**20th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B – October 14, 2012 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Mark 10:2-16 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**God’s Original Plan for Families**

**I. A marriage of one man and one woman**

**II. Children are brought to the Lord**

*Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” “What did Moses command you?” he replied. They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.” “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. 6 “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ 7 ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” 10 When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. 11 He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” 13 People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” 16 And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them. (NIV)*

What happened to the days of *The Donna Reed Show, The Cosby Show, Family Ties, 7th Heaven, Father Knows Best, The Waltons*? These television shows depicted families working out real issues as a family. Today our families are exposed to the dysfunction of *The New Normal, Partners, Modern Family, and The Simpsons*. Cameras document the *Kardashians* and *The Real Housewives of* pick a city or county and record every lack of self-control, disrespect, self-centered egotism and revenge. And then you have the *Bachelor* and *Bachelorette*, which seem to present the idea that if you whore around with enough people you might find your true love.

Society seems to have an idea for marriage, sex and families. God in his Word is clear. He is our Creator and he set the standards for marriage and family long ago. They are good plans for marriage and family because they come from a holy, gracious God who wanted and still desires the best for his people. Today as we meditate on Mark chapter 10 Jesus teaches us God’s Original Plan for Families: I. A Marriage of One Man and One Woman; II. Children are Brought to the Lord.

**“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”** Seems like an honest question. The Pharisees were religious leaders of the Jews in Jesus’ day. The Pharisees were divided on the issue of divorce and could not agree on the interpretation of a passage in Deuteronomy 24. Moses said that **“If [the husband] finds something indecent about [his wife] he could send her away.”** One camp of Pharisees followed the teachings of Rabbi Shammai who said that the only reason for divorce was moral indecency. The other camp followed Hillel who said that anything that a wife did that did not please the husband was grounds for divorce. But like a well-crafted question to a presidential candidate in a pre-election televised debate they expected Jesus to side with one or the other. This would give the Pharisees the opportunity to criticize him publicly. But they didn’t expect this answer from Jesus.

Divorce was never an option when God instituted marriage. In fact, in Malachi God said, **“I hate divorce**.” (2:16) But because people are sinful and ruin good things, like marriage, God allowed divorce in certain situations. In Matthew’s account of this story Jesus said that marital unfaithfulness, adultery, would be a Scriptural allowance for divorce. The Apostle Paul recorded the other circumstance in which God allowed divorce. In 1Corinthians 7 Paul describes the case of a couple, one is a believer, the other is an unbeliever, and the unbelieving spouse abandons the marriage. The believer attempts to reconcile with no positive results, Paul then says to leave, “**God has called us to live in peace**.” God allowed divorce in these instances to keep peace in society. Seeking a divorce in these circumstances was not mandated, but allowed. God would rather see a husband and wife reconcile and save the marriage.

Now, in Mark 10:11,12 it sounds that if someone divorced and remarried, they were guilty of committing adultery - a sin against the sixth commandment. In Matthew’s account of this story we know that Jesus was attacking the lax discipline among the Jews regarding divorce. Men divorced their wives and remarried for any and every reason; irreconcilable differences, which basically means they didn’t feel like working it out so they gave up. If someone sought a divorce, for any other reason than marital unfaithfulness or abandonment, and remarried, they sinned.

Jesus pointed out to the Pharisees and to his disciples God’s original plan for marriage – and it didn’t include divorce**. “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. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate.”** (vs6-9) God’s plan for marriage was one man and one woman, two united as one, for life, until death ended the marriage bond. That plan still stands today. When God created the world, he said, “This is very good.” That perfect creation included the sacred bond of marriage and God’s plan for marriage.

What were also included in God’s plan are the roles of men and women within marriage. From the beginning God’s intent was that the man, the husband, be the leader in the home and the woman, the wife, be the helper. God’s intent still stands today. Paul, in our Second Lesson from Ephesians explained God’s roles, **“Wives, submit to your husbands as the Church submits to Christ. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the Church.”** (5:22-25)

Husbands, how well have we followed God’s plan for marriage? Have we been like Christ, the faithful husband who sacrificed himself for his people, or have we become the lazy Homer Simpson or Al Bundy? I think we would all say that we love our wives, but do we show it, as God asks of us? Do we think of her needs first, or selfishly think of us first and our wants? Do we fulfill our wives’ psychological needs, her emotional needs? Do we treat our wives with respect? Is there love in the tone of voice we use when we speak to her? Do we build her up or tear her down? Do we take the lead in the study of God’s Word in the home, or have we become lazy with his Word?

Wives, have you followed the example of the Church and Christ, and submit to your husband – that is willingly love him, respect and honor him, willingly help him? Do you follow his lead, or do you resent him for not being the leader God wants him to be? And if so, do you willingly and freely forgive him? Or do you complain? Have you tried to find companionship elsewhere, because your emotional and psychological and maybe even physical needs are not met in the marriage relationship?

And God’s plan for marriage includes single folks. Unfortunately, the “new normal” plan in our society is that boyfriend/girlfriend move in together before marriage, and for too many in our society it seems like a good idea. Did you know that statistically, couples who cohabitate before marriage are more likely to divorce than those who do not? http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr049.pdf Not only is it a bad idea statistically, more importantly our Creator doesn’t approve.

When we talk about cohabitation before marriage it also brings us to the topic of sex. Sex is part of God’s original plan, a gift that he gave to men and women to enjoy in marriage. Any sexual relations outside of marriage are a sin against God’s plan for married people. But our sinful society leads us to believe that we and our children have the right to have sex with whomever we want whenever we want as long it’s safe – this is not God’s plan for sex.

Throughout the Bible the Holy Spirit uses the picture of husband and wife to describe our relationship with God. As members of Christ’s Church, we are the bride, and we ought to stand before our husband, Christ, with a wedding dress that is free from the stain and dirt of our sins. But when we are lazy husbands, unforgiving wives, and promiscuous single people, we stand before God as an unfaithful wife who has cheated on her husband. We’ve cheated on God with the ways we’ve disregarded God’s plans for marriage. We stand before God in a wedding dress that is unacceptable – it is torn, dirty, stained with our sinful ways.

Even though we have been the unfaithful bride, the Bible tells us that God is our faithful husband. He still loves us, and he willingly takes us back to himself, and he gives us a new wedding dress. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “**I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness**.” (61.10) Wedding dresses are expensive. Brides-to-be will spend anywhere from hundreds to thousands of dollars for the “perfect look.” Jesus went to the cross to purchase your new wedding dress. He paid for it with his lifeblood – this dress is priceless. This dress is your salvation – it saves you from your sins.

Perhaps you feel the guilt of divorce. Perhaps you still feel the guilt of an unfaithful act, perhaps you have been treating your spouse with a lack of love and respect, you haven’t been a faithful leader or a helper. Perhaps you were someone who disregarded God’s plan for sex – your faithful husband, Jesus Christ, has dressed you with the robe of his blood which washes all those sins away.

Listen to what your faithful husband has done for you, “**Christ loved the Church, and gave himself up for her**,” Jesus showed self-sacrificing love by going to the cross to purchase a clean dress for you, a dress purchased by his holy blood, so that he might “**make you holy, cleansing you by the washing with water through the word,”** what a beautiful picture! In holy baptism Jesus dressed you with perfection, a robe that covers over all of your sins, so that he might “**present [you] to himself as a radiant Church**,” a bride who shines like the sun, “**without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless**.” (Ephesians 5:25-27) This is how your husband in heaven sees you: holy, perfect, sins covered with his lifeblood.

This is God’s plan for us, that as his bride we live according to his plan for marriage. We will respect his plan: one man, one woman, two united as one for life. Husbands, we will love our wives as Christ loved the Church. We will seek her needs first. We will respect her as a gift from God. We will forgive her. We will lead her to God’s Word. Wives, you will love your husband, help him, support him, forgive him. And at this point in life if you are single, you will respect God’s plan for marriage, and wait until God unites you to your future spouse in marriage. Then you can enjoy all of the blessings of marriage. One of those blessings is children. God has a plan for children, too.

The disciples were with Jesus. He was probably teaching them, but moms and dads interrupted and brought their children to see Jesus. Luke tells us even little babies were brought, not for a publicity photo for an upcoming election. They wanted Jesus to bless their children. The disciples, however, rebuked these well-meaning parents. Perhaps they were conscious of Jesus’ schedule. He did not need to be bothered by noisy kids. But Jesus was indignant, downright angry, and said, “**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these**.” (vs14)

From Scripture we know that through Holy Baptism the Holy Spirit grants the gift of faith even to little babies. They, too, according to Jesus, can and do believe in him through baptism. Jesus assigns spiritual responsibility to the parents – especially to fathers. In Ephesians Paul wrote, “**Fathers, do not exasperate your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”** Fathers, this is God’s plan for us. Our great privilege and responsibility is to take the lead in our homes and bring children to the Lord. It begins with our attitude toward the Word of God. It’s an attitude that mimics King David who said, “**I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!**’” We will make church, Sunday school, catechism class priorities.

It begins with small things, asking your children about the sermon on the way home in the car. Asking your child what they learned in Sunday school or catechism. Reading the Sunday school lesson to them during the week. Learning their catechism homework with them. Leading devotions around the dinner table.

Fathers, this is our responsibility. We take the lead in spiritual matters. This is God’s plan. In those homes where the father does not believe, or there is no father - in those homes Jesus raises up Godly women to lead children to the Lord.

God’s plan begins with adults becoming like the little children, having a child-like faith, that simply trusts Jesus, and trusts our Father in heaven, to empower you to carry out God’s plan, to bring a child to him.

Finding these examples is difficult in our culture, in our society, which focuses so much on television, the families we see there, too often, do not follow the plan God has for family, for marriage. But here God gives us direction, his purpose, his plan for family and for marriage. I pray that we continue to learn and to grow in our understanding of God’s plan and purpose for us as members of his family. Amen.