

Homily - Sex, Drugs, and Rock n Roll

The Rev. Ken Kaisch

August 11, 2024 - St. Barnabas Episcopal Church

Today, I want to talk about the glories of Sex, Drugs, and Rock and Roll. I know, it's probably not what you expected when you came to church this morning, but the fact is, I've always been a problem child. Just ask my mother! But more on that later...

Let's start this morning in a more conventional place by talking about a word we all bandy about... the word "spiritual."

Just what exactly do you mean when you use the word spiritual? (Wait for response). Encourage congregation Story of St. John's, Logan, and their response. Do you have spiritual feelings or experiences in the outdoors? How about at church? Do you have these spiritual experiences anywhere else?

We have great difficulty articulating what we mean by spiritual, don't we? So, let's look at other experiences that we have difficulty articulating.

How about your feelings when you love someone? Have you ever been able to clearly describe your feelings of love to the person you love so much?

How about just describing your feelings of gratitude when you are really thankful?

Have you ever wondered why talking about these things is so difficult? It's like we come right up to the limits of what is known as we try to discuss spiritual topics like God or love or gratitude. So what is this all about? Why do we have trouble here?

All of these things we are talking about this morning are unitive experiences. A unitive experience is one where our limits and boundaries seem to disappear - the distinction between you and me, between this and that, simply evaporates. In place of division, there is suddenly this marvelous sensation of joy and this experience of unity, of oneness. Which, of course, brings us back to sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll.

I was thinking about this phrase the other day, just musing and idly wondering. All of a sudden it came to me - these are all unitive experiences.

As we make love with our partner, one of the things we strive for is that moment of orgasm - the big O. What happens then? At the moment of orgasm - your sense of self -- the boundaries that surround you -- simply disappear for a moment. You have this marvelous unitive experience with your partner...but to do that, YOU - that sense of selfhood that defines us -- must disappear.

This is also what happens when we become conscious of the love we have for another. The boundaries we surround ourselves with -- the limits that we have -- just evaporate.

They disappear. In their place, there is this marvelous sense of deep connection and unity.

Although this is a bit more tenuous and difficult to explain, the same thing happens with drugs. For a moment or two, our sense of separation diminishes or disappears. You know how it is with alcohol - at least when it's a positive experience - you have this warm sense of connection with others. The same happens with weed. Your boundaries soften, and you let others come in closer. With the psychedelics, literally, your sense of self dissolves, so there is this sense of merging with the world around you. A clear, unitive experience! With some of the harder drugs like fentanyl and heroin, you nod out, you go to sleep. You leave the essential aloneness of your waking state. In effect, you run and hide. Not a great unitive experience, but for a moment, your sense of separation and aloneness disappears.

And that brings us to rock 'n' roll - one of our culture's all-time favorite ways of entering a unitive state. When you go to a concert, the sound is so loud that it envelops you and bursts through whatever boundaries you put up. The drum and bass line Thump, Thump, Thump, and our brains synchronize to the beat. As a result, you have a crowd of people who literally tune themselves to each other, overcoming individual boundaries so that they can participate in that larger entity that a rock concert creates.

You'll notice with all three - with sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll - the enormous effort that it takes to overcome our essential and existential aloneness. Have you ever wondered why it takes so much effort?

We live in a world riven by division and divisiveness. Even the language we use is characterized by this divisiveness. While all language ostensibly connects us, it actually serves to disconnect us from the unity we long for. You see, language divides the world into subjects and objects. When we use words, we start by dividing things. No wonder we have trouble understanding and communicating unitive experiences. Experiences like love... like communion with God.

The tragedy is that we rarely notice this divisive aspect. As a result, we are victimized by the very tools we use to try to bridge the gaps between us. This means that, in the spiritual realm, every attempt to communicate a unitive experience is highly likely to fail.

Imagine your dilemma if you were Jesus, trying to get your listeners to leave their divided states and enter into union with Him and the Father. Every time you use words to try to bridge this divide, the words keep you from your goal.

It is as if you tell people to go left, and automatically, they turn right. After thousands of iterations like this, you finally have to give up and realize that words are not effective tools for communicating our unitive experiences.

For example, in the gospel of John, Jesus says, "I am in my father, and my father is in me; just as I am in you, and you are in me." We hear this, but it doesn't make sense. We don't feel Jesus inside of us. To take it to an extreme, when cadavers are dissected, we don't find a Jesus spot somewhere. So, what is he talking about?

To be clear, Jesus has to push beyond words, and he invites us to push ourselves beyond words as well. At the Last Supper, he takes bread and says, "This is my body, which is given for you." Then he takes a cup of wine and says, "This is my blood, which is poured out for you and for many." He doesn't ask us to think about it. Just, "Here I am; I love you."

When we come to church, we take that bread and that wine - the body and blood of Christ - into our own bodies, into our own selves. There, within us, the Body and Blood of Christ lose their identity. There, they become part of us - they are no longer distinguishable as separate objects. Christ literally becomes a part of us.

The bread and wine literally have to die. As we consume them, they disappear as separate entities and become part of our flesh, part of our being.

So, we come to the Eucharist every Sunday and are assured that, as we partake of the bread and wine, we are taking our Lord into ourselves. When we try to understand this, we typically use thoughts, ideas and words, and perhaps even images. And we typically walk away from the Eucharist feeling no different than before. Why would that be so?

We fail to understand our spiritual experience because we use the wrong tool -- divisive language - and the language itself prevents any deeper understanding. So, how can we get beyond this? This is a really critical and important question, and it behooves us to resolve it as soon as we can.

Instead of thinking about it, which requires language and its implication of divisiveness, what if we simply... opened ourselves to the experience?

What if we came back to our seats and sat quietly, without words... Without thoughts? What if we closed our eyes and went inside, trusting that God, that Jesus himself, is right here with us?

There is within each of us the Presence of God - the living and holy Power of the Divine. Jesus himself assures us of his holy Presence. All of the saints -- Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, Julian of Norwich - confirm this holy Presence.

They invite us to partake of the Bread of Life and confirm this for ourselves. The only requirement is that we go within and open ourselves. So let us now sit in quiet, without thoughts... without knowing... and rest in Christ.