**Genesis 2:18-24** September 26, 2021

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*Genesis 2:18 The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”*

*[The remainder of the sermon text is found in the sermon.]*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**What God Has Brought Together…**

If you have a criticism of a group, and you want people to listen, the criticism has to come from an insider. I am going to use a silly example to show you what I mean.

So, if you want people who love doughnuts to be convinced of the error of their ways (I told you it would be silly), the criticism will be most effective if somebody who at least likes doughnuts says it. Otherwise the doughnut-lovers will say, “What do you know about our lives? We are powerless victims of the fatty sugary temptations of glazed doughnuts deep-fried to perfection. You have no understanding of our struggles!” To address the abuses of doughnut lovers, you don’t choose a doughnut hater as your spokesman, you find a doughnut lover who admits he has a problem. When he addresses the problem, at least a few will reluctantly nod their heads in agreement.

I am not trying to be provocative. This is just an observation of things you, too, have noticed. It applies to religion too. If a blatant atheist criticizes Christians, we bristle. We dismiss them out of hand. But if a Christian we respect makes the exact same criticism, we are way more likely to hear them out, and maybe even nod our heads in agreement. Same thing for just about everything else, whether politics, race, economics. I’m not sure if it has always been this way. I’m not saying this is right or wrong. It’s the way things are. Criticism is most effective when it comes from those who share your identity.

Maybe that is why the sign on my grandpa’s desk made an impression. The sign said, “Of course God created man before woman. First you write the rough draft. Then you print the final copy.” My grandpa was no good-ole-boy, but he was born before the women of America had a constitutional right to vote. For him, an old school male to put that statement on his desk… it made my young man brain think. If a woman had said it, even my dear grandmother, I would have dismissed it as someone with an ax to grind against men. But it was my grandpa. He had my attention. He put an important message about marriage in front of my eyes.

Maybe, contrary to all the jokes that paint marriage as an evil to be endured rather than a blessing to be appreciated; contrary to all the people who say they every marriage they have seen resulted in people who grow old and pick at each other; contrary to the statistics that say ½ of all marriages end in divorce; contrary to the celebrities who seem to think that marriage serves no purpose but to get their names on the covers of more check-out aisle tabloids and therefore it ought to be done frequently; contrary to the growing number of people who seem to think that marriage is something optional and best avoided unless you can properly lawyer up and protect what is yours when it all heads south—maybe, contrary to all that, marriage is one of the greatest gifts God has given to humanity.

God’s word tells us that if there are problems within marriage, the problem is the people, not the “institution.” When we treat this gift of God with the respect it deserves and conform ourselves to it, rather than trying to manipulate marriage into getting what I want out of it (here, men and women each have their own sneaky, selfish ways)—when we conform ourselves to God’s design marriage will be an unequivocal blessing.

To me, the best way for us to appreciate this is to walk through today’s reading from Genesis, verse by verse.

**A. The Lord God Knew We Needed Marriage (18)**

Our reading from Genesis takes place on the sixth day of creation, before the world had seen its third sunset. (If the math doesn’t make sense, ask me after church.) At the time of our reading, Adam was marveling at how the light looks different, the air changes with each hour. As Adam was taking it all in on his first day of life, the Creator made note of one thing that was “not good.” ***“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”***

Before we go further: While this sermon is about marriage, marriage is not a command. We know that that most committed Christian, the Apostle Paul, never married. God’s Word in 1 Corinthians chapter seven blesses marriage, yet also tells us that the unmarried are uniquely gifted to serve God. Most of all, we remember that the one perfect man to walk the earth, Jesus, did not marry.

But for the first man, God intended marriage. Adam was walking alone, but it was not good for him to be walking alone. God intended that he walk with a ***“suitable helper.”***

***“Suitable helper…”*** Now that phrase raises eyebrows. Some people, both men and women, have heard that and said, “So, God made Eve to be a ‘suitable helper,’ huh? So you think God just made women, to be servants for husbands?” ***“Suitable helper”*** can sound like nails on the chalkboard to our 21st century ears. No, that’s not what it says. Some people hear what they want to hear in the Bible.

The Hebrew language has words for servants, slaves, maids, and the like, and those words are not here. *This* Hebrew word for “helper,” do you know who it *usually* refers to in the Bible? It usually refers to God. For example, Psalm 146:5: ***“Blessed is he whose help[er] is the God of Jacob.”*** God is the subservient slave of no one. But he *is* their helper. He is not a “helper” who does what you could do but would rather some drudge to do for you. He is a “helper” in the sense of someone who does what you need done, but can’t. That is the “helper” that God had in mind for the man.

The other important word is “suitable.” It has the idea of two things that are designed for each other. They aren’t identical because, if they were, it wouldn’t work. A left hand and a right hand are formed differently. They are not identical. If they were identical, you couldn’t fold you hands in prayer. Steering wheels would be a challenge. “Suitable” is like two banks of a river. If you have one, you have the one. They go together. They are the same, and yet they are different, even opposites in some ways. That is what God had in mind. Adam and Eve; him and a suitable helper; someone like him, yet different in all the right ways.

But first, God needed to do something. He needed to impress on Adam that he had better not *ever* take for granted the girl he is going to walk down the aisle into his hands.

**B. The Need Adam Feels (19-20)**

***“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. So 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.”***

The Lord God had just created Adam. Now God had a proud parent moment. He had the animals come to Adam. I can imagine God’s joy while watching Adam: “Did you hear what my boy said? He called it a giraffe! Isn’t that great!” But animal names weren’t the point. Adam got the point. He realized that there was none like him. All the animal world came before him in pairs, but Adam was by himself. He was incomplete. God had wanted Adam to feel incomplete.

This is a point for our world in general. Men and women in society at large ought to realize one another as “suitable helpers,” not just within marriage. Each bring strengths and virtues to the table. Each are God’s creation. Man and woman should not sink to man *vs.* woman, some sort of competition to show up the other. Each is created different and for a reason. And yes, it is a dichotomy: male and female. God led Adam to see his need for the other.

Lesson taught and learned, God would now usher in the “suitable helper.”

**C. The Solution the Lord God Provides (21-22)**

***“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.”***

When the Lord had created everything else in the universe, he simply willed it and it popped into existence—like a magician pointing his wand. When it came to Adam, God formed him from the dust and breathed the divine breath into him—not a magician, but an artist of the highest order. God did basically the same thing for woman. Though in a slightly different way, she would also be formed by God’s design, not merely summoned into existence. More than that, God would use the rib of man to create her. She is not of some different substance from man, neither inferior nor superior, but alongside.

Therefore the New Testament says, *“[Before God,] there is neither… male nor female, for you are all one in Christ”* (Gal 3:28). Neither man nor woman is of greater value to God, neither more beloved, neither less significant.

Each is uniquely gifted to serve their role—as again we might think of the left and right hands. Same but different. This is the family order that the New Testament decreed in our Ephesians reading: the wife to respect her husband, even as we Christians respect and submit ourselves to Christ; the husband to love his wife with a sacrificial love like Christ displayed for us. This is baked into the first marriage, and all marriages after it.

Of course, since we are fallen people, marriages have to be heavily flavored with forgiveness. Husbands are not faultless leaders, nor wives always lovely. But that is what Christ is for. He won forgiveness for our faults, and taught us how to forgive. Married people must remember that. Adam would one day need to learn about forgiveness, but not on this day. This was a golden day when all was right.

**D. Adam Appreciates the Solution (22b-23)**

***“And [the Lord God] brought her to the man. 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.’”***

Adam woke and understood what had happened. The suitable helper, the corresponding partner he knew he needed had been provided by God. It was like a wedding day, only more. It was love at first sight, dating, engagement, and the wedding all condensed to a moment. With the innocence of a child, Adam’s first recorded words are the poetry of love and joy.

Sometimes it’s easy to lose, to forget that joy in marriage. Sometimes the one who once set your heart a-flutter proves unworthy of trust and love. Some, even as I speak of God’s will for marriage, will think, “Pastor has no clue about what I have gone through.” But I do. I am not speaking of any specific marriage other than the one perfect marriage the world has ever known. And even that one did not stay perfect for long. I am speaking of God’s will for marriage. His will is what Adam and Eve knew in that moment. God’s will does not ignore anyone’s unjust suffering any more than unjust suffering negates God’s will.

And maybe that was the point of my grandpa having that sign on his desk, to remind him to *always* treasure the one God had put into his arms.

**E. The “Institution” This Event Establishes (24)**

The Word declares, ***“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”*** Genesis chapter two was not just for Adam and Eve. It is God’s will for all time. Our Lord Jesus, when he taught about marriage in our Gospel reading, he took his listeners back to the Garden of Eden. He said that God’s will still applies to all human kind.

And that is where the problem is. The problem is that human nature hates God’s plan. We want intimate relations before and outside of marriage. That is sin, whether you are 16 or 60. Our cultural norm has become shacking up, moving in with a boyfriend and girlfriend. That is not just sin, it is *living* in sin. Divorce is rampant, which while there are certain instances when divorce is justified in God’s eyes, but only when one side has already taken a sledgehammer to their marriage vows. There are those who are physically and verbally violent, those who are manipulative, pathological liars toward those whom God has graciously given them to love and care for. There are those who imagine that people of the same sex can get married. (Maybe in America, but not in God’s court of law.) More than that, the utter selfishness of all of these behaviors is exposed when we know that children always do best in stable, two-parent, heterosexual families. People want freedom to live outside the lines of God’s design, even though by doing so they destroy their children’s lives and their nation. And how much do we contribute to it? What about coarse joking? Pornography? Lust? What about not commenting on the sinful ways of those to whom we have an obligation to speak? There is no commandment more sinned against than the sixth, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” There is no sin more destructive of the social order God desires.

Lord God, forgive us. Forgive us for Jesus’ sake. May we treasure the forgiveness he won on the cross. May we treasure the chaste and holy life he lived. May we learn to live our own lives in purity, and to encourage those around us to do so as well.

Adam and Eve did eventually did fall into sin, but there in that afternoon sunlight, of the sixth day, they understood perfectly what marriage was meant to be. Lord, give us the mind of those two who, for a time, lived it. Amen.