

**oSt. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 10:2-16

***“A Holy Union”***

In this morning's Holy Gospel reading from Mark, Jesus, in His response to the Pharisees, intentionally focuses more on the God ordained nature of marriage than on the humanly devised machinery of divorce. I believe we ought to take Jesus' example and build up marriage instead of exploring and explaining ways for it to be destroyed.

God strongly values the union of a man and woman – making it holy, all the way back to the very beginning. You heard our reading from Genesis 2:18-24 this morning. I want to especially read verse 24, the last verse, *“a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”* There is no expiration date on these words! We need to understand that God's plan from the start was for man and woman to join together in holy partnership – and I am intentionally using that word.

Now, I want to share with you the words from Genesis 1:26-27. *“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”* It is very interesting that God is not talking in the first person singular but in the first-person plural – *“in our image.”* Right there in Genesis – God is speaking as the Holy Trinity.

And in this morning's Old Testament Reading from Genesis, chapter 2, we learn that apparently there must have been a great deal of time during which man existed without a woman present. Let's learn more about the creation of a woman, please open your Pew Bibles to page four, Genesis chapter two, verse 18. *"The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.""* What did God do? Look at verse 19 and 20. *"Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name." "So, the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found."* Here at the end of verse 20, after all that has been created, the animals, the birds, and every living creature, we learn that man still does not have his *“helper.”*

Did you notice verse 20 says *“no suitable helper?”* The word *suitable* is very important. The listing of definitions of the Hebrew word for *suitable* *'kenegdo'* (כִּנְגְדוֹ) includes – are you ready for this - ‘opposite’ and ‘opposite to.’ God is saying that Adam needs a suitable – opposite - helper. So, what does God do? Let's read verses 21 and 22: *"So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh." "Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."* It would seem to me that Adam is affirming that

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God took flesh as well as bone from his side and used them to create Eve – the first woman. Eve by the way means ‘first woman.’ Since the man had been charged with naming all of the other beings – he named her ‘woman.’ Now let’s go to verse 23: *“The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman for she was taken out of man’”* I believe that Adam is affirming that God took flesh and bone from his side and created Eve from them. Please look with me at verse 24: *“That is why a man leaves his father and his mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”* When they become one flesh – God may, if it is His will, to give children. That is what comes out of a blessed union – children.

It is amazing that what was just separated - wants to be rejoined, and desires to become one again! A part of Adam is missing, and he calls upon the missing part to rejoin him. Although the woman begins from the man’s body, the man ultimately merges back with her. This is the awesome completeness of human creation. And about this union, Jesus proclaimed, *“Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”* (Mark 10:9). There is a beautiful tradition that I think of in the joining of the opposite to complete the ones made in the image of God. This tradition takes place in the marriage ceremony – when these words *“Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder”* are prayed – I take a white stole, and after the man and woman have made their vows to one another, I wrap a white stole around their joined right hands – and I lift them high during those words – to show everyone present the special union that has taken place. It is from this long standing and beautiful tradition that it is said that the couple has “tied the knot!” God has had a plan from the very beginning! *“Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder”* It becomes a visual thing as well as a spiritual thing during the marriage ceremony. The act of joining hands and tying the knot are beautiful traditions of the church. It is a visual thing as well as a spiritual thing – during the marriage ceremony.

God has a lot to say about this arrangement. Please turn with me to page 1573 – at the bottom of that page to Mark, chapter 10, verse 6. (Mark 10:6-9) *“But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So, they are no longer two, but one flesh.’ Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*

Those are not words that we make up – those are Jesus’ words. From chapter one of Genesis, we read that humanity is created in the likeness of God. In preserving the human race, we preserve the “image of God” in the world. I talked to you a few moments ago about procreation – that the image of God becomes a union of one – the two people, and from that union comes a baby who is created in the image of God. You know, all we have to do is look at our children and we see the reflection not only of husband and wife, but also the reflection of Almighty God. Isn’t that beautiful. The joy and simplicity that is on their face, as they just love you – no matter what. I had the joy this morning to have Deanna Carmical come to the side door, asking me to bless her godchild. I went outside with some anointing oil and there was this little girl sitting in the stroller, and a dog named Molly, and I was blessed to anoint and bless this young lady. She has not been baptized yet, but that doesn’t stop me. She is the image of God. What a blessing!

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You could have just told them no a thousand times, all these beautiful kids, but they are going to come and cuddle and want to sit on your lap. That is what God desires – a closeness with us – because we are made in His image. This is not a mandate that everyone must marry, but those who do marry are to be man and wife! That is also not to take anything from the people who have adopted. Just because it is not coming from my body and my wife’s body – God has put us together as a family. Anyone who has adopted – or has been adopted knows that to be true.

This is a basic fundamental, traditional Christian belief –and it comes right from the very beginning – in the Book of Genesis. However, it is this very essential belief of faith that has been debated and changed by culture and the Supreme Court of the United States of America. It would seem that Satan very much is on the prowl. Listen to these words from the Apostle Peter from 1 Peter 5:8-9. *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”*

I would hope that whatever small insight I have provided this morning accompanied by your knowledge of Scripture that you will agree with me that marriage is the *rejoining* of a man to a woman, and so realizing the miraculous fullness of divine creation. Let our focus be the same as Jesus’. We are defending and lifting up marriage as ‘God ordained’ and the covenant relationship that God Himself envisioned it to be from the very beginning. Those very same children that Jesus said, *“let the children come to me”* are the fruit of the relationship that we have been talking about from the very beginning. Pray that God would protect every marriage, blessing the wife and husband, and their children, providing them wisdom and a longing to seek Him and worship Him.