it to participation in willful, intentional, sinful practices—you're ruining it. You're spoiling it. You're

making it useless to Christ because you're pulling the body He redeemed out from under His care, His design of love, His ownership. And though you may fool yourself into thinking you are taking ownership of your own self, you're really just signing the title back over to sin, death and Satan. Paul is saying you are a Christian and you don't do this kind of stuff!

Paul is writing to a city of Corinth with more than a dozen pagan temples and there's at least 1000 temple prostitutes at Aphrodite's church alone. Debauchery and immorality is the norm. But 21st century North America isn't that much different. We've got every same vice going on under the radar plus we've got the internet where we can invite any depravity right onto our homes on the big screen. We can pollute our bodies with filth or every kind, thinking that it's our body to do with as we please.

And although sex is the most personal and physically polluting sin, all others stem from the same root—thinking we're free and that all things are lawful for me. Saying "All things are lawful for me" is just saying to Jesus, "This body isn't yours! It's mine!"

Too many of us muddy this clear, clear teaching of Holy Scripture. We think and behave as if our body and life is ours for the most part, but we relinquished part of our thoughts, behaviors and life, our Sunday mornings, over to Jesus, and that's good enough to save us. But there is no "my" part and "God's" part. There is Satan or Christ, death or life, forgiveness or sin. It's not a tough dynamic.

Are you willing to dance that line? Are you willing to take your body that Christ died and rose to make His own and treat it as your own sinful plaything, abuse it and possibly destroy it? Isn't that like letting a 300+ year old viola bounce around in the cargo hold of a 6400-mile flight? Are you willing to risk arriving at your final destination ruined for your Savior?

That is what you're risking. Willful sin rejects Christ and runs into the hands of death. Jesus Christ has every reason to see what you've done with your body, which in reality is His body and react, "They had no right to do such a thing. Someone must pay."

That's exactly how the Father reacted when sin ruined His creation. "Someone must pay!" That someone was His Son. And He paid on the cross.

Now He takes His body soiled in sin and washes it daily through that death and resurrection to make it blessed, holy and priceless to Himself. He sees His broken and righteousness-starved body dying, and nourishes it with the resurrected body and blood of His Son to restore it to perfection and rightness. He pronounces His Word of Gospel over His body saying I forgive you in My holy name. He does this for His people, the body of Christ.

In light of that, are you really willing in any way, shape or form say, "But that's not your body, it's mine"?

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

Your flesh, your body, is God's, and this is a very, very good and blessed thing. Repent of your messing with it, soiling it, fouling it. Turn it back over to Jesus, the one who makes it perfect and holy for God's use and pleasure. Take joy in the fact it is not your own. The Lord it belongs to is love, love that did not spare His own Son to bring you into paradise with Himself.

Daily turn back to your Lord of life, and rejoice that your body and soul is a blessed possession of God, purchased at the price of Christ.

Amen.