

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost; October 6, 2024

Genesis 2:18-25

“Marriage is Still Good”

**The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is a suitable partner for him.” Out of the soil the LORD God had formed every wild animal and every bird of the sky, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them. Whatever the man called every living creature, that became its name. The man gave names to all the livestock, and to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal, but for Adam no helper was found who was a suitable partner for him. The LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. As the man slept, the LORD God took a rib and closed up the flesh where it had been. The LORD God built a woman from the rib of that he had taken from the man and brought her to the man.**

**The man said,**

**Now this one is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh.**

**She will be called “woman,”  
because she was taken out of man.**

**For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother  
and will remain united to his wife,  
and they will become one flesh.**

**They were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed.**

The Sixth Day of Creation was busy. On that day God made all the land animals. And then he made his creation’s crown: man, Adam. For this most special piece of creation, God slowed down and worked hands on, fashioning Adam from the dust of the earth. God breathed the breath of life into Adam, giving him a soul. And, best of all, God created Adam in God’s own image: Adam had a stronger intellect and will and emotion than the animals. But even more than that, Adam’s will was perfectly aligned with God who made him. He thought, spoke, and acted just the way his Creator God wanted him to. **God created the man in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them.**

But now wait! What’s this about “female?” Well, in Genesis chapter 1, that’s everything that’s said about the creation Eve: just that God did it. But then Genesis chapter 2 rewinds and zooms in on that busy Day Six of Creation. We learn from chapter 2 that God did not create Eve straightaway after he created Adam. Instead, he waited until Adam had learned a lesson: **“It is not good for them man to be alone.”** The Lord paraded every animal in front of Adam so that Adam could name them. By the end of the parade, Adam could see: none of these are for me. I am alone.

And that was not good. So God made it good by making Eve. As Moses records this creation of woman, he refers to God four times, all four times calling him “Adonai Elohim,” a name that emphasizes both his power and his love. The creation of Eve was a divine expression of both power – who else could make a perfect woman out of a rib? – and love – who else could make a perfect woman for Adam’s good and for her good?

It was God’s power and love working together when **The LORD God built a woman from the rib that he had taken from the man and brought her to man.**

Because Adam was created in God's own image, he saw Eve the same way the Lord did: as an amazing expression of divine power and love, the perfect gift of a gracious Creator. And Adam broke out with the world's first love poem: **Now this one is bone of my bones and flesh and of my flesh. She will be called "woman," because she was taken out of man.**

So many good things the Lord God made on that very busy day! All the animals, Adam – handcrafted in God's image, and Eve, also built in the image of God as Adam's perfect companion. But when God brought Adam his perfect helper, he was creating something else, too: marriage. Adam could see it: **For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and will remain united with his wife, and they will become one flesh.**

On that busy Day Six God crafted both man and woman; he made them, and made them to be together. They were perfectly good. And so was the marriage he placed them in. **God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. There was evening and there was morning – the sixth day.**

Their marriage was perfectly good, and was designed to bless them in many ways. Besides the blessing of companionship, of a fitting partner to be there to love and lean on, this perfect marriage was designed to make children. Among other things, God told them: **"Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it."** Adam also states a third great blessing of marriage: **"and they will become one flesh."** When Adam looked at Eve he understood that they were also made to complement and satisfy each other physically.

All those blessings made the first marriage good. And a closer look at the end of Adam's little love poem, words quoted verbatim by Jesus Christ, will also define exactly what God intended this perfect marriage to be: **"a man will leave his father and his mother"**: it is to be a willing union that separates bride and groom from their parents as they join in marriage. **"and will remain united to his wife"**: it is a union for keeps, between one male and one female. **"and they will become one flesh"**: it is within this lifelong union of one man and one woman that God intends flesh coming together to be enjoyed.

Marriage was good. Full of blessings, and clearly defined, the gift of a gracious Creator to his first humans. But that first marriage – not just good, but perfect – didn't stay that perfect. It is in the very first next chapter of Genesis that we hear Adam singing a much different tune about Eve: **The man said, "The woman you gave to be with me – she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate it."** Not exactly a love poem anymore, is it? "This woman – who, by the way, you put here, Lord, so if you want to blame someone for this mess we're in now, maybe start with yourself, Lord! – this is all her fault." And it was Eve's fault, but Adam's too. He was with her the whole time. They were made to be together, and together they lost perfection and paradise.

And immediately that fall into sin infected their marriage and their view of marriage. No longer such a good thing, certainly not perfect. This is what the Fall in the Garden still does to our view of marriage: not so good. And sometimes, no good at all. Companionship, you say? To stare across the dinner table every night for sixty years at the same face? Keep it. Children, a good thing? With all the cost and the grief and the cost and the fatigue and the cost and the frustration and the cost? Keep them. And why should I limit myself to one partner when I could get so much more variety and pleasure out of life?

It's not just the blessings of marriage that the Fall disdains. It's the definition, too. Why shouldn't we be able to define marriage how we want? We can! We will! Why can't all love be love and be honored, and people marry in whatever combination they see fit? They can! They should! Why should red-blooded

youths in love be expected to join in marriage before they join their flesh? It's not realistic! And what if a married couple doesn't get along anymore? Why should they have to work to get back to what they used to have? We should be able to call it quits if we want!

It started immediately after the Fall, and continues to this day even, sadly, among the people of God. Marriage, with its divine blessings and divine definition, is no longer always seen as good. The blessings are defied and definition is redefined.

So there was one perfect marriage a long time ago, ruined when Adam and Eve's eyes got too big. And it appears to me from the internal evidence of Genesis that their perfect marriage did not last long at all, that it was only a short time between their wedding day and their Fall into sin. But there is another perfect marriage, and it will never end. It is the eternal marriage between the groom, Jesus Christ, and his bride, the Holy Christian Church.

After commanding all Christians to submit to each other, St. Paul makes the specific application of wives submitting to their husbands, which is to respectfully and willingly allow their husbands to lead. Paul then pictures the relationship of Jesus and the Church – which is all believers – as a marriage. It is the perfect, eternal marriage. You have the Church, the bride, willingly submitting to Christ because he is her Savior: **For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he himself is the Savior.** The Church allows Christ to lead because the Church has seen his perfect love for her. Paul says wives with imperfect husbands should submit to them not because they're perfect, but because it's the will of Christ our Savior. And he is perfect.

He is the perfect husband to his bride, the Church, because he loves her so much that he dies for her to make her perfect, too. **Husbands, love your wives, in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy...** Jesus died to purify his bride. His blood washes away her sin, and the water of baptism cleanses each member of the Church by bringing them to faith in Christ. **...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word.** You individually are a member of Jesus' bride, the Church, because God connected the power of his Word to the water of baptism and brought you to faith. And now you are perfect in the eyes of your Savior God. Absolutely perfect, just like Jesus the groom: **He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so she would be holy and blameless.** I have seen more than a few beautiful brides lift their veils, back when brides still wore veils. They work hard to look as perfect as possible at that moment they join the groom at the altar. And many get very, very close. But Jesus' bride looks absolutely perfect to him: glorious, no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, holy, blameless.

It is so beautiful that it could overwhelm us. Even St. Paul, who writes the words, struggles to process them fully: **This is a great mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church.** It's a great mystery, which means you could never know it without God revealing and explaining it to you. It's also a saving mystery: Christ died to make us, his bride, perfect. He washed us in baptism and purified each one of us personally. That's the perfect marriage, and the union will last forever.

And did you notice the Old Testament passage that St. Paul cited near the end of those verses? **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."** And did you notice who else quoted those words, in today's Gospel, as he defended and defined

marriage between a man and a woman? Jesus Christ, our perfect groom, who makes us his holy bride for eternity.

This is what turns our hearts to believe and honor what God says about the goodness of marriage and the nature of marriage, and even the roles he established for husband and wife beginning in the Garden, where he made Adam, the leader, first and then blessed him Eve, the helper. This is what changes our minds to say, "The companionship of marriage is God's blessing. So are children. So is the joining of flesh within marriage." It's not to say everyone has to get married or have as many children as possible, but Jesus' bride agrees: these are blessings from God.

It is also what conforms our minds to agree with God's definition of marriage, even in the face of all societal pressure to let people define it however they want. Our Savior God invented marriage to be a blessing; he defines it.

It is also what moves Christian husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and died for her: you will literally die for her in love. If you will die for her in love, you will also listen to her and pray with her and put her desires and interests ahead of your own. You will lead with sacrifice, like your Savior. You will not make leading about having your way, but about exalting and cherishing her as Christ exalts and cherishes his bride. The love of the Groom is also what moves Christian wives to see the role of helper and supporter as a blessed and privileged position, no more a mark of inferiority than Christ's Church is inferior to anything.

It was in divine love that the Lord God made the first marriage, and made it perfectly. It was in divine love that Christ joined himself to you and me and his Holy Church, dying for us and washing us clean in baptism. May the love of God in Christ capture our hearts and minds; may the perfect of marriage of Christ and his Church move his Church to see: marriage is still good. Amen.