

PENTECOST 20 (PROPER 22), OCTOBER 7, 2018

GOD'S MARRIAGE

TEXT: MARK 10:2–16

OTHER LESSONS: GENESIS 2:18–25; PSALM 128; HEBREWS 2:1–13 (14–18)

Genesis 2:18–25

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 So out of the ground the LORD God 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.

Hebrews 2:1–13

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

⁵ Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.⁶ It has been testified somewhere, “What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?⁷ You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor,⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,¹² saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

¹³ And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Mark 10:2–16

² And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”³ He answered them, “What did Moses command you?”⁴ They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.”⁵ And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.⁶ But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’⁷ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh.⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

¹⁰ And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹ And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, ¹² and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

¹³ And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” ¹⁶ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

GOD’S MARRIAGE

Well, when you consider the crazy, upside-down and perverse culture we’re living in today, I have no doubt that many sermons this morning will be focused on God’s understanding and gift of marriage—one man and one wife for life. This is good. We need to hear such a message. Our kids need to hear such a message. They need to hear and know God’s definition of marriage—something He Himself instituted in the Garden of Eden, creating the bride and groom, husband and wife. This is something that is often vilified, mocked, and despised by so

many people today because it does not match up with or agree with the corrupted version of marriage championed in today’s music, magazines, social networking, and TV, even the Disney channel. The two opposing views are just that—opposing. They cannot stand together. We cannot agree to disagree or simply “coexist” in our confessions. This is how God created marriage to be. This is how God intended marriage to be. Any other alternative is wrong and sinful and rebels against the very God who created and gave this holy institution. Yes, this needs to be heard, now more than ever.

But, this is not the only message God intended in these lessons. Just a couple verses later, the disciples ask Jesus more questions about marriage and divorce and God’s intentions, and Jesus bluntly ties together divorce, remarriage, and adultery. So... how many people will hear a sermon today on the

sinfulness of divorce and adultery? Will God's people hear about divorcing your spouse, not out of any biblical reason, but out of very selfish reasons (i.e., financial stress, loss of looks, decrease in physical and emotional passion, irreconcilable differences) as sin, a sin that renders asunder what God has joined together? Probably not many. Pastors won't preach such a sermon, not because the message isn't there, but precisely because the message is so blunt and unsettling and common in our culture today that preaching such a sermon would inevitably make a lot of people very upset, perhaps even angry.

Well, you're not going to hear that sermon from me either today, not because I'm afraid of ruffling feathers or calling sin what it is; but simply because there's more to this lesson. To limit the focus to only marriage or only divorce and adultery is to limit the

message that Christ conveys in this Gospel.

Even though the lesson is very clear and blunt and in Jesus' words, I want you to think about how scripture speaks of marriage, divorce, and adultery. Think about the Israelites in Isaiah's or Jeremiah's time. Think about God's bride in Isaiah's or Jeremiah's time. Time and time again God—the heavenly groom—expresses His sorrow and anger over the fact that His bride, Israel, has not been faithful to Him. Time and time again she would wander. She was a very adulterous bride, always giving herself over to the false gods.

And yet...Israel's faithful Groom never divorced her. He absolutely had grounds to divorce and walk away from the Israelites. After all, they abandoned Him. They committed adultery against Him; that is, they were not faithful to Him. They brought infidelity to

the marriage. God absolutely could've walked away and let them flounder in their deadly, sinful adultery after they essentially divorced Him from their lives in favor of their own passions and desires...but He didn't. God was faithful to them. God was faithful to His vow to love them, in spite of them and their infidelity. Our Groom's loving faithfulness still burns just as strong, in spite of our infidelity, in spite of our adulterous and unfaithful ways.

Let me ask you: What do you rent asunder that God has joined together? I told you before that there is a lot more to this than simply the institution of marriage and divorce and adultery. Just think about all that God has joined together in our relationship to Him. He joins together hearing His Word and faith; hearing His Word and making disciples. And yet... how often is the Word of God divorced from our efforts and intentions to make disciples? **“How can**

they hear if someone doesn't tell them?”

How often the Word of God is forsaken in favor of our selfish desires for entertainment, money, ease, man's favor and praise, or simply wanting to not hurt anyone's feelings. It's easier to stay quiet, turn a blind eye to sin, and ask God for forgiveness than it is to be faithful and stand firm in the Word and proclaim God's Law and Gospel.

Just think about how God joins together His work, His action, and His presence with His divine service. And yet...how often do we willingly divorce ourselves from our Groom by simply not showing up; not coming home to His house to be at rest and fed and nourished by Him?

But here's the thing: Our Groom—our God—is faithful. He is full of unconditional love and forgiveness and faithfulness to us and for us. Just

look right here [the crucifix]. Here is the incomprehensible love of your Groom for you on full display for all the world to see. Here in the death of Christ Jesus is the undying love of God for you, His beloved and cherished bride. Think about how God joins together His love, His grace, His mercy, His forgiveness, and His peace that surpasses all understanding with bitter suffering and anguish and death; with wrath and persecution and blood and nails and thorns and gall. I understand why people struggle. I understand why people doubt and reject and ridicule. It goes against all reason. Here in the bloody corpse of a lowly condemned man is the undying and unconditional love for an adulterous bride who deserves nothing but the Biblical penalty for adultery—death, present and eternal death.

But your Groom doesn't forsake you. He doesn't leave you to your own reason and strength. He

doesn't throw His hands in the air and turn His back on you in smug satisfaction, knowing that your adulterous and sinful ways have earned you a one-way ticket to eternal damnation.

That's not our God. That may be how we act against our fellow Christians, but that's not how our Groom acts with us. In fact, the Groom takes our place. He puts Himself in our place, willingly suffering our justly-deserved punishment for divorce and adultery. He takes our place, dying our death. The sinless victim of our adulterous ways takes our place and suffers His Father's just and righteous death penalty for our adulterous sin, and He does all of this out of His love and faithfulness to us—all of us—every man, woman, and child, no matter how old or young, smart or slow, rich or poor, felon or free man, citizen or alien. That's love; love that ONLY God can have!

My brothers and sisters in Christ: I can't make you faithful. I can't make you love your Groom or anyone else that the Groom Himself died for. The truth is you can't make anyone love someone else. It just doesn't happen. They might say the words and put on a good show, but you know when someone truly loves another. You can't make that happen. You can't force it, and you can't fake it. This is why I simply point you to the love and faithfulness that your Groom has and gives to you. Through the working of His Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit who works in and through the loving gifts of the Groom—the life-giving gifts of Word and Sacrament—your God and Groom Himself creates His faithful bride, no different than He did in the Garden with our first mother. God Himself creates the blessed bridal faithfulness and life in all who hear and believe.

Behold Christ, your bridegroom, who lived the

perfect sinless life for you; who lived, died, and rose again for you, who still comes to you today with His gifts of forgiveness, life, love, and peace that surpasses all understanding. He comes to you today, to forgive you and cleanse you of all your adulterous unfaithfulness, making you pure and righteous in His sight.

The rest of the world may see a lowly, beat-down, adulterous sinner, but God sees a beautiful bride; a bride so cherished and so loved that He willingly laid down His life for her so that she may have life eternal with Him.

This is your reality in Christ, right now and for all eternity. May this Good News uplift your soul and bring you the joy and peace that only the bride of Christ can truly know.

AMEN

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen

