

Sweating the Small Stuff: Maintain the Temple

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1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells within you. If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. 1 Corinthians 3:17-17 (NRSV)

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NRSV)

Let me begin by asking you a question. Are you tired of the corona virus? Are you tired of thinking about, talking about, hearing about, and worrying about Covid-19? Well, I am.

Well, here's the deal. We're going to continue to talk about it and think about it; and especially we're going to continue to pray about it. But we're going to move now into what was going to be our ordinary, the sermon series we had planned as we planned our sermons out though the year. The series is called "Sweating the Small Stuff," dealing with the daily challenges of life.

But before we do, I want to offer you a word of encouragement. I want to begin each week with just a word of encouragement. And today that comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians and begins with chapter six, verse 3. It says, "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:3-6)

Paul is saying two things here. One is that we're away from one another, but I remember you in my prayers and I love you and I'm thinking of you and I thank God for you. So, we can do that. We're apart from one another but we can thank God for one another and remember one another in our prayers.

The second thing he says is that "I believe God is doing a work in us." A work among the Philippians, that we don't even know quite what the completion will be. I believe God is at work within us and we don't even quite know what the outcome of this is going to be. We just claim

that, we believe that God is at work in our lives amidst all of this. And that we are learning and growing through it in one way or another.

So, with that let's move into our message for today. Let's join in prayer. *Gracious God, open us up, open our eyes that we might see, open our ears that we might hear, and then O God open our hearts that we might feel. And our hands that we might serve. Amen.*

One time I was on the telephone with someone and I was driving around in the parking lot. I know you're not supposed to be on the phone while you drive, but I was talking about how I wish God would give me a parking place. I was circling the parking lot and I just said, "I wish God would give me a parking place." Well, that initiated a theological conversation with my friend, who said, "I don't think God cares one bit about your parking place. Why does God care if you have to walk a little extra distance to get to Nordstrom's?"

On the one hand it seemed like he was right, but on the other hand, 80 to 90 percent of our life is small things like driving in circles around a parking lot. We spend most of our lives in tasks and habits and things that you just have to do to get through the day. Things like taking out the trash, and going to work, mowing the grass and paying the bills, making lunches and deciding what you're going to have for dinner and cooking dinner and doing the dishes. All of those things that are just tasks that we have to do every day. And if you take God out of all those things and God has nothing to do with those things then there's not a lot of life left for that big stuff. We've got to learn to find God to experience God in the dailiness of life.

When I was in college and really while my kids were growing up my mom lived in Destin, Florida. We'd go every summer to vacation at her house. She lived right on the bay so I could go out and sit and look at the bay. We could go over to the beach. I loved to look at the ocean, this vast ocean, especially in the evening when it wasn't so hot. It was so huge and so overwhelming. If you think of something big you think of the ocean.

But all the ocean is is a collection of millions and millions of tiny drops. Yes, each one of those individual drops is not all that significant by itself but there is nothing else but those little tiny drops. And I think that our faith life is like that, too. We keep looking for that big thing. But the big thing is just the compilation, the gathering of all those little things, each moment, each experience, each opportunity. Each task of daily life is our opportunity to be worshipful, to give God glory.

What we're going to do during in this sermon series is try to reinforce that and help us understand. To look at some of those daily tasks, those daily challenges, and see how we might glorify God in the midst of them.

Today we want to talk about our bodies. If you think about your day, every 24 hours a pretty significant part of it has to do with taking care of your body. Now that may have to do with all the things around eating. Things like choosing your groceries, cooking dinner, eating your dinner. It has to do with your personal hygiene. All the time you spend on that. It has to do with exercising. It also has to do with sleeping - how much of your life do you spend sleeping? All of that is designed to help take care of your body.

How can we frame those things, how can we understand them in Scriptural and spiritual framework so that as we do those things, they can become part of the way we God glory and worship God?

What I want to do today is to lift up four principles that I think we can frame the way we care for our bodies that will help us. The first principle is that mind, body and spirit are all intertwined together. They're inseparable.

Look, Paul and Jesus were both Jews, so as they taught, they came from a Jewish understanding of the body and the spirit. Now early Christianity grew up in a Greco-Roman world so there are influences of that Greco-Roman world even at that time Rome ruled over Israel. But the Jewish understanding is different than the Greek understanding. The Greek understanding was dualistic - that there was a body and a spirit and they're separable. The believed that a spirit can live outside the body and there are spirits around all the time and the spirit inhabits the body. But they are very dual and in some ways the spirit was seen as especially holy and the body not so holy.

Well, a Jew would never understand it that way. In fact, the Hebrew word for spirit is the word *ruah* which is the word for "breath" or "wind." And you can't imagine there being breath without there being a body doing the breathing. They're connected. Breath is actually part of the body. So, it is what gives the body life.

That's how Paul and Jesus both would have thought about the mind and the body being connected. When Paul writes in Thessalonians these words which we heard a few minutes ago: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus." The whole self.

When you begin to understand science and see how the body and mind work it becomes clear. I once went to see a man in the hospital and when I went in he began to sort of rant and rave about how we're in the end days. He saw the sun go away and water turn to blood and how the plagues were coming. He said, "You may be possessed by the devil," all of those things. I was kind of taken aback but his wife was there and she told me, "He's had this infection and ever since he's had it his paranoia has just taken him over. This isn't him. "

It occurs to you when you see something like that we are at the mercy of the chemicals that run through our bodies. That the neurons and the chemicals and all of those things, the physical part of our body is so significant in the way that our minds and hearts work.

Let me give you another example. When someone reaches a certain age sometimes, they will begin to not take care of themselves and their personal hygiene will begin to deteriorate. So, we say, "Hey, we want you to get up. We want you to get dressed and cleaned up. Maybe put on some nice clothes and go to dinner some place. Let's go out." This is because we realize that as people begin to treat their bodies differently their spirits change. And it changes the way they understand themselves as part of God's purposes in the world.

And the flip side is that if we want our bodies to be healthy, we've got to address the anxieties, the fears, the regrets, and the stresses that are constantly pushing on us. Those things can lead to terrible deterioration in our bodies.

So, the first principle is to understand that in God's eyes, mind and body and spirit are all intertwined and tied in together.

Here's the second principle. God cares for your body and your soul, not just your soul but your body and your soul. All you have to do is to read the Gospels and it's so clear. How much time does Jesus spend dealing with people's physical bodies? He feeds the hungry, gives water to the thirsty, cleanses the leper, and heals the sick. He helps the paralytic walk. There's a man whose body is possessed by demons and he casts out those demons and the demons go into a herd of pigs and they run off a cliff into the sea. If you ask what Jesus did, he healed the sick, preached the Good News. That was Jesus' ministry.

Jesus cared about our bodies. Now if you're a United Methodist, our heritage is connected with John Wesley. He was an incredible, prolific writer - he published hundreds of treatises or books. But what the most famous, most popular of any of his books was called "Primitive

Physique or an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases." It was a book of medical advice.

I'm not all that proud of all of Wesley's cures. Here are some of them. To cure hair loss, "rub the part morning and evening with onions till it is red. Then rub it afterward with honey." Some of you who have issues with hair loss might try that! I want to hear about it later and see if it worked. Here's his cure for an earache: "Put in a roasted fig or onion as hot as may be or blow the smoke of tobacco strongly into it." Here's his cure for a toothache: "Be electrified through the teeth." Oh, my goodness!

He had an exercise chair in his home that was made of leather and was shaped sort of like a horse. He would exercise on it and it had an accordion feature and he would ride kind of up and down on it, pushing up on his legs to give himself exercise when he wasn't able to go walking. I think the most famous thing he did was he created this machine that used electricity to cure. In fact, he wrote an entire book on how you can use electricity to cure ailments. You can see a picture of this contraption. It's still there at his house in London.

I just find it interesting that we're now using electrical impulses to deal with pain. Maybe he was just ahead of his time.

Now I share that with you not just to make fun of Mr. Wesley, but to say that in his understanding, the theological groundwork for that was that God was interested not just our souls but, in our bodies, as well. That salvation was wholistic, that it was all of us, of mind, body and soul.

The second principle is to remember that God cares deeply about our bodies, not just our souls.

The third principle is kind of tied to it. God loves us and our bodies just the way they are. So, whether they're big, tall, short or whether they're old or young whether they're healthy or not as healthy God loves our bodies just the way they are. We live in a time when people kind of go one way or the other. There is sort of problems on both ends. On one hand so many people don't treat their bodies well, they don't eat well, they don't exercise, they put all sorts of poisons and drugs and things into their bodies and don't take care of them. They run hard, they don't sleep enough, all those things. But on the other end we have people who are just obsessed with it. Issues with eating disorders are really significant. All of us at some point look in the mirror and we think, "Oh, man!" We reach a certain age and we say, "Oh, man! Look at that? Where did

those bags come from?" So, we become sort of focused on what we look like and if we're healthy or not. We spend all our time focusing on that. Here's what I want you to know - you and your body are loved just the way you are. Not the way you wish you were, but just the way you are.

Psalm 139:14 is another Scripture that you're probably familiar with. "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." (Ps. 139:14) God loves you just as you are. Now it may seem counter-intuitive to say on the one hand "You need to take care of yourself!" and on the other hand say, "You're fine just the way you are." But I think that if you really think about it the foundation for taking care of yourself is knowing that you're loved just as you are.

Let me give you kind of an example. Let's pretend that you have a house, a home that you don't like and in fact you can't stand it. You don't like the way it looks on the outside. Maybe you inherited it from your family. You don't like the way it looks on the outside, or on the inside. Are you going to take good care of that house? Probably not. You don't like it so you're not going to spend a lot of energy on it.

On the other hand if you have a house you really love, if you understand that this house is special and isn't just an ordinary house, it's a special house. It was "fearfully and wonderfully" built by the creator. If you have a house like that then you're going to take good care of it. You'll put a new roof on it, you're going to get it painted and you'll do everything you can to take care of it.

I think the same principle applies in our lives. When we understand ourselves as loved, as special, as "fearfully and wonderfully made" and we're special just as we are, then we begin to take care of ourselves in better ways. And God works within us to sanctify us. It's no different than our spirit. God loves you just as you are - "without one plea" as the hymn goes. But even spiritually God wants to move you and grow you and move you forward. That's true in our bodies as well. That's the third principle - that God loves you and your body just as they are.

The fourth and final principle is sort of a culmination of all of them. You - your body - is the temple of the Holy Spirit. God lives inside you. You don't own your body, God does. And you are but the steward of it.

This image of stewardship comes in this Scripture we read from 1 Corinthians. "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (1 Cor. 3:16-17) My Bible has a little footnote that reminds us that the word you here is plural, so it's like saying, "Do you

not know that God dwells in you all?" So often this is interpreted to say, and I think this is correct, to say that God's Spirit dwells within the community of faith, within the Body of Christ as we're together. But throughout Corinthians Paul talks over and over about how our individual bodies are the temple of God and that we shouldn't mistreat them. He said that you wouldn't connect the body of God, God's temple, to a prostitute he says for example. So, the picture is that each one of our bodies belongs to God and God lives within it. And because of that we are stewards of it. Our job is to take care of something that belongs to God.

In 1987 I went to the city of South Houston as my first solo pastor job. I left the position of youth pastor here at St. Luke's and went to South Houston. And what was really cool about being there is that the church building there was built by the people in the church with their own hands. The bricks were laid by the men of the church. Actually, they weren't bricks, but white stones, gray stones. The men did the electrical work. And as a result of that they treated it with such reverence. They'd come up and clean the pews with that Murphy Oil Soap, just wipe it down really well. They'd polish the brass on the altar. They'd cut the grass and take care of it so well. There was a lady who'd come and plant flowers around the sign and rotate those with the seasons. They did it as volunteers, not on a committee really, they just showed up and did it. They'd been doing it for years and you could tell it was holy work. That they felt like it was their job to care for God's church. And that this nitty-gritty work of planting flowers and cleaning pews was holy work. It was their way of worship.

When we take care of our bodies, where God lives, the Scripture teaches us that God lives within us. When we take care of our bodies that's holy work.

On the website there's a way for you to participate in something we offer at St. Luke's. We've offered it first to our senior adults and now we want to offer it online to you. Just one simple session of holy yoga. The idea is that the way we take care of our bodies with yoga is holy work.

So those four principles. The first is that our bodies and spirits are entwined and inseparable. The second is that God cares about your body and not just your soul. The third is God loves you and your body just as you are. And Fourth, your body doesn't belong to you, but to God and you are just the steward of it. You are to take care of it.

Now here's the truth. At some point all of us are going to die. And when that happens God will give us a new body. There's the image in 1 Corinthians of the seed that is planted. And that

seed is planted and as that seed dies a new plant comes up and God gives it a body as God has chosen. That's what the Scripture says. So, we'll get a new body. But until that time I really want to take care of the one God's given me now.

There's a funny saying I've heard people use. It goes, "If I'd known I was going to live this long I'd have taken better care of myself." And I'm now at that age that that's beginning to make sense to me. I realize I haven't always taken as good of care of myself as I should. But I've been listening to this song by Cat Stevens as I exercise. He talks about how he's going to the store and buy the best kinds of healthy food and he's even going to go to the dentist. The chorus line goes like this: "Because I've got a thing about seeing my grandson grow old." I want to be around, and I believe God has work for all of us to do so part of our worship then is to take care of the bodies God has given us.

Let me close with just one more important Scripture. This is from Romans 12:1: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship."

So, this week whether you're exercising or eating or sleeping, or whatever it is you're doing to take care of your bodies, make that be your offering to God in worship.

Let's pray together. *Gracious God, we thank you that each one of us is fearfully and wonderfully made. We ask you today that you bring health and wholeness to our bodies, minds and spirits. That you sanctify us completely, and that you receive the ways we care for our bodies as our daily offering of worship to you. In the name of Christ, the Great Physician, we pray. Amen.*