

Pentecost 18B – Proper 22B (10/4/09 – *Marriage & Relationship in Christ*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

The Scriptures set before us today – the Lessons appointed for this **18th Sunday after Pentecost** – touch on a difficult topic: Marriage ... and also its counterpart, Divorce. These are “hot button topics” today – sometimes more easily ignored than addressed since they are so controversial. In fact, I have heard of some in our church body who advocate ignoring such hot issues in the pulpit. But that is not my way ... nor the Church’s – since it wasn’t our Lord’s. No ... it is good that God through His Church sets these before us today – so that we must consider these important topics from a Godly and God-given perspective, no matter how uncomfortable it might be for us.

Our Scriptures today teach how we as Christians are to view marriage ... and how we are to act in marriage. We are to consider marriage as not just a life-long relationship between a man and a woman. We have good friends we’ve known perhaps longer than our spouses. If you’re not married yet, that will certainly be the case – that you have good friends you’ve known longer than a spouse. But it holds for many married couples – especially for the younger ones ... even for some older ones. More importantly, did you notice that I said, “**not just** a life-long relationship between a man and a woman”? In today’s world that is controversial in and of itself. That marriage should be **only** between a man and a woman is up for grabs in the United States – even within many fairly large church bodies. But for those who hold that God’s Word is inspired, inerrant, and unchanging – like we do ... because It **is!** – there is no question about God’s will for marriage: one man ... one woman ... for life. He lays it out in the Sixth Commandment: ***You shall not commit adultery.*** He doesn’t add “for a while” or “as long as you still feel the spark.” And our Lord makes it clear – as hard as this is for us to hear – that divorcing (outside of what His Word elsewhere permits ... God does **not** contradict Himself) divorcing for unScriptural reasons leads to adultery [MK 10.11-12] ... of which people must repent.

Luther’s explanation in the Catechism unpacks this Commandment a bit and summarizes what God in Scripture says elsewhere about His gift of marriage: *We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor*

each other. The right, God-loving-and-fearing way to think about marriage, then, is that it is a life-long, **one-flesh** relationship between one man and one woman, characterized by sexual purity and decency and by love and honor. Our spouse should be as dear to us as ***bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh*** [GEN 2.23a] ... to whom I ***hold fast*** as my most prized earthly gift and whom I treat as I would my very own flesh. This especially applies to us husbands. Even the generic designation Adam gave Eve: ***She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man*** [GEN 2.23b] tells us that the husband/wife relationship is to be one of greatest cooperation and connection – husband and wife are so closely connected that they are one.

So what does that mean for us? It means that we should love and take care of our spouses as if they were our very own selves. The next time you are tempted to watch out for your own interest – get your own way – think this way instead: *I can't have my own way if it means that my spouse doesn't get hers/his ... since we are one flesh ... joined so tightly by God that we are no longer two but one flesh. If I ignore her/him, I ignore myself – which I would never do. If I speak unkindly to her/him, I speak unkindly to myself – which I would never do. If I insist on doing things my way ... without considering what my beloved spouse needs or desires, I have lost – because my way must be our way ... it can't be just my own selfish way that neglects my spouse's needs and feelings. In fact, if I get my way over her/his way, I haven't really gotten my way at all – just a selfish, sinful way ... sin's won.*

You've realized, of course, that you have **not** been living the way that God sets out for us here ... the way He would have us live with others ... the way we should live our relationships. You've been selfish, self-centered, inconsiderate, and thoughtless about the wants and needs of your spouse. So repent! And if you've been divorced – even if it was for the Biblical reasons of infidelity or abandonment – you know you didn't always live selflessly according to God's will. So you need to repent! And if you're not married yet, well ... you also know you've been selfish, self-centered, inconsiderate, and thoughtless at times to those around you – to parents, siblings, friends, co-workers, even fellow believers gathered here at St. John. So you need to repent, too! We all – and all too often – separate ourselves from those we should live in blessed relationship with ... by our sinful thoughts and words and deeds ... by our unfaithfulness. Even (especially!) from our God!

But thanks be to our loving God Who remains faithful to us – like a true Bridegroom! For *what is man, that You are mindful of him* [HEB 2.6] ... that the Father should have made the Son of Man *for a little while lower than the angels* [2.7] ... and take on our weak, human flesh to be one with us? Christ our Lord and heavenly Bridegroom has so identified Himself with us – made Himself one with us – that **we are *bone of HIS bone and flesh of HIS flesh***. And the only way in which He has been *separated from us sinners* is that Christ our High Priest was perfectly *holy, innocent, unstained* [HEB 7.26]. That is to say, that *in every respect* He was – and *has been tempted – as we are, yet without sin* [HEB 4.15].

Where we so easily separate ourselves from others and stain all of our relationships by our sins, Christ our Savior forever remains perfectly spotless and faithful. And His love for us – unfaithful Bride that we are – is so very **unchanging** that He promises: *neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*. [ROM 8.38-39] But this should not surprise us – for if our gracious and loving God was so willing to unite Himself to our flesh in order to save us from our sin, how could He Who commands that **we** not separate what He has joined together in marriage ever separate from us whom He has joined to Himself by His incarnation ... and by Baptism and faith and the Holy Supper?

Our Lord cannot deny Himself – as He says through St. Paul to Timothy: *if we are faithless, He remains faithful – for He cannot deny Himself* [2TIM 2.13]. Despite our continued falling into infidelity, Christ our dear Lord remains every faithful to us – He is the First ... the Original ... indeed, the One-and-only *Semper Fi ... Semper Fidelis ... Always Faithful One*. He puts the same thought a different way in the *Epistle* we use in our Rite of Holy Matrimony, EPHESIANS 5: *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for Her, that He might sanctify Her, having cleansed Her by the washing of water with the Word, so that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that She might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but*

nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the Church, because we are members of His Body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church. [5.25-32] Christ our Lord left His heavenly Father and earthly mother and joined Himself to His beloved Bride, the Church – and therefore also to all of us believers – by His incarnation, death, and resurrection. And having joined Himself to us and us to Himself, He will always faithfully care for us, providing all that we need for this body and life ... and all that we need for life at the eternal Wedding Banquet of heaven.

Christ your Lord has so loved the Church – **you** – that He *gave Himself up for you* ... so *that He might sanctify you, having cleansed you by the washing of water with the Word* in Holy Baptism, *so that He might present you to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that you might be holy and without blemish.* Christ your Lord *nourishes and cherishes you because we are members of His Body.* As much as God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in a perfect, loving relationship within the one Godhead, so does your gracious God desire to live in perfect, loving relationship with you. That is, in fact, why God created Adam and Eve ... and the whole of creation in the beginning – so that He might pour out upon us His love ... and walk with us in the cool of the day in Paradise.

You see, the Pharisees who *came up and in order to test Jesus asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”* [MK 10.2] had it all wrong. They came with wrong motives ... and asked the wrong question. The civil law they had received through Moses was not God’s original design, merely concession for relative order in society – to protect spouses and children. And that’s how we should think of divorce today. It is only *because of your hardness of heart* [10.5] – our sin – that divorce exists ... and happens. It is only *because of your hardness of heart* that relationship with parents, siblings, friends, co-workers, fellow believers ... **God** ... is broken. But in Christ our marriages and relationships – also with God – are helped ... restored ... healed ... forgiven ... mended. And what God has joined to Himself shall not be separated from Him ... forever.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]