

St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church Modesto, California  
The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost  
October 26, 2003

Sermon by Pastor Jonathan Micheel

Genesis 2:18-24

<sup>18</sup> **The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."**

<sup>19</sup> **Now 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.**

<sup>20</sup> **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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.**

<sup>23</sup> **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." <sup>24</sup> For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. (NIV)**

Mark 10:2-16

<sup>2</sup> Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

<sup>3</sup> "What did Moses command you?" he replied.

<sup>4</sup> They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

<sup>5</sup> "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. <sup>6</sup> "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' <sup>7</sup> 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, <sup>8</sup> and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. <sup>9</sup> Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

<sup>10</sup> When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. <sup>11</sup> He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. <sup>12</sup> And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

<sup>13</sup> People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." <sup>16</sup> And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them. (NIV)

**Three Things to Remember about Marriage and Family**

For the last four months, we've been in the church season of Pentecost. That's the time of year when we hear God's words about what it is to be one of his children. It means, first of all, that we have life because of what he has done for us. The green-colored paraments remind us of that life that God gives and nurtures in us as he comes to us in his Word and in his Sacraments. Today we bring this season to a close, and we do so by hearing God speak about something that has an enormous impact on our lives as his people: marriage and family.

Now, there's always a risk when we talk about marriage. Many people in our church are not married. Some aren't old enough yet. Some are unmarried by choice. Others are single because God took their spouses to heaven already. Still others are still looking for the right person to spend their lives with. So, for all the singles, we should note a couple things at the outset. First, marriage is a good thing. It's a gift from God. But we can also say that being single is a good thing, too. The Bible says so (1 Corinthians 7:1). God knows that marriage can bring great blessings, but it can also bring lots of extra work. Single Christians are free from some of the obligations that married Christians have, and singles may therefore be able to serve in ways that married people can't.

We're talking about marriage today, so as people in the same family of God, let's remember a couple things today:

- Married people: We must not view unmarried people as incomplete human beings, or keep asking them, "When are you going to get married?" Instead, let's appreciate them, their gifts and service, pray for them and support them.
- Single people: Bear with us today as we hear God speak about marriage. Support and pray for married people and families, for when families are strong, everybody benefits.

So, with that said, let's listen as God gives us Three Things to Remember about Marriage and Family. They are: 1) Marriage is God's. 2) Divorce is dangerous. 3) (Really the most important one) God is love.

### **Marriage is God's.**

To find the beginning of marriage, we need to go all the way back to day six of the universe's existence. God has created all things—almost. He's made the atmosphere, light, energy, plants, animals, and one human being named Adam. One man, that's all. But the Lord isn't finished. He's going to make another human being. He goes about it in an interesting way. God has Adam name the animals. He does this not because he's too tired to think up good names. God does this to teach Adam something. Adam sees Mr. Bull and Mrs. Cow. He sees two horses that go together. He sees Mr. Duck and Mrs. Duck. But he realizes that there's no Mrs. Adam to go with him. Something's missing.

So God, as he had planned all along, I'm sure—finishes his creation by making Eve, a woman he makes with loving care, starting with a rib from right next to Adam's heart. Adam wakes up, takes a look at Eve, and says, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!" In the original Hebrew language of Genesis, Adam sounds a more excited. It's as if he sees Eve and says, "Now that's what I'm talkin' about!"

In this way God made man and woman and joined them in a unique relationship. They were to live together for life. One man, one woman. They were to enjoy a unique form of companionship. They were to produce children. And they were to become “one flesh”; that phrase hints at sexual intimacy, which God designed for married people. And so this mysterious thing called marriage was begun, and with it the family, the basic unit of society.

Have you ever had a project, something you’ve worked on and put a lot of yourself into? Maybe a school assignment, maybe a job at work—something that you’ve really invested a lot in? That’s what marriage is for God. God, in his delightful creativity, came up with this idea to make two human beings, alike yet different, and have them spend their lives together and make one another’s lives richer. That’s God’s project. Or, as one pastor put it, “Marriage is God’s baby.” Marriage and family were invented and instituted by God. They were begun with God’s purposes in mind. And he designed them because he loves people.

### **Divorce is dangerous.**

Do you see, then, why God is not happy when we treat marriage and sex and family as if they are ours to do with as we please? Such as...

- When we treat sex as our right to exercise anytime, with whomever we choose, in spite of the fact that God designed it only for people who are married to each other?
- When we, along with much of our culture, say, “Who needs marriage? Who needs lifelong commitment? If I like someone, I’ll just live with them. We can break up if we need to.”
- When we treat the ending of a marriage like breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend?

Do you see why Jesus speaks the way he does when asked about marriage and divorce?

<sup>2</sup> Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

<sup>3</sup> "What did Moses command you?" he replied.

<sup>4</sup> They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

<sup>5</sup> "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. <sup>6</sup> "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' <sup>7</sup> 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, <sup>8</sup> and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. <sup>9</sup> Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Jesus was living in a time when the prevalent view of divorce was pretty free. There was one school of thought that was very strict about divorce, but many people, even religious leaders, were lax. They allowed divorces for many reasons.

Jesus was going against his culture on this. When asked about divorce, he reaffirms that marriage is God’s. Marriage is more than just an agreement made by two people that they can break off when one or both decides they don’t want to be in it anymore. Since God instituted marriage, Jesus can say that a married man and woman are people whom God has joined together. Marriage is God’s.

When does God want a marriage to end? When he ends the life of one of the spouses. God never wants divorce to happen. When two people get married, God does not want to see their union ever broken up. It happens in a sinful world. When one spouse breaks the marriage by having an affair, for instance. Or when one spouse walks out on the other. Or when there's abuse by one spouse against the other. In such cases, God considers the marriage to be broken, and the spouse who was sinned against may obtain a divorce, so that what his/her spouse did to break up the marriage may be legally recognized.

Some states have what is called "no-fault" divorce. Legally, a divorce can be obtained without either spouse admitting that they did something to break the marriage. But in God's eyes, there's no such thing as no-fault divorce. Jesus says as much when he says, "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," speaking of the Israelites' divorce regulations. Divorce always comes as a result of sin. Sometimes it's the sin of just one spouse that breaks the marriage, sometimes it's both people sinning against each other. That tells us why divorce is so dangerous. It involves people sinning, and sin is what drives people away from God.

This seriousness is reflected in Jesus' words: "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery." If a man for an invalid reason divorces his wife, in God's eyes he's still married to her. He made vows to her, and God considers that promise binding. So if he hooks up with another woman, God considers that adultery. The same applies to a woman who divorces her husband for reasons other than adultery or desertion.

The basic principle, once again, is that marriage is God's, not ours to do with as we please. Breaking a marriage is a sin against God. It puts a strain on a person's relationship with God, and it can even kill that relationship.

Divorce can do further damage, too. Notice how right after this section about divorce comes the familiar account of little children coming to Jesus. The disciples want to keep the children away from Jesus. Jesus tells them, "Don't you dare! Let the children come; don't keep them away." Following right after warnings about divorce comes this warning: don't do things that keep children away from Jesus. That can happen in a divorce, can't it? A simple example: when parents have shared custody of their kids, it's hard to keep kids in regular contact with Jesus in church and Sunday School. So divorce can do spiritual harm to adults and also to the kids involved.

These are hard words for us. We live in a society like that of Jesus, in which divorce is often taken lightly. More than that—this is a sensitive subject because many people in our church have gone through divorce. By my estimate, out of about 100 families in our church, 25 have been through divorces.

I certainly don't want to stand up here and bash everyone who's been divorced at one time. As if your lives weren't hard enough already! Many of you are already dealing with serious issues like making blended families work. You don't need, in addition to all that, to walk around burdened by guilt, branded by some kind of scarlet letter.

Those who have never been divorced should not throw stones. Instead each one of us, no matter what our marital status, should ask ourselves some hard questions. Have we always respected the fact that marriage is God's? For instance...

- Does each of us have a track record completely free of sexual sins? No lust in the mind, no foul language that demeans God's gift of sexuality, no crossing the line sexually?
- Have we always respected that sex is only for those committed to one another for life, in other words, people married to each other?
- Husbands, have we loved our wives the way God wants us to, being willing to sacrifice for them in the way that Jesus gave up his life for us? Have we taken the lead in our families, going first even in the hard things?
- Wives, have you always been respectful of your husbands, acknowledging them as the leaders of the family? Not undermining their authority but helping them as they lead the way through the minefields of life?
- And kids, have you always thought of your parents and grandparents and guardians as people God wants you to listen to and obey? Have you done what they've told you to do—and done it the first time they told you to do it? Have you always obeyed and never made them mad?
- Parents, have we cared for our kids as gifts from God, caring for both their physical and spiritual needs?

My point is that the words that Jesus speaks about marriage and family remind all of us that we are sinful people who have not done what God has asked of us.

What saves us is the third thing to remember about marriage and family...

### **God is love.**

What Jesus said about divorce was brutally frank. He pulled no punches when it came to biblical morality. He knew right from wrong, he knew moral absolutes, and he told people what was what.

But that wasn't all Jesus did. He didn't just point out everybody's sins and then go away. He instead went to the cross for all people. He went there to take the blame for sexual sins, for husbands' sins against wives and wives' sins against husbands, to take the blame for failing parents and the punishment for naughty kids—for all of us who have sinned against God and his gifts of marriage and family. God is love (1 John 4:8). Jesus Christ did more than point out sin. He took it away, having it laid on him. The job of the Christian church is not just to preach morality. Yes, we must do that, for God does it. But our main job is not to scold people. It is to comfort them with the reality of God's love for them. The main job of the Christian church is to welcome the wounded and give them the healing that only Jesus can give. The hurting are welcome here—adults, kids, married, single, divorced, everybody. People carrying guilt because of sin, including sexual sins. People with open wounds because of divorce and broken marriages. Kids who have sinned against their parents. Kids who have anger and hurt deep down because their parents have sinned against them. To all of us Jesus says, "Come. I am giving you a new life. I died so that your sins will not kill you. I am alive now to love you every day. I forgive you. I accept you. I care about you."

Jesus gives us his love and forgiveness, and he even brings it into our homes. He uses it to renew and rejuvenate the love between husbands and wives, the love between parents and kids, grandparents and kids. He gives his love to us freely, without limit, and enables us to share that love with one another.

Can you remember these three things about marriage and family? Marriage is God's. Divorce is dangerous. And most of all—this is the most important one—God is love. May his love be always in our homes and in our relationships. Amen.