

## The Nature of Marriage

Mark 10:2-16

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Whenever our Lord and His apostles talk about marriage they begin in the beginning. In the beginning the Creator made them male and female. In the beginning God instituted marriage upon the creation of woman. The institution of marriage goes like this: a man shall leave his father and his mother, be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

When a man leaves his father and his mother, he is distancing himself from their authority. He is still their son. He is still required to honor them. But when he gets married he is establishing a house hold of his own. God calls him to be the head of his house. If he is going to be the head of his house, he can no longer live at home with his parents and he can no longer honor them in the same way as he did before. Now that he is married, his own family must take priority. He still honors his father and his mother, but he does so as the head of his own household and not as a member of their household any more. Parents therefore are called to let their sons go and get married and not to try to dominate them as they may have done in times past. A husband who is still dominated by his parents does not make a good husband.

When a man is joined to his wife, the two become one household. They live together when they are married. They establish together how their household is going to operate. They mutually agree upon the values that are going to govern their marriage. As a result it is wise when selecting a spouse to select someone who has the same value system that you do. When a man is joined to his wife, he trusts her and she trusts him. Marriage is not founded upon love as the world lies to you. Marriage is founded upon trust. It is easy to love someone. It is very difficult to trust someone. Trust cannot thrive without a shared set of values. Therefore your marriage cannot thrive unless you share a common set of values. I think from this it should be obvious that Christians ought to marry other Christians and not from among the unbelievers.

A man and his wife become one flesh. God grants the one flesh union to a husband and his wife. God calls them to one flesh with each other. Our bodies are one flesh. Our arms and legs are one flesh with our torsos. Our bodies are one flesh in a way that we find it impossible to do harm to the members of our body because they are all one flesh together and make us up as people. When a husband and a wife become one flesh they become members of one another's bodies. It is therefore not permitted that they harm one another just as the members of our bodies do not bring harm to each other. The one flesh union becomes permanent because as God has created the world the one flesh union of a husband and his wife produce children. Thus in the beginning God tells us to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. He then institutes marriage wherein this being fruitful and multiplying is located. Your children are the one flesh of the two of you.

It is from this institution that our Lord and His apostles answer all of their questions about marriage. They do not answer questions about marriage from a philosophical standpoint. They do not answer questions about marriage from the standpoint of its benefits to society or its standing in front of the law. They answer the questions about marriage from the creation. Marriage arises from the creation. It is part of the creation. Just as surely as gravity and the sun and the oceans are parts of creation, marriage is a part of creation. It is just the way that things are. If you live contrary to way that things are, you will suffer harm and harm others. It is just like ignoring gravity which is also part of the creation. If you ignore gravity you will suffer harm and others will suffer harm also.

And so our Lord answers a question about divorce from the institution of marriage in the beginning. Since marriage is God's institution, when a man and a woman get married, they are not the ones who are making the marriage union. God is making the marriage union between them. They did not make themselves male or female. They did not institute the marriage union themselves. God made them male and female. God instituted marriage. Therefore it is God who brought them together. Ask any couple and they will tell you the unusual set of circumstances that brought them together. Even if a couple was born and raised in the same community and grew up together, they still have an account of how God brought them into marriage. It is unique for each couple, but each couple has the account. Therefore once a couple is married, God has married them. God has joined them together. God so joins them together that even their bodies are joined and they become members of one another. Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate.

In fact our Lord treats the first marriage of all of us as the one that is in effect until one member of the couple dies. Romans 7 and other places in the Scripture indicate that death dissolves the marriage bond. That makes sense. Death is God's action. It is His curse upon the creation for our sins. Therefore when one dies, one is suffering the curse that God has imposed upon His creation. Therefore God ultimately brings about death. Therefore when a couple gets married they are joined by God because it is His institution. The joining does not separate until one of them dies. When one of them dies, then God Himself has brought the union to an end and the living spouse is free to remarry.

That is why our Lord says that anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against his first wife. He also applies the same principle to women in Mark 10. Any woman who divorces her husband and marries someone else commits adultery. The first marriage is still in effect. God had joined them together. It is God's institution. Once He has established it, only He is permitted to end it.

This is why the liturgy of matrimony warns people that marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and for the purposes for which it was instituted by God. Once it is done it is done and there is no undoing except by death. Any divorce is just two human beings pretending to separate something that God has joined together. Therefore any subsequent remarriage of the two people is adulterous because their first marriage is still in effect. That remains so as long as they are still alive.

Many questions like this can be answered from the institution of marriage. For example if the one flesh union is given to a man and his wife, and God has not given it elsewhere, to take advantage of the one flesh union outside of where God has given it is a violation of the creation. It will bring harm to you as a creation of God. In other words it will harm your body. Even if you never catch a venereal disease, it will still bring harm to you. God does not want you harmed. Why do you wish to harm yourselves? Thus questions of cohabitation can be answered from the institution of marriage. If a man leaves his father and his mother for the purpose of establishing a new household with his wife, then we either need to acknowledge that cohabitating couples are married according to God's institution and issue them licenses and bless them as married and treat them as married or we need to regard such arrangement as outside of the will of God as He laid it down in the creation. If it is thus outside of God's will, harm comes to the people involved, even if the harm is not a statistical harm like research has shown that women who cohabit are more likely to be abused by the man with whom they live than women who are married. The reason is obvious. It takes a special kind of man to marry you. It takes one who understands commitment the way that our Lord Jesus Christ understands it, in terms of offering up ones' life. Make no mistake young men of the congregation when you marry you die. The old you and the you that you wish

would be is not there and will not be. Only the husband and father that God has called you to be is there. It is beautiful, but it is a death. If you want to keep the old you, don't get married.

Questions of homosexuality can be answered from the institution of marriage. In the beginning the Creator made them male and female. Therefore heterosexual marriage is part of the creation. It is the way that things are. To engage in homosexual behavior therefore is to act contrary to the creation. When one acts contrary to the creation you will experience harm and bring harm to others. It is curious that our contemporary society cannot see the harm that it brings to those who practice it and to others.

Homosexual unions take that which bestows life and put it in the place of death. Furthermore such unions do not produce life by definition. And you cannot use infertile heterosexual couples as means to justify homosexual behavior because they are infertile because something about their bodies is broken. If it were repaired, they would produce life according to God's command to be fruitful and multiply. In a homosexual union even when there is nothing physically wrong with either person in the union, they produce no life. They are not fruitful. They do not multiply. They do not fulfill God's institution as He instituted it in the beginning to be fruitful and multiply. There is the harm that they bring to others.

Whenever passages like this come up some members of the congregation are understandably concerned about the adulterous marriages within which they live. I do not advise divorcing again and returning to the first spouse unless that can be done without inflicting more harm. You may demonstrate to God your heavenly Father that you are sorry for your sin against His institution of marriage by remaining as you are and living chastely within your current marriage. Those of you who have not entered into such a relationship have now heard the word of God. Do not enter into those marriages and thereby commit adultery. In other words do not divorce and remarry. What God has joined together, let no one separate.

Also the hypocrisy of most Christians including our congregation is revealed by passages like this one. We oppose homosexuality, but we do not oppose divorce and remarriage. And I would point out to you that the unbelievers are aware of our hypocrisy. I would cite the TV show "The Good Wife" as an example. In an episode of "The Good Wife" one of the attorneys was asked to participate in a mock trial that was designed to test the legal limits of religious freedom in regards to the homosexual question. The mock trial brought suit against a Christian florist who refused to provide flowers for a so called gay wedding. When the florist was on the stand she claimed that she was not discriminating against homosexuals in her place of business because she would sell flowers to homosexual customers, but when asked to provide flowers for a so called gay wedding she declined because such action on her part would be an endorsement of the wedding and thus a violation of her freedoms to practice her religion. When the attorney questioned her she asked the florist upon what basis did she establish that homosexual unions were sinful. The florist answered, "On the basis of the Bible." Then the attorney responded, "Doesn't the Bible also condemn remarriage after a divorce indicating that such remarriages are adulterous." The florist had to agree that the Bible did condemn such marriages. Then the attorney asked, "In your practice as a florist, when you provided flowers for heterosexual couples getting married did you research those couples to ascertain whether or not one or both of them had been previously married and deny them services on that basis?" The florist admitted that she had not. To which the attorney replied, "Then your application of the Bible is hypocritical at best."

Now I do not know who writes "The Good Wife" but I would be surprised if they believed in Jesus. That means that not only are we hypocrites the unbelievers are aware of our hypocrisy.

Now, why all the fuss? What harm does a little divorce and remarriage do? Isn't it better for a couple who is fighting all of the time to divorce rather than to continue to harm one another? One wonders why the question is not if a couple is fighting all of the time, why don't they learn to serve each other in love and stop fighting or are they just too immature for that? Why don't they learn to confess their sins to one another and forgive one another just as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven us or do they not believe in Jesus?

And then there is the perennial question, "Doesn't God want me to be happy?" And let us be frank, God does not care about your happiness. God cares about your salvation. We enter into the kingdom of heaven through much suffering. Did you not think that your suffering would be real? Did you think that your suffering would be something that you could control? If you think that you can control suffering, wait until you die and then we will see how much suffering you can control.

But I digress, What is the big deal? Your children are the big deal. Your children are the big deal. Study after study after study has shown that under ordinary circumstances children thrive the most when they are raised by one father and one mother both of whom formed the one flesh union that brought them to birth. Do you want what is best for your children? Well then, that is what is best for your children. That is the way we are created. Do you want what is best for your children or not?

When the Lord dresses down you parents for how you have treated marriage, He is taking up the children into arms and He is blessing them. We would bring a curse upon our children. He is blessing them.

No one enters into the Kingdom of God unless they do so like a little child.

Our Protestant America has taught us that children are innocent. They are sweet. They are cute. There are rows and rows of infant fashion involving the word "cute" in some form or another on the garment. I have now seen them all. The reason that children are cute is because God created them cute. If they were not cute they would not survive because we adults would not be able to stand them because of their sinfulness. Psalm 51 is right. We are all conceived and born in sin. We are all conceived and born selfish. We are by nature unclean in the sight of the holy God. They are not innocent. I think that you parents know that they are not innocent. Protestant theology insists that they are innocent because they are trying to make a theological system work out logically, but the Bible is describing life the way that it is, not the way that we would like to pretend that it is. The Bible is describing life the way that it is and not according to some person's preconceived theological system.

If children are not innocent then why does our Lord say that the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these and then furthermore goes on to say that the rest of us should receive the Kingdom of God like the little children do? Children are dependent. One of you made this observation to me just a couple of weeks ago, "If there were not someone taking care of a child, it would die." Aside from being an iron clad argument against evolution such a statement points out why only those who enter the Kingdom of God like a little child enter it. They are dependent.

That is the chief characteristic that distinguishes adults from children. Adults can make a living in the world. Children cannot even begin to do this. If left to themselves, they die. If someone takes care of them, they live. Only such people who cannot take care of themselves before God can enter the Kingdom of God.

What do you say, you divorce and remarried adulterous people? Are you able to take care of yourself in front of God? Are any of us no matter what our sins able to take care of ourselves in front of God? Can we even begin to make a living before Him? No. No we can't. And that is good news. Because

only those people who cannot make a living in front of Him can enter the Kingdom of God. In fact unless you enter the Kingdom of God helpless to do anything about your own sins, you cannot enter it.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.