

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
October 4, 2015

First Presbyterian Church
Clarksburg, WV

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Mark 10:2-12

Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. (Mark 10:10 N.R.S.V.)

God's Ideal of Marriage

I am a child of God. I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. And I believe he has the power to change my life and your life.

A little boy was talking to his mother, he said, "When I grow up, I'm going to marry you."

His older sister said, "That's silly you can't marry your mother."

"Well then," the little boy said, "I will marry you."

His sister laughed and said, "No, you can't marry your sister either."

"What?" exclaimed the little boy, "I have to marry a complete stranger?"

Maybe that explains why marriage is sometimes so difficult. Our scripture from Mark 10 contains one of the so called, "hard sayings," of Jesus. Jesus says marriage is for keeps, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." (Mark 10:11-12)

Unfortunately, this passage has all too often been misused to kick those who are already down and to heap guilt on those who are already feeling worthless. That was not Jesus' intention here, nor is it my intention today.

This hard saying of Jesus ranks right up there with some of his other hard sayings. "Give to everyone who asks of you." "Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you." "Anyone who looks at a member of the opposite sex with lust in their heart has already committed adultery."

Remember Jesus is talking to some pharisees here. The pharisees took great pride in the fact that they kept all of God's laws. They were very self-righteous. Jesus is telling them that they have not kept the law perfectly and that they too need God's help.

We too need God's help, now more than ever. I would hazard a guess that there is not one person here today or listening in on the radio whose family has not been touched by divorce.

Perhaps I should say, “wounded by divorce.” Some of us still bear old scars. Others among us are still bleeding. What are we to do?

The first thing that Jesus does is to remind us of God’s ideal for marriage. We have to have a good model or standard. If our model is flawed, then how can we expect the finished project to be perfect? When they started putting up the building next door, they first put up a little brick and stone wall with a little window in it. You can still see it if you look. That is the model for the workers. It meets all of the specifications in the building plans. If the workers have a question about how thick the mortar is supposed to be, or how the window is supposed to fit, they go look at the model. But what if the model is flawed?

I once bought a little carpenter’s square. It was smaller and more convenient than the common model. It wasn’t long before I realized something was wrong. The boards did not fit together right anymore. I compared my small square to my old, larger one. Guess what? The new square wasn’t square. No wonder I was having problems.

So many of our marriage problems today are because we are working off of flawed human models instead of God’s model.

Jesus reminds us that God provided the model for marriage from the very beginning. He quotes our Old Testament Lesson from Genesis 2. “God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

In Genesis 2, we are told that God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. Then God took a rib out of Adam and made a woman from the rib he had taken from Adam. When Adam woke up, he said, “Wow!,” or something like that.

It is interesting to note that scholars have pointed out that the Hebrew word, “Adam” means dust creature. It only begins to function as a name after Eve is created. Before that it is more of a description. When God creates Eve, he doesn’t pick up a new lump of earth, instead he takes a piece of the dust creature. Furthermore, the Hebrew word for “rib,” can also mean simple “side.” So if it pleases you to think this way, we might say that God didn’t just take a single rib out of Adam, but in a sense he divided him in half.

Whether you like that interpretation or not, it is still clear that God didn’t just create two like beings, but rather he created two who were meant to come together and form one.

Jesus said that Moses allowed men to give their wives a certificate of divorce and send them away. Then he adds, that it was not God’s ideal or intention, but it was because of their hardness of heart. Hardness of heart is simply a lack of compassion and kindness. Now think about how we treat our own flesh. If our fingers touch something hot, our whole body reacts to quickly move the fingers out of harm’s way. There are some people who deliberately harm their own flesh, but those are people with deep psychological and spiritual problems. In general we take care of our body as if it was the only one we had.

Just checking to see if you are awake. Of course we take care of our body as if it was the only one we had. If we break this body, God isn't going to give us new one. At least not here on earth. So think about how differently we might treat our spouses if we saw them as truly a part of our flesh.

Of course, my body does what I tell it to do. If I tell my hand to pick something up, it does. Whereas my wife . . . Actually my body doesn't always obey me. Sometimes it tells me, "I'm too tired." My knees pain me from time to time, my back aches, but, hey! This is the only body I have, so I still take care of it. If my hand were paralyzed, I wouldn't like it, but I would still take care of it. As the wedding vows say, "for better or for worse."

So is Jesus saying that divorce is always wrong? Yes, in the sense that divorce is not part of God's good creation. However, we live in a fallen world with imperfect people. Sometimes divorce is the best of the terrible options that are left. Sometimes you don't get a choice. Your husband or wife just leaves you.

I don't believe that divorce is an unforgivable sin. Our God is a God of second chances and third chances. And Christ will not forsake us if we must walk through that valley.

Yet, I must say that divorce is not the easy out that some people seem to think it is. Any time we go against God's good plan for us, we are going to experience pain. Divorce is no exception. It hurts a lot, often for a very long time.

Let's look at the other side for a moment. You probably know an older couple, hair all white, yet very much still in love. I have seen old couples like that walking in the park, still holding hands after all those years. We all long to be like that.

It is easy to assume that couples like that had an easy time of it. To assume that they were soul mates from the very beginning. I have talked to some of these couples. They all say the same thing. It was not easy and never automatic. They hurt each other, and forgave each other. They disagreed and fought over many things, and they worked it out. There were times when they wondered where the love went, but with God's help they stayed together. It is never easy.

I often ask young couples who come to me, why do you want to get married? The number one answer is, "Because we love each other." My next question is, "What will happen when you fall out of love?"

Most couples can't answer that question of course. But I want them to know that the initial rush of hormone driven feelings most people experience when they get married, doesn't last. One morning you wake up and find that feeling is gone. Don't despair, love will come again, if you are willing to stay together and ask God's help. The love that comes back is a deeper, more mature, and in some ways, more genuine love. That is the love that we so envy when we see old couples walking together hand in hand.

This is God's plan for you too. So if your marriage is faltering today, don't give up. Ask for God's help to make it through the rough times. If you have been through a divorce, don't lose

hope. God is still walking with you. God is a God of more chances. God still holds out his ideal of marriage for you. With God's help, lasting mature love can be yours. And the two shall become one. What God has joined together, let no one separate.

Amen.