

The 19th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 22)

Text: Genesis 2:18 - 24 (NIV)

¹⁸The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” ¹⁹Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. 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. ²⁰So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹So 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. ²²Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ²³The 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.” ²⁴For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.



Theme: Marriage Is Good

What is the biggest problem facing the city of Milwaukee? I was at a conference for religious leaders about a month ago, which was put on by the mayor’s office, the District Attorney, and the Police Department. When we were in small groups, the question was asked what the biggest issue facing the city of Milwaukee is. The conference was on crime, which is a huge issue. The woman next to me mentioned jobs, which is also an issue. My answer was the breakdown of the family. When I said that, I noticed the two police officers at the table nodding in agreement. God made marriage good in the beginning, but when we destroy what He made, it leads to crime, a loss of jobs and many other social issues. Today I would like to look at how marriage is a good thing.

I. In the beginning marriage was good..

You might remember that when God created the world everything was good, except for one thing. It was not good that the man was alone. So God designed a **“helper, suitable”** for Adam. Those are two very important words. The Hebrew word for **“helper”** is the Hebrew word “Ezer.” The name Ebenezer means “Stone of Help.” When we think of a helper, we think of an assistant, but that is not how the word is used in the Hebrew language. It is sometimes used in a military sense, such as when one army is fighting, another division comes to help and support them. But the word is most often used of God. Psalm 121 says, *“My help comes from the Lord.”* Dt. 33:29 says, *“Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper.”* When God created marriage, he intended that the man and woman would be a help and support to each other. That is played out in many ways. We are a help and support to each other in the raising of our children. It is often said that two can live as cheaply as one. We help and support each other in the making of a household and a family.

The other important word is **“suitable.”** This word can also be translated as “fit” or “corresponds.”

God made men and women different. We are not the same, but we are not opposites. He made us to complement each other. Husbands have gifts that their wives might not have, and wives have gifts that their husbands might not have, but you put us together, we make a great team. You might say that with the creation of Eve, the creation of man was complete.

Marriage was not our idea. It was God's idea to bless us. As Jesus states in today's Gospel lesson, it is God who joins us and makes us one in marriage. Every time that the Bible speaks about marriage it quotes Genesis 2:24 to remind us how God planned marriage to be in the beginning. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul writes that marriage is not for everyone. Some people have the gift of celibacy. In marriage God gives us someone who will love us, support us, and care for us for the rest of our lives together. It all seems very legal when we get the required documents and such, but in it all God is uniting two people as husband and wife.

II. We have done our best in this world to destroy this good gift of God.

We can come up with a long list of how we have done that. There is easy **divorce**, which Jesus speaks of in today's Gospel lesson. Some of the pharisees thought that because Moses allowed for a certificate of divorce, they could divorce their wives and not sin as long as they gave her this certificate. Even if they didn't like her cooking, they could divorce her on those grounds, and not sin. On the other hand, they did not allow their wives to divorce them for any reason even if the husband was unfaithful. Jesus makes it clear that if they divorce their wives, they have sinned. They were looking for a loophole, and Jesus closed them up. In far too many families today, the bond that God makes in marriage is destroyed by divorce also.

It is also very tempting to have **relations outside of marriage**. Those who are not marriage are given the impression that until you are married, it is okay to have as many partners as you desire. Those who are married are sometimes tempted to look for someone else, but God's plan is that relations are reserved for your husband or wife alone.

Along with that there is a big temptation to **live together outside of marriage**; however, *The National Marriage Project* at Rutgers University has found "Cohabiting couples have a much higher breakup rate than married couples, a lower level of household income, and a higher level of child abuse and domestic violence." (Page 26)

Pornography abounds today on the internet and clubs throughout the city.

There is the issue of **homosexuality** and **homosexual marriage**. This is a very difficult temptation for some people, so they need our care and support, but like all the temptations that we struggle with, just because we have that desire, it doesn't make it right. With regard to gay marriage: the Bible, biology, and thousands of years of history until the last 10 years have told us that God made them male and female.

A few years ago we received a letter from our children's school that one of the teachers was going through "**gender reassignment transitioning**." The letter stated that they were proud that the teacher was going through this procedure, and threatened any parents or students who might consider reacting negatively.

But the worst transgressions against the 6th Commandment are when husbands and wives do **not treat each other as a gift of God**. How many times do your kids hear you arguing because you want it your way. How many times do they lie in bed, listening to mom and dad fight? How often do they become a pawn in the war between mom and dad? This is where the rubber hits the road. When we abuse God's gift of marriage, the people we hurt the most are our children.

When we think of how good God created marriage and what we have made it into, we can all see our sin in some way. We are all guilty.

III. But in Christ, the goodness is restored.

You have probably heard the reports about the 4th century papyrus fragment that purportedly said that Jesus had a wife. What you might not have heard is that most scholars agree that it is a fake. But Jesus does have a wife. His wife is the Church. There are many references in the Bible to the church as the Bride of Christ, such as Revelation 21:9, "*Come, I will show the bride, the wife of the Lamb.*" That wife is the heavenly Jerusalem, the eternal people of God. Ephesians 5 says that Christ gave Himself up for the church. He cleansed her through Holy Baptism, and presents her as a radiant church. The Bible compares the church as a whole to our mother, and we are the children of God.

In Christ, we have the forgiveness of all of our sins, including our sins against the 6th commandment. As Christians we don't look for loopholes or excuses like the pharisees did. We look at our lives and see how we have abused God's good gift of marriage and all the good gifts that He has given to us. We all have temptations that we struggle with. It is easy to concentrate on other people's sins and condemn them but to be blind to our own sins. We confess our sins, and God invites us to trust in His forgiveness. His blood, shed on the cross, cleanses us from all of our sins.

God's grace is also so great that He even makes good come for our sins when we repent. There are several good examples of that is Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1. Most of the relationships that are mentioned didn't begin in a God-pleasing way. Matthew lists the relationship between Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar, Rahab the prostitute who was the great grandmother of King David, and of course, David and Bathsheba. If God was able to turn those sinful relationships into something good, He is will be able to bring good and blessings from our relationships which did not begin in a God-pleasing way.

Within our marriages none of us has been the perfect spouse, nor will we ever be, but Christ puts forgiveness, kindness, and compassion back into our marriages.

We always think that we are smarter than God. Today that shows in how we are trying to invent something that is better than marriage as God design it in the beginning, but marriage is a great gift of God. If you are looking for that special someone, do so with prayer not passion. If God has given you a spouse, see that person as a precious gift of God. We have only hurt ourselves by abusing this gift of God, but thanks be to God, for His redeeming love in Christ, that forgives our sins and renews us to live our lives in way s that will not only bless us, but also many generations to come. Amen

*Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI 53225
Oct 7, 2012*