

The first wedding ceremony I ever performed was quite an experience. The bride, Seguna Kathapali, was the daughter of the surgeon in town. And I mean THE surgeon in town. Siler City, NC is a town of about 8,000 people and there was one surgeon in town. Seguna was not a member of the Presbyterian Church in Siler City. Her family was Hindu.

Seguna was born in India and her parents were practicing Hindus. Seguna attended a Catholic School when her family lived in Ireland and through that influence she became Christian. Seguna's fiancé was Presbyterian and so that is how they came to me to perform the ceremony. This was the first wedding I was ever asked to perform.

Since Seguna's family was Hindu, the family wanted a Hindu ceremony. Seguna wanted a Christian ceremony. So the family compromised and they had both. The Christian ceremony was in the evening on Saturday and the Hindu service was during the day on Friday.

The Hindu service was quite a different experience than I had ever attended before. It was held at Dr. Kathapali's home where they had two large tents set up. One tent contained food for the guests to eat. Lots of curry I remember. And one tent set up for the marriage ceremony. Guests were invited to roam back and forth from the ceremony tent to the food tent. I did not participate in the Hindu ceremony as it was led, not surprisingly, by a Hindu priest.

I couldn't understand what was being said by the Hindu priest. But I remember that there was lots of lots of food that was being brought forward for the ceremony. And it was really good looking food. This food was brought forward and then it was placed in different locations around the tent. It was my understanding that this food was being brought as an offering to the various gods that were being represented inside the tent.

Now when the ceremony was complete, I always wondered what happened to all of that food. I don't think it was eaten by the gods that it was being sacrificed to. So what happened to all of that good food that people spent all of that time preparing? Because I wanted to eat that food and I hate to see good food go to waste when I can do something about it.

In Paul's day, what happened to the food from such ceremonies was that people would then collect that food after the pagan ceremonies and then sell the food on the street. Corinth had a market like all communities in those days where people would bring meat, nuts, produce and sale on the street. That's how people grocery shopped.

And the issue for the Christians in Corinth was whether or not they could purchase and eat such food. Some Christians said that it was ok to eat it while others said it was not. And so they consulted Paul about this.

Paul had been the person who started the church in Corinth but he had moved away. When he receives a letter from the Corinthians in which they ask for his guidance he writes to them the words which we will be reading now. This is Paul's answer to their question about whether or not it is ok for Christians to eat food that had been used in pagan ceremonies.

Read I Corinthians 8

There is disagreement among the biblical writers about this question of whether or not it is proper for Christians to eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols. In Acts 15, James tells his listeners that they are not to eat food that has been sacrificed to idols. In Revelation 2, Christ condemns the church for eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols.

But in the scripture we just read, Paul says that food that has been sacrificed to idols is ok to eat. There is nothing wrong with eating this food. However, Paul says, just because it is ok to eat it does not mean that they should eat it. Paul then communicates to the Corinthians that eating this food may cause some folks to stumble in their faith.

Paul says that Christians who think it is wrong to eat this food may be weakened in their faith by seeing Christians eat this food. And we can see why this could be a problem for some Christians since the biblical writers disagree about whether or not it is ok to eat meat sacrificed to idols.

Paul, however, sets up a contrast between knowing and loving. Between doing what one is free to do verses doing what is the loving thing to do. And Paul says that even though he thinks there is nothing wrong with eating this food, he says that eating this food is probably not the loving thing to do. It is not loving if your actions cause harm to another.

So what does this scripture have to teach us today? To my knowledge, none of us have to decide whether or not we can eat certain foods that have been sacrificed to idols. That is not part of our normal conversations. But even though we may not face that particular situation in our life we do face situations where we have to decide if it is better to be right or to be loving. Is it better to be right or is it better to be loving?

Recently, I saw the following conversation posted on Facebook between a 4 year old and her 6 year old brother. The two were in the car on Gervais Street in Columbia as they passed the State House. The four year old asked, "Is that the White House?" To which her very knowledgeable 6 year old brother arrogantly responded, "Noooo. That's not the White House. The White House is in New York City. Duh." So sometimes even when we think we know something we don't really know something.

All of us are in situations where we may have more knowledge about a certain subject than the person with whom we are in a conversation. We may overhear conversations that drive us nuts because one or both people talking have inaccurate information. I can tell you that drives me nuts. And we may want to be so smug with ourselves and point out how that person is wrong. Duh!!!

We may find ourselves in a disagreement with our spouse, our parents, our children, our siblings, our friends and we may want to be so smug with our extensive information on the subject at hand. But Paul says that knowledge is not as important as love. Knowledge puffs up but love builds up. Paul reminds his hearers that the most important response is not knowledge but to be loving.

What is the loving thing to say in this situation? What is the loving thing to do? Do we try to one-up the other or do we seek to show love toward the other?

Something else that Paul says in this passage about doing the loving thing. Paul says that this knowledge verses love debate is not a private matter. Paul reminds his hearers that the way we act and the decisions that we make are not just about us and our relationship with that person and our relationship with God.

Paul says that the decisions that we make impact other people as well. Paul reminds his listeners to not make decisions thinking only of ourselves and what we think we need. Paul says that we need to consider how our decisions impact those around us.

You may feel as though you have some important decisions in your life. Paul may be sharing some wisdom to you at this time. As you face these major decisions in your life, ask yourself these two questions. Am I being guided by what I think I know or am I being guided by a desire to do the most loving action? That's the first question for you to consider. As I face this major decision in my life, am I being guided by what I think I know or am I being guided by a desire to do the most loving action?

The second question from Paul as you face this major decision in your life is this question. How is my decision going to impact others? How is my decision going to impact others? Am I being loving and how is my decision going to impact others?

Like it says in the bulletin, anyone is invited to remain after the fellowship time and dialogue with me and others about the contents in this sermon and Scripture. Maybe you have some thoughts. Maybe you have some questions. Maybe you want some guidance as you face a big decision in your life.

Maybe you want to give advice. I would love to be in dialogue with you about what you are thinking. Hang around and share what you think. Or contact me via email, twitter, or Facebook.

Am I being loving and how is my decision going to impact others? My prayers are with you as you face the big decisions in your life. AMEN.

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