

MARRIAGE

A GIFT OF GOD!

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Rev. Mark F. Bartels

Epistle Lesson; Hebrews 2:9-11

Gospel Lesson; Mark 10:2-16

Sermon Text; Genesis 2:18-24

There was a young pastor, just fresh out of the seminary. He had never performed a wedding. And, he was quite nervous to perform his first wedding. He was worried that he would not remember everything that he was supposed to say. And so, he talked to an older pastor. The older pastor gave him a bit of sage advice. He said to the young pastor, “Look, if you forget something, if you forget what you are supposed to do next, just do this. Just quote scripture. You can't go wrong, if you quote scripture.”

And so came the day of the wedding. That young pastor, got through the scripture readings. He had a little sermonette. He had the young man and the young woman say their vows to one another. And then, the young pastor got to the part of the wedding service where he said, “Now that this young man and this young woman have consented together in holy marriage and have pledged the same before God and these witnesses, I declare them to be husband and wife in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

At which point, his mind went blank, and he could not remember what came next. He got all panicky. And then he thought, “*That*

older pastor told me, just quote scripture.” And so, he blurted out the only scripture passage that he could think of, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

There was a little girl, who had just seen the movie *Cinderella*. The next day she was talking to a couple of her little friends about the movie *Cinderella*. One of the little girls said, “I know how it ends. They live happily ever after.”

The next little girl said, “Oh no they don't. They get married.”

Marriage is a wonderful institution from God. But, because we are sinners, and we live in a sinful world, marriage can have some difficulties that go along with it. On the basis of today's scripture reading, let's look at marriage. First of all, let's look at marriage as God instituted it – in a state of perfection. Let's look at the perfect marriage in the Garden of Eden. Our scripture reading begins this way.

The LORD God said,

“It is not good for the man to be alone.

I will make a helper suitable for him.”

This was the sixth day of creation. The LORD had created everything - the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the seas, the plants and all of the animals, and then the crown of creation, the human being. He created man. But there was still one thing that was lacking. That man, the crown of God's creation, didn't have a companion. He didn't have someone whose hand he could hold, someone who he could share his deepest thoughts with, someone who could compliment him, be a compliment to him. He didn't have someone he could be intimately related to, love with all of his heart, and someone he could have children with. And so, the LORD, in His love, determined that He would create the perfect companion for Adam. And, look at what happens next, in a bit of I suppose what you call pre-marriage counseling. Once the LORD says, “I will create a helper suitable for him” (for Adam), He does not create that

helper right away. Look at what He does.

“Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all of the beasts of the field and all of the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each of the living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air, and all of the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.”

So, during the sixth day of creation, God brings all the creatures to Adam. Adam's intellect, being perfect, was far above our intellect. And so, he named each of those animals. During the course of that day, what did Adam see? They all had companions. There were male and female giraffes, hippopotamus, and horses. But for Adam, during the course of that sixth day of creation, there was never anyone who was like him, whose hand he could hold, who could be his companion.

Having shown that to Adam, then the Bible says, “The LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep.” Now, you notice, God did not ask Adam, “*Who would you like for a companion? What would you like your companion to be like?*” He did not ask, “*Would you like a bunch of guys that you could go ice fishing with?*” God determined exactly who would be the absolute best companion and compliment to this man that He had created. He caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep. And the Bible says that from Adam's rib, God formed a woman. The famous Bible Commentator, Matthew Henry says, “Notice that God did not take Eve from Adam's head to show that she should rule over him. Or, from his feet to show that he should trample upon her. But, He took her from his side to show that they are equals. He took her from under his arm, to show that he should protect her. He took her from near his heart to show that she should be his beloved.”

And so, the LORD God formed this perfect, perfect companion for Adam. The Bible says that when Adam woke up, the LORD God

brought the woman to Adam. It is kind of like watching a father walk his daughter down the aisle, as he presents his daughter to the groom. The LORD God brought this woman to Adam, and presented Adam with the perfect companion that He had made, who he could love. They could love one another, care for one another, share their deepest thoughts with one another, their deepest heart with one another, be intimate with one another, and have children together. God presented her to Adam.

And, what did Adam say? He said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." He recognized the unity that God had created between he and the woman, this awesome wife that God had given to Adam.

And then, scripture says even to all the rest of the world, to the end of time, even after the fall into sin God says, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." So, they are no longer two but one.

And then Christ added this: "Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate."

And so, God instituted this marriage, where husband would leave his father and mother, and his primary relationship would now be with his wife. They would cleave to one another. They would be united with an inseparable bond, that could only be separated by death, which is why we begin our wedding services saying, "We are gathered here in the sight of God and of His Church to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in holy marriage. The union of husband and wife in heart and body and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy, for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity and when it is God's Will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and the love of the Lord. Therefore, marriage is not to be entered into lightly or inadvisably, but reverently, deliberately and in accordance with the purposes with which God has instituted it."

In marriage today, we make pledges to one another that Adam and Eve did not have to make to one another, in perfection. Now, marriage is marred by sin and the effects of sin. Now, in marriage we have trouble and trials. Now, in marriage husband and wife may sin against one another. Now, in marriage one spouse may be too demanding, one may be too lazy. Now in marriage, one of us may have a wandering eye and not be satisfied with our spouse. One may be too critical. We have all of these troubles in marriage. And when a young man and a young woman look at one another, standing here in front of the church, the pledges they make say something that Adam and Eve would not have had to say in perfection. They recognize sin and its troubles. A young man or a young woman says,

•“I, 'so and so' take you, 'so and so' to be my husband or my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward for better or for worse.”

Adam and Eve did not have to say, “for worse.” They did not have any worse. They were perfect.

•“For richer, for poorer.” In the Garden of Eden, there was no poor. But, now we promise to be together for richer or poorer.

•“In sickness and in health.” In the Garden of Eden there was no sickness, but now we pledge to be together in sickness and in health.

•“To love and to cherish, until death parts us.” In the Garden of Eden there was no death. There would have been no death in perfection, but now we pledge to be faithful, until death parts us.

•“And I pledge you my faithfulness.” In the Garden of Eden, in perfection, there was no threat of unfaithfulness, but now we promise faithfulness.

We live in a world and in marriages that are affected by sin. And so, what do we do? How do we make these marriages, marriage that is instituted by God, a blessed thing, when it is marred by sin?

There was a little boy who was in Sunday School one day. The

Sunday School Lesson happened to be Jesus' first miracle. He learned how Jesus had been at this wedding. They had run out of wine, and so Jesus turned water into wine at this wedding. After Sunday School, the dad picked up his son from Sunday School, and they were driving home in the car. The father, being a good father, said, "Well, son, what was the Sunday School Lesson about today?" And the little boy recounted to his father that Jesus had been at a wedding and He had turned water into wine.

Then the father, wanting his son to really think about what he had learned, asked the little boy, "So, what did you learn from the lesson?"

And the little boy said to his father, **"I guess, if you are going to have a wedding, you better make sure Jesus is there."**

You can't say it any better than that, ok? If you are going to have a wedding, if you are going to have a marriage, in a world that is affected by sin, you better make sure that Jesus is there.

There is a radio station called KFYO A.M. It comes out of St. Louis, Missouri. It is an all Lutheran radio station. I think it may be on 24 hours a day, and you can get it on the Internet. So, I was listening to it one day, sitting in my office. They were interviewing somebody who was a Christian expert on marriage. I have heard a lot about marriage, and experts on marriage, and so, I was listening with just half an ear, as I was working. The question asked by the interviewer, to this expert on marriage, was, "What is the most important ingredient in a Christian marriage?"

I knew what the interviewee was going to say. He was going to say, "*Well, the most important ingredient in marriage is Christ-like love.*" But, that is not what he said! What he said caused me to stop and think! The interviewer asked, "What is the most important ingredient in a Christian marriage?" And, his answer made me think, when he said, "The most important ingredient in a Christian marriage is mercy."

Mercy!

I want us to think about that, a little bit. In Confirmation Class, occasionally I get asked this question. “What if Eve had eaten that fruit, and fallen into sin, but Adam did not eat that fruit and he so he remained perfect? What would have happened to their relationship?”

That is a question we can't answer, isn't it? Wait a second. Wait a second! I know of a relationship where the bride is a sinner and the groom is absolutely sinless and perfect. I want to tell you how that unfolds. The Bible says that as a believer in Christ, you are the bride of Christ. The Church is Christ's bride. But, you are a sinner, aren't you, just like me. And, if we look into the mirror of God's Word, to see what we look like in God's eyes, why, we are covered with spots, wrinkles, and stains of sin – things we have done against God, the thoughts we have had, the words we have said, the things we have done against others that make us, in God's eyes, covered with sin, shame, and guilt. We don't deserve, in any way, to be united, as it were, in marriage to this sinless, holy, Son of God, Jesus Christ. So, how does that work? How can a sinful bride be married to a holy, sinless husband, Christ. Listen to what it says in the book of Ephesians, of how this all works.

“Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant Church, without stain, or wrinkle, or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

Look at what the holy, perfect groom did. He looked at the spots, stains, wrinkles, and sin of His bride, and rather than reject her, and say to you, “*I don't want you to be my bride. You are too ugly. You are too covered with sin, stain, and shame,*” what did the perfect, sinless groom do? He said, “*I will take your ugliness, your sin, your shame, your wrinkles upon me, as my very own. I will suffer and*

die, and remove from you all of your sin, so that I can present you to myself as holy, spotless, without wrinkle, and with no blemish.” He has washed us with water, through the Word. That is mercy.

That is mercy!

Every day our groom, Christ, is so merciful to us. Undeservedly, He forgives us all of our sins and declares us holy in His sight, because of what He has done for us.

The key ingredient in any marriage is mercy.

There was a young man who was engaged to be married. It was a week before his wedding and he called up the pastor and he said, “Pastor I am going to have to call off the wedding.”

The pastor asked him why. The young man said, “Well, since we have gotten engaged, my fiancée put on 45 pounds.”

That is mercilessness.

The key ingredient in any marriage is mercy.

There was a husband who did something dumb. He ended up leaving the house for a day. He came back and wanted to come back into the house. The pastor was talking to the wife, and she said, “Well, I guess I can let him back in, but I am not going to forgive him. I can't do that yet.”

The pastor said to her, “So long as you are not merciful, so long as you don't forgive him, there will be a wall that can't be removed between the two of you.”

The key ingredient in marriage is mercy.

We undeservedly, for Christ's sake, because of what Christ has done, forgive one another, our shortcomings, our faults, and our sins. You know what it is that binds you so tightly together to Christ that you never want to leave Him? **It is His mercy.** What is it that can bind two sinners so tightly together that they will never want to forsake each other? **It is mercy - Christ's mercy, reflected in marriage.**

Which then causes us to have that commitment that scripture calls us to.

Being the father of three boys, who are either in high school or college, sometimes, when I am in the car, and I am not in control of what is on the radio, I listen to songs that I would not normally listen to. And my horizons get expanded, a little bit. There is a song that is on popular radio that I have heard a number of times. It is totally in a foreign language. It is totally in German. It is very unusual for something like that to make it big in the American airwaves. So, you can imagine it is a pretty catchy song. And, it has even caught my attention. It starts out this way, when a guy with a real deep voice says, "Du hast mich." And then, he goes on and says that, again. The other day, it just so happened that I was talking to the boys about that song, "I wonder what that song is all about in German. I don't understand any of the words." So, we googled it on the Internet and got a translation of it. I was shocked at what the song was all about. There is a question that gets asked over and over in that song. The question is this. "Do you want to be faithful to her, unto death? Do you want to be faithful to her, unto death!" And the resounding response that comes back, over and over is "Nein!" (No!)

That is not how God created and intended marriage. God intends, in marriage, that we be faithful and committed to each other, until death do us part.

One day, Winston Churchill, who was a great leader of the free world, during WWII, was at a banquet in honor of himself. Dignitaries from all over the world were there, famous dignitaries. During the course of this banquet, someone asked Winston Churchill a very penetrating question. It caused the room to fall silent. The question the person asked was, "Sir Churchill, if you couldn't be yourself, if you had to be someone else, who would you most like to be?"

And, everybody fell silent. What great leader of the free world would he want to be? What great statesman would he want to be?

What great general would he want to be? Everybody fell silent. They wanted to hear who Sir Winston Churchill would most like to be, if he couldn't be himself.

Sir Winston Churchill said to the crowd, "If I couldn't be myself, and I had to be somebody else, I would most like to be..." and he had a dramatic pause. Everybody waited breathlessly, as he reached out his hand, to his dear wife named Clementine, who was sitting next to him, lifted her up and said, "I would most like to be Miss Lady Churchill's second husband."

What was he saying? *"More than being a great leader of the free world, more than being some famous person, accomplishing great things, if there is one thing I want to be it is **husband to my wife.** That is what I want."*

That is commitment.

That is the commitment that God calls us to in marriage - commitment to the bride or the groom that God has given to you. More than being some famous person at work, more than being a great person, there is nothing more I would want to be than your husband, or your wife. That is the commitment that God calls us to. Isn't it awesome that your Savior is committed to you? He is committed to you, until the end of the ages.

We love Him, but we fall into sin. What does He say?

"I will never leave you.

I will never forsake you."

We love Him, but we fail Him many times. But, He says,

**"I am with you always,
even to the end of the world."**

No matter what happens, no matter what happens, no matter what situation we are in, what does the Bible say?

**"I am convinced that neither death, nor life,
neither angels, nor demons,
nor the present, nor the future,**

nor any powers,
neither height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation
will be able to separate us from
the love of God
that is in
Christ Jesus, our Lord.”

Jesus is committed to you. Nothing can stop Him from loving you!
Knowing that, that is the commitment that God calls husbands and
wives to, in marriage, a Christ-like commitment.

Marriages are not perfect, but as Christians, we have Christ. We
know what it means to be merciful, and we know what commitment
means. And so, that little boy's advice is very, very good.

**If you are going to have a wedding,
you better make sure that
Jesus is there!**

Amen