

MARRIAGE IS GOOD

Genesis 2:18-25

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (Series B)

October 6, 2024

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The Old Testament lesson comes from Genesis, chapter 2, verses 18 through 25. In this Scripture lesson, we see the creation of woman, and God's institution of marriage.

We're going to talk about marriage, which means that some of what you hear might prompt some questions. It might bring up old hurts. It might make you feel the need for confession. There is a lot more that could be said than what I will say. Time does not permit everything. And there are even some things that I will purposely leave out, not because they are unimportant, but because they require a delicate touch, more suitable for a one-on-one or one-on-two conversation. If any of that is you, please make an appointment with me or just drop in to the office.

Please stand as you are able for the God's holy Word. From Genesis 2, beginning at verse 18, we read in Jesus' name.

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." ¹⁹ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man."

²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here we see how God invented marriage, so we also see his plan for it. There's a process in the story. God took Adam through an experience in order to show him the beauty of woman in the end.

First, God saw that it was not good for man to be alone (2:18). So far, everything in creation was good. The only "not good" thing was man's loneliness. So God brought all the animals before Adam, but none of them were fit for him. And, of course, God knew this already, but he parades all the animals in front of Adam so that he would know that nothing else in creation is fit

MARRIAGE IS GOOD (Genesis 2:18-25)

for him (2:19-20). So the LORD caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, like an anesthetic kind of sleep. And he took out a rib or a chunk of flesh from his side. From that piece of flesh, he formed a woman (2:21-22). Now this is interesting. Do you realize that every other living thing came from the ground? Every beast and bird was formed out of the ground (2:19). Even Adam was formed from the dust of the ground (2:7). The woman was the only thing in all creation to be made from something living. Perhaps part of this is to give a special honor to women. So wives, if your husband ever teases you by calling you his “rib,” you can remind him where he came from by calling him a “dirt bag.”

The real meaning, though, is voiced by Adam when he meets his wife:

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh” (2:23).

So Adam knew, every time he looked at Eve, that she was a part of him. And in marriage, God makes this the reality for every husband and wife. Man and woman were once one flesh. And in marriage, that becomes the reality again. Two people, a man and a woman, but one flesh. Two complementary persons, becoming one.

Some people don't really like the title “helper” that is given to the woman. But it's not a title of disrespect or inferiority. The Holy Spirit is referred to as our “**helper**” (John 14:6, 26; 15:26; 16:7), but he is certainly not inferior to us. The Psalms often refer to the LORD as our “helper” (10:14; 30:10; 54:4; 118:7). It simply means that we really need him; we would be nothing without him. And every wife knows that her husband would be nothing without her. Most husbands know this too. So when God calls the woman Adam's “helper,” it simply means that he needs her. He's no good without her.

Husbands and wives are different. Men and women are different. God made us different for a reason. Some consider it sexist to say such a thing, but everyone knows it's true. We're different. And the differences are more than just physical. God made us different for a reason. It may seem that a difference implies inequality, but that's not true at all. The value of a human comes from being created in the image of God, and this is true for all humans. Think of it this way: suppose you go to a store and purchase a pen for one dollar and a notebook for one dollar. Which one is more valuable? Neither, they were both a dollar. But together, they are worth much more than two dollars, because, in the hands of a skilled artist, they can become a masterpiece. Such is marriage, and God is the artist. God created marriage, and marriage is good.

Now about as quickly as we say, “Marriage is good,” we have to acknowledge all the pain surrounding marriage, or the absence of marriage.

In almost every marriage, one dies before the other, and the other goes back to being alone. But it's harder than simply being alone, because you have to live with the absence.

Or in many marriages, one suffers some infirmity, whether it be physical or mental. And the other becomes a caretaker. This is a blessed opportunity to love, and to further learn the depth of what love really is. But it is also difficult. You may even have to bear the pain of your husband or wife not knowing who you are or becoming very angry. That's painful. It's a special kind of loneliness.

There is also the pain of divorce. No one ever plans on that when they get married. No one ever thinks, “This probably won't last.” Or, at least, the bride and groom never think that. Nobody ever intends or wants their marriage to end that way. But it happens. Or, I should say, “People do it.” It's not something that just happens. We shouldn't think about it that way, as if it's something unavoidable. It's always avoidable. It's something people do. But it's not always

MARRIAGE IS GOOD (Genesis 2:18-25)

mutual. It might be a decision the other person makes, and that's extremely painful. Not only do you know that things should be different, you know that things can be different. Things can be made right, but you're not the person with the ability to do it. I can't imagine how painful that would be. And even if you're on the other side of it, if you're the person who leaves, that's still painful, and we can acknowledge that pain.

Sometimes, in tragically wrong marriages, a spouse becomes abusive, and the only safe or right thing to do is for the other to leave. This is a complex kind of pain. First, there is the pain of abuse, which goes beyond physical. But there is also the pain of loneliness, and the pain of wanting to love the abuser, but grappling with the reality that it might not be the right thing, at least at the moment. That would be so painful.

For many, there is the pain of wanting marriage, but never receiving that gift. For a season of my life, I lived with that pain, so I know a little bit of what that's like. But I don't know what it's like for that pain to persist much later into life. Marriage is a gift from God, and it is right to desire that gift. And so is singleness. Singleness is a gift where God can use you to love your neighbors in different ways. But it might not be the gift you want. And that's painful.

And even within good marriages, there is pain. Most marriages, or maybe all marriages, go through seasons of difficulty. I don't feel like I have a lot of wisdom regarding marriage. Some people say I don't have much wisdom about anything. They might be right. But I do have one insight. I always tell people, when they get married, that from this point forward, your husband or wife becomes the person you will sin against the most. And they will sin against you more than anyone else. Part of the reason for this, obviously, is the close proximity. But it's more than that. You're not just close; you are part of one another. You become one flesh. There's a spiritual connection. It's different than any other relationship you will ever experience. Every single thing you do affects your husband or wife. And I really mean *everything*. Even decisions you make where you think, *This doesn't affect anyone but me*, that ceases to be true when you take a husband or a wife. Aside from God, of course, because every sin we commit is against him, your husband or wife is the person you will sin against more than any other person in the world. And they, likewise, will sin against you more than anyone else. This is painful, for both sides. It is painful to be sinned against, and it is painful to sin against someone we love. It also means that the single most important thing for any husband or wife to understand is the infinite depth of Jesus' forgiveness of you. The sins you commit against your husband or wife, you need to confess those sins to them, and you need to seek their forgiveness. But, before God, Jesus has already paid for those sins, and when you confess those sins to your Father in heaven, he is faithful and just to forgive you (1 John 1:9). And when your husband or wife sins against you, remember the depth of sin that Jesus has forgiven you. Do you really have the right to turn and withhold forgiveness from another soul whom he loves? Of course not. But this can be painful. Sometimes we confuse forgiveness with feeling okay about something. Forgiveness is not the same thing as being okay with something wrong. Forgiveness means bearing the cost for what someone else did. That's what Jesus' forgiveness of us means. It doesn't mean he's okay with sin. It doesn't mean he's not hurt by it. He was condemned and killed for it. That hurt a lot. But his forgiveness means that he bears the cost for our sin. That's what he was doing on the cross. So when we forgive others, it does not mean that we aren't hurt by them. If anything, forgiveness might mean that we bear that hurt, and we don't hold against them. And in this way, forgiveness, especially within marriage, gives us a little glimpse into the depth of how Jesus has forgiven us.

So there is a lot of pain surrounding marriage, or the absence of marriage. But this does not mean marriage is bad. If anything, all the pain testifies to the goodness of marriage. If there

MARRIAGE IS GOOD (Genesis 2:18-25)

wasn't something good there, if there wasn't some divine institution that we all should desire, there wouldn't be any pain from its absence or corruption. Marriage is not really the cause of the pain. It's when marriage is corrupted or despised that the pain comes. And that pain testifies to the goodness of real marriage.

God instituted marriage. That's what makes it good. Marriage was not man's idea. God told us about it. And more than just telling us about it, he created it. As male and female, he created us for marriage. It's written into the fabric of the natural world. And it's so interesting, and significant, that God instituted marriage before the fall into sin. Almost everything God has spoken to us, and nearly every command he has ever given, came after man fell into sin. But marriage goes all the way back to creation. God literally made husband and wife for each other. It's no fairy tale; it's how he created us. And before the fall into sin, he commanded the man and the woman to be fruitful and multiply. Marriage is the first institution, and it is the foundation for a well-ordered society.

So what, exactly, is marriage? The word "marriage," in its non-technical sense, simply means to join two things together. So marriage, and now I mean the institution of marriage, is not simply an agreement. It's not putting two people next to each other. But it is the joining of a man and a woman together. There is a physical connection where husband and wife become one flesh, but it's more than just physical. God has built a spiritual connection into it. And that's not something we can turn on or off at will. It's just the way God created us, where the physical is connected with the spiritual. So marriage is not really something we do. It's not even something we enter into as an agreement. We make vows in weddings, and that's good. They remind us what God calls us to. But we might get the false impression that our vows make us married. They don't. The vows are simply an acknowledgement of what we should do when God makes us one flesh. So pay attention to what we heard Jesus say in the Gospel lesson. He quoted Genesis, saying, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Mark 10:7-8). But then he goes on to add, "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:9). God joins husband and wife together. And this is true whether they are Christians or not. Many people have no idea that God joined them together, but it's still true. Marriage is always God's work. And Jesus' command, "Let not man separate," isn't just a commandment, as in, *Do not separate*. But it includes the idea that man really isn't capable of separating it.

Think of it like two boards glued together. When you glue two boards together, assuming you do it right, the strongest part is the connection. You can separate the boards, but they don't come apart at the joint. The glue doesn't break; the wood breaks. That's what divorce is. Divorce doesn't really dissolve a marriage, like we pretend it does. It just breaks it.

Now when we see that marriage is something God does, that might feel restrictive to us. Our twisted hearts don't always like the way God does things, because it means we can't have them the way we want. But this is really good. If marriage is something God does, it means that marriage is good, even when we make a mess of it. God is faithful to what he creates. He is faithful to what he joins together. And his commandments protect us. You can call them restrictions if you want, but they restrict us from harm.

It's no secret, and I'm not telling you anything new, when I say that God's commandments regarding sexuality and marriage are very counter-cultural. The world sees the Christian ethic as repressive, or they might even call it *oppressive*.

MARRIAGE IS GOOD (Genesis 2:18-25)

Now I don't really expect unbelievers to respect the commandments in the Scriptures. Why would they think anything of them if they don't trust the God who gave them? So if I could say something to the outside world, it would simply be, *How's it going out there? Consider your sexual ethics, and consider what has resulted from them? Is it working out?* It's obviously not. There are broken families. Men and women are angry at each other. They're lonely. Young mothers are trying to provide and care for children on their own. Dads are pushed out of their families, only to be replaced by abusive step-fathers. Prisons are filled with fatherless men. Young women fear for their safety, because there is no real expectation that the childish men around them will respect them. If you really think that the world's concept of so-called "free love" is liberating, just take a look at how things are going out there. They thought God's commands were too restrictive, but it's a prison out there.

So for just a moment, I want to speak to young people, especially those who are not married, but someday might be. Think about what kind of husband or wife you want to have. And it could be a lot of things. Maybe you want to marry someone who is intelligent. If so, become intelligent yourself. That will be attractive to them. Maybe you want someone who is healthy and physically fit. Be that kind of person. Maybe you want someone with a sense of humor. Crack a few jokes. It will be attractive to them. And everyone wants a husband or a wife who will be faithful to them. If that's the kind of person you want to marry, and if that's the kind of person you want to be for them, practice that virtue now. It doesn't work to become that person later, when you're married. You have to be that person now. If you feel like you've already blown it, confess that sin, and know that your Father in heaven forgives you for Jesus' sake. Jesus once said to a woman caught in adultery, **"Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more"** (John 8:11). The Scriptures command chastity (e.g., Matt. 15:19; Acts 15:20; Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 6:18, etc.). And, yes, that means that we save intimate love for marriage. If you trust Jesus to forgive your sins, you should also trust that his commandments protect you from harm. God invented marriage. So listening to the Scriptures is like reading a manual written by the guy who invented the thing.

Marriage is good. God created it, and he blesses it. Pray for God to bless it. Pray for God to bless your marriage, your parents' marriage, your children's marriages, and all marriages. In many ways, we have made a mess of marriage. And there is so much pain. Pray for God to heal us through the blood of Jesus.

The greatest thing about marriage is that it's a picture of something greater. It's a picture of Christ and his Church. When we experience forgiveness in marriage, it gives us a little bit of insight into how Jesus has forgiven us, and how he endured such pain in order to bring us back to himself.

Remember how the woman was taken out of Adam's side, but then given back to him as his wife. And consider how we, through our sin and rebellion, have wandered away from God, but we have been brought near again through the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13). Marriage is a picture of us, who were born alienated from Christ, being brought back and being made one with him through Baptism. So Paul writes in Ephesians, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). That's the true reality, of which marriage is a symbol. God has brought us back to

MARRIAGE IS GOOD (Genesis 2:18-25)

himself through the blood of Jesus. And he has cleansed us through Baptism, so that together, as his Church, we would be pure and spotless before him, to be loved by him forever. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.