

Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost, October 7, 2018, Liturgical Year “B”

St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 10:2-9

“A Sacred Union”

I want you to listen to these words that come from the very beginning of the service for Holy Matrimony – based on the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, which is a part of our Anglican Church in North America prayer book that we pray will be available next June: The priest says to all who are present: *“The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind was ordained by God: for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord; for mutual joy, and for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; to maintain purity, so that husbands and wives, with all the household of God, might serve as holy and undefiled members of the Body of Christ; and for the upbuilding of Christ’s kingdom in family, church, and society, to the praise of his holy Name.*

Therefore, marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was ordained by Almighty God.” Those are powerful words!

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 the last verse – verse 24, *“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. Please understand that. God’s plan from the start was for man and woman to join together in holy partnership – and I am using that word purposely.

In this morning’s gospel reading from Mark, Jesus, in His response to the Pharisees, intentionally focuses more on the God ordained nature of marriage than on the human machinery of divorce. I believe we ought to take Jesus’ example and build up marriage instead of exploring and explaining ways for it to implode.

Please open your Pew Bibles to page 3, for Genesis 1:26-27. Let’s look at what God has to say: *“Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness; so that they may rule over the fish in the sea, and over the birds in the sky, over the livestock, and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So, God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”* I bet you didn’t notice that the Holy Trinity is referenced here? Did you? God is not talking in the first person singular but in the first-person plural – *“in our image.”* Right there in Genesis - God is “one in three!” How amazing. Right in the very beginning! A lot of times it goes right over our heads.

In these two verses we have a ‘Reader’s Digest version’ of the creation of a man and a woman. There is so much that occurs during this awesome event of the creation of humanity. In chapter 2 of Genesis, we learn that apparently there was a great deal of time during which man existed without a woman present. Let’s learn more about the creation of a woman, so we need to turn to page four, Genesis chapter two, verse 18. *“The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to*

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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, very, very, important. The listing of definitions of the Hebrew word for *suitable* 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 God took flesh as well as bone from his side and used them to create Eve. 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”*” It would seem to me that Adam is affirming that God took flesh as well as bone from his side and used them to create Eve? Since the man had been charged with naming all of the other beings – he also named her ‘woman.’

There is a law of physics that says, “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” 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.”*

Isn’t it amazing that what was just separated wants to be rejoined, desires to become one again! What is separate has a natural desire to become one once 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 the joining of the opposite to complete the ones made in the image of God. Thank you, Lord! 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 the joined right hands of the man and woman – and I lift it 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!*” “*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.

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.*" Jewish commentary on the Holy Scriptures – which is called ‘Midrash,’ states that “*first man was created entirely by God, but the making of a man that is born is shared by the joining of male and female: (it is a biological fact folks) the white is from the male, out of which brain and sinews are formed; the red is from the female, out of which the skin and flesh and the blood are made; and the spirit and the life and the soul are from the Holy One, blessed be He. Thus, all three have a share in him.*” Those are words from the Midrash – they are not my words.

From chapter one of Genesis, we read that humanity is created in the likeness of God. A Jewish rabbinic sage, named Ben Assai, wrote that: “*Whoever does not engage in the propagation of the species is deemed by scripture to diminish, as it were, the likeness.*” In other words, in preserving the human race, we preserve the “image of God” in the world. 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. The joy and simplicity that is on their face, as they just love you – no matter what. You could have just told them no a thousand times, 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!

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 the Supreme Court of the United States of America. It would seem that Satan very much is on the prowl. Hear 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. 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.