

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, October 4, 2015, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 10:2-9 and various

“Marriage – God Style”

It was not too long ago I was given a story about St. Valentine, and I do not recall hearing this before. Valentine was a priest for whom Valentine's Day is named, and was killed for defending the wonderful and godly institution of marriage.

The emperor of Rome, Claudius, passed a law banning marriages. His reason was this: because men would not volunteer to join his Roman army leaving their wives and girlfriends behind. Valentine knew that God instituted the family and it is His will that there be great marriages. So, Valentine kept right on performing marriage ceremonies – but in secret. He would whisper the words of the Holy Matrimony service, while listening for soldiers on the steps outside. One night, he did hear footsteps. The couple he was marrying escaped, but he was caught. He was thrown in jail and sentenced to death. Valentine tried to stay cheerful while imprisoned, and many young people came to the jail to visit him and he was actually performing marriage ceremonies while in jail. The jailer's daughter would often visit Valentine in his cell, and they sat and talked for hours. She believed he did the right thing by ignoring the Emperor and performing marriages. On the day that Valentine was to die, he left her a note thanking her for her friendship and loyalty. He signed it, "Love, from your Valentine." That note started the custom of exchanging love notes on Valentine's Day. It was written on the day he died, February 14, 269 A.D. As far as I know this is the first instance that a Christian priest was martyred for upholding the sacrament of marriage.

Sadly today, we hear about fewer and fewer long term marriages – like 50th anniversaries being celebrated, and when they are celebrated, or even 40th or 35th, it is a great deal in today's day and age. Divorce statistics have sky rocketed, the average lifespan of marriages has dropped alarmingly. Now, please understand that there are some situations that the only way forward – for the best thing, especially for children involved is to part ways, but what is objectionable is the ending of a marriage as a convenience – without any work at all, without any counseling, without any prayer. One writer stated that we have gone from “death do us part” to “satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.” In a culture that has made the shelf life of husbands, wives, and families as disposable and as perishable as a fresh container of milk, it seems that any marriage without an expiration date of ten years is, well, a miracle.

Agatha Christi, the famous mystery novelist, once said, “An archaeologist is the best husband a woman can have. The older she gets, the more interested he is in her.”

Professor H.W. Jurgen, a West German sociologist, claims that

- married couples talk with one another 70 minutes a day in the first year of their marriage.
- This drops to 30 minutes a day in the second year
- and then only to 15 minutes a day in the 4th.

- His research shows that by the eighth year, a husband and wife, typically, share hardly any small talk and are very nearly silent with each other. This is truly sad, but an accurate expression of our day and age.

In this morning's gospel reading from Mark, Jesus, in His response to the Pharisees, actually focuses more on the divinely created nature of marriage than on the awkward 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 self-destruct.

I would ask you to please open your Pew Bibles and turn 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, according to 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." Just a note: did you notice that the Trinity is referenced here? God is not talking in the first person singular but in the first person plural – "in our image." That should give us a hint that God is "one in three!" How blessed.

In these two verses we have a condensed version of the creation of a man and a woman. There is a great deal that occurs during this awesome event of the creation of humanity. From chapter 2 in Genesis, we learn that apparently there was a great deal of time during which man existed without a woman present. To learn more about the creation of a woman, we need to turn over to page four, to chapter two, and go to 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." This use of this term *suitable* is very significant in this context. 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."

In performing this "surgery" God also assumed the role of an anesthesiologist by putting Adam to sleep. Then God took one of his ribs. The Hebrew term for *rib* is not used anywhere else in

the Bible as it is used here. The Hebrew term for *rib* usually refers to the side of a building, a supporting beam, or the side of a room. But when this term is used anatomically, it refers to the area of the ribs and includes not only one bone, but also the flesh and muscle as well.

Adam apparently had a significant section of his anatomy removed, his whole side, nearly one-half of his physical being removed to create his suitable opposite – *woman*. We cannot take this lightly, especially in light of how our current culture attempts to redefine marriage. We cannot just ignore what we just read from Genesis. Nearly half of man was used to create woman.

Now let's look at 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?

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.*"

What was just separated desires to be rejoined, longs to become one again! What is separate has a natural desire to become one once again. A part of Adam is missing and he summons the missing part to rejoin him. Although the woman begins from the man's body, the man ultimately merges back with her. The unification of a man with a woman is the awesome completeness of human creation. And regarding this union, Jesus proclaimed, "*Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.*" (Mark 10:9). Human wholeness depends upon the joining of the opposite to complete the divine image. Praise and thanks be to God! An interesting side note – a beautiful tradition that I have used in the marriage ceremony – when these words "*What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder*" are prayed – I wrap a white stole around the joined right hands of the man and woman – and lift it high during the words – indicating 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 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 scriptures – 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: 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."

Parents have a human aspect in that they die, but they also have a spiritual aspect in that they bring forth life and birth. A Jewish sage by the name of Akiba wrote, "Although man was created from the ground, and Eve from Adam, and now it is impossible for man to propagate

(or reproduce) without woman, and for woman without man, yet even now, it is not possible for both of them to propagate without the Shekinah – the presence of Almighty God.” Life continues to be a miracle of God. (And it is precious – but that is a whole other sermon for another day!)

From chapter one of Genesis, we read that mankind is created in the likeness of God. Another Jewish sage, Ben Assai, wrote: “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. The preservation of the human race can only be achieved by the union of a man and a woman, created in the likeness of God, united in marriage. 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 – right from the very beginning – in Genesis. Yet it is this very essential belief of faith that has been debated and changed by the Supreme Court. Satan very much is on the attack.

I would hope that whatever small insight I have provided along with your knowledge of Scripture that you will agree with me that it is not possible for marriage to be anything else other than the *rejoining* of a man to a woman, and thereby achieving the miraculous fullness of divine creation? I pray that we would not fall into the same trap that the Pharisees did, and that our focus would be the same as Jesus’. Let us concentrate on defending and lifting up marriage as God ordained and the covenant relationship that God Himself intended it to be from the very beginning of creation. It is also my prayer that God would protect each marriage, blessing the wife and husband, as well as their children, giving them wisdom and a desire to seek Him and worship Him. May each godly marriage grow and be blessed, and nourished by the Lord - so that you may achieve a long lasting, fruitful relationship.