



## **YOUTH DAY (Youth and Sex)**

### **LECTIONARY COMMENTARY**

**Sunday, May 4, 2008**

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**Lection - Proverbs 5:1-2; 12-23 (emphasize 12-14) (New Revised Standard Version)**

#### **Proverbs 5:1-2**

(v. 1) My child, be attentive to my wisdom;  
incline your ear to my understanding,  
(v. 2) so that you may hold on to prudence,  
and your lips may guard knowledge.

#### **Proverbs 5:12-23**

(v. 12) and you say, 'Oh, how I hated discipline,  
and my heart despised reproof!  
(v. 13) I did not listen to the voice of my teachers  
or incline my ear to my instructors.  
(v. 14) Now I am at the point of utter ruin  
in the public assembly.'

- (v. 15) Drink water from your own cistern,  
 flowing water from your own well.
- (v. 16) Should your springs be scattered abroad,  
 streams of water in the streets?
- (v. 17) Let them be for yourself alone,  
 and not for sharing with strangers.
- (v. 18) Let your fountain be blessed,  
 and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
- (v. 19) a lovely deer, a graceful doe.  
 May her breasts satisfy you at all times;  
 may you be intoxicated always by her love.
- (v. 20) Why should you be intoxicated, my son, by another woman  
 and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?
- (v. 21) For human ways are under the eyes of the LORD,  
 and he examines all their paths.
- (v. 22) The iniquities of the wicked ensnare them,  
 and they are caught in the toils of their sin.
- (v. 23) They die for lack of discipline,  
 and because of their great folly they are lost.

## **I. Description of Liturgical Moment**

On this first Sunday in May we turn our attention to Youth Day and focus on teaching our young people about sex. So often this message is ignored in the church to the detriment of our youth who will surely find out about it in other places. The fact is, God has something to say about our young people's sexuality. Let us foster a frank conversation with our youth that begins at home, continues in the pulpit, and returns to the home.

## **II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Proverbs 5:1-2; 12-23**

### **Part One: Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter**

I am a frightened late thirtyish father of one daughter, who knows what lays ahead for her. Though she is still just a baby, every day she grows into more of a little girl with her own will, attitudes, likes, and wants. The conversation about boys, though a decade or more away, is too close for comfort. I know it is already time to establish a strong Christian and moral foundation for her so that in the moments of decision she will inevitably face, she will have resources upon which to draw and a sustaining faith that can help her to avoid the sexual pitfalls that ensnare so many of our young people.

### **Part Two: Biblical Commentary**

Proverbs is a wonderful old book of wisdom that often gets lost in our teaching and preaching cycles because of its decidedly "this worldly" orientation. It does not contain the elaborate poetic praise of God that endears the Psalms to us, but Proverbs contains

gritty, hardnosed instruction about how to survive in this world with our integrity intact. Much of its instruction sounds like the type of home-spun wisdom we expect to hear from our grandparent who opens up to tell you, “what I really think you should do.” In fact, that is perhaps not far from what the book itself purports to be; Proverbs 1:8 declares “Hear, my child, your father's instruction, and do not reject your mother's teaching.” Parental instruction, this motherly and fatherly guidance born of a deep and abiding love, makes the hard lessons of this book easier to swallow.

Bringing up the subject of sex: The fifth chapter addresses, as do many other sections of this book, the matter of sexual behavior. It is a testimony to the fact that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The wisdom given in this book may be more than 2,500 years old, but it is right on target for discussions about sexuality today. The author's plea to “my child” has been (or should be) echoed by every parent of a pre-teen and a teenager. It is a call to “remember your home training,” a pleading with a beloved offspring, “don't forget what I told you,” as they race for the door with a cell phone or I-Pod glued to their ear. It is a reminder that sex is nothing to be toyed with for the consequences of abusing this gift are dire, debilitating and disastrous.

We can no longer afford to ignore the reality that our young people are having sex, and lots of it. Any pastor who truly cares for the young people in his or her congregation will realize the truth of the saying popularized in the '80s, “silence equals death.” Our silence for far too long has condemned thousands to ignorance about their sexuality. Driven by urges they have never learned to control, young men and women have left the church behind, and any teaching it could offer, thinking that the Word of God has nothing to say about sex, nor their parents, who unfortunately were often inept or afraid to offer words of wise counsel and adequate instruction.

The message that “silence equals death” resounds today when we see that HIV/AIDS is hitting young people in our community harder than any other group in the nation. What used to be called the gay white men's disease, can now be called the black teen and young adult disease. Our children are becoming infected with this deadly virus at an unprecedented rate, and the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) is off the charts. But ignorance, not disease, is the biggest culprit.

The clarion call is for us to preach the authentic, “thus says the Lord,” about sexuality. Such a message need not be a series of “don'ts” and “shouldn'ts;” it should resonate with a message of hope that they will find fulfillment within the borders of a stable, lifelong, monogamous relationship; where they can fully express their sexuality with a God-ordained partner. The message should be optimistic, but never naïve for the consequences of naïveté are also dire. We are called upon to provide information that no one else does. We can no longer be so fearful of the reactions of some in our congregations that we shrink from even using sexual terms used by our physicians.

We cannot overlook that young people are in the process of differentiating themselves from their parents and their parents' rules. Proverbs 5:12-13 emphasizes that often even the best advice is not taken; “(v. 12) and you say, ‘Oh, how I hated discipline, and my

heart despised reproof! (v. 13) I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors.” Yet this is a moment where emphasizing what is really at stake in the exercise of their sexuality is key, for the abuses inevitably lead to disastrous consequences. The appealing seductive nature of temptation itself should be emphasized, while the pastor notes that it is more often males that entice teen girls. We cannot fail to add gender balance to the passage’s metaphors which place women in a negative light. Proverbs 5 clearly paints a portrait of the battle for the souls of young people with temptation pulling them one way, and wisdom guiding them another. As much as possible it should be stressed to youths that there is more going on than just an earthly battle with sexual desires. A struggle for their ultimate allegiance is being waged; will they follow the path laid out by God, their parents, and pastor or will they stumble down a road to heartbreak and ruin.

### **Celebration**

When it is done in the appropriate context, sex can be a blessing. Context is key in this regard as is the wisdom to discern how God wishes us to express ourselves sexually.

### **Descriptive Details**

The descriptive details in this passage include:

**Sights:** The dejection of youths who get diseases because of sexual irresponsibility, the sadness of teen parents unable to financially and emotionally care for children, and the heartbreak of parents who assist in picking up the pieces after children engage in irresponsible sexual behavior. The sensual nature of the proverb stands out as well as the classic biblical symbolism of paths, houses, and wells. For instance, the well is the “watering hole” of the ancient world, the pick-up spot; hence the many stories of males meeting females there (Rebecca Gen 24; Rachel Gen 29; Zipporah Ex 2).

Other sights, sounds and textures should readily come to mind in illustrations that bring home the message of engaging in sex responsibly or irresponsibly.