

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
October 7, 2018
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Genesis 2:18-24 The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

19 Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. 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. **20** So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. **21** 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 then closed up the place with flesh. **22** Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 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."

24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

"God's Help for Humanity"

What is the purpose of marriage? Depending on whom you ask, you will likely get some very different answers. You might get as many different responses as the people you ask.

Actually recent surveys demonstrate it's not just a difference in our perception. In 2002 the National Marriage Project did an extensive study. They set out to discover some reasons why men are less likely to commit. Here's one of the more interesting findings: "The most striking reason (for men's fear of commitment) is how many men said they wouldn't marry until they found the 'perfect soul mate,' someone very 'compatible.'" (Keller, p. 23) Compatibility sounds like a pretty reasonable expectation. But even here the survey is revealing: "They said that 'compatibility' above all meant someone who showed a willingness to take them as they are and not change them. "More than a few of the men expressed resentment at women who try to change them...Some of the men describe marital compatibility as finding a woman who will 'fit into their life.' 'If you are truly compatible, then you don't have to change,' one man commented." (Keller, 24)

A more traditional view of marriage recognized a need for change. Men were proud of their warrior tendencies. Being strong, powerful, aggressive, even violent was something men were proud of. But it was also assumed that marriage provided a way to tame men and channel those instincts toward the good of their family and society. One scholar notes that a man "who indulged in excessive eating, drinking, sleeping, or sex" wasn't really considered fit to care for his own household, much less serve in any public way. (Keller, p. 26) Lipton

concluded, “in the face of recent revelations about the reckless and self-indulgent sexual conduct of so many of our elected officials, it may be worth recalling that sexual restraint rather than sexual prowess was once the measure of a man.” (Keller, p. 26)

But we’re not here today to pick on men. This isn’t an issue for just some people in our society or even that one half of our population. Both men and women want a marriage where they can get what they want. They want to be able be themselves and not be forced to make any uncomfortable changes while expecting the other person to be attractive, intellectually stimulating, share common interests and support them in their own personal pursuits. When you take a step back and really analyze that, you can recognize it won’t work for two people, a potential husband and a potential wife to share those same expectations. We expect so much from the other person. We are willing to give up anything ourselves.

There’s a very simple explanation for this. Today we are looking at Genesis chapter 2. But when we keep reading in Genesis, we see the root of the problems. The fall into sin, when Adam and Eve ate the fruit they were commanded to avoid, brought devastating results. Sin infects every human heart with a selfishness at the deepest levels. Even our most important relationships aren’t immune. Surveys and news coverage just reflect the selfish focus inside each human heart. We have a selfish focus on ourselves. This infection of the heart accounts for every unreasonable expectation before marriage and every abuse inside of marriage. It explains every effort to abandon God’s standards for marriage and sexuality. It gives us the root for every deviation from God’s plan.

In Genesis chapter one we see the grand scope of all creation. In Genesis chapter two God zooms in on the pinnacle of his creation. It’s not two different accounts of creation told one after the other. It’s not two different writers giving their thoughts on creation and then stitched together into one book. It’s like what happens after your daughter has finished opening all her birthday presents. You get one box with all the parts for her new bike. You get out the instructions and it shows you all the parts and pieces as well as an overview of the finished product. Then you have to go to the step by step details to get from a pile of pieces to a fully functioning bike.

In Genesis chapter two, we get to zoom in on what God was doing on day six of creation. At the end of each day we get the assessment that everything was good, just the way God planned it to be. But here, after just making Adam, God makes the evaluation that “**it is not good.**” (Genesis 2:18) God’s not saying he made a mistake and now he’s taking an eraser to his creation blueprints. He didn’t put the wrong bolt in the wrong place and now has to take apart the entire bicycle. He just hasn’t completed his work yet.

God has one important piece missing: “**I will make a helper suitable for him.**” (Genesis 2:18) And because God understands this one half of humanity he has just created, he realizes what he must do. Sometimes it’s not just enough to tell a man something. You might get a head nod or a grunt, but you can’t be sure if you are getting through. A lot of times you have to provide a demonstration. You have to show him. God takes Adam and gives him the responsibility of naming all the other creatures. He has a representative pass in front of

Adam. He comes to match its description with its purpose and function. And through this rather deliberate process, God is helping Adam realize something about himself. He is unique among all of God's earthly creatures. None of the other creatures could serve as a real counterpart to him. None could share his thoughts and feelings. None was capable of being a helper who could correspond perfectly to him.

It's easy to dismiss and laugh away these chapters of Genesis as woefully antiquated and primitive. But when we take them at face value - as not just legends meant to impress morals on us - then we develop a deeper understanding of God's plan and purpose for every human being. What Adam came to realize was that he was alone. And God did not intend for him to go through life this way. Adam had been created in a unique way when God formed him out of the dust of the earth. (Genesis 2:7) Adam had been given a special relationship with God when God breathed the breath of life in him. (Genesis 2:7) He had been created to enjoy a special and intimate relationship with God. He alone had been given the image of God. Human beings are uniquely hardwired to enjoy fellowship with God.

So the realization that he was alone would help him see the value of the gift God was about to give him. God's process brings about the intended purpose: realization of no appropriate counterpart for Adam. So God takes similar care and energy and attention to craft for the man a suitable helper for him. And in the rest of Scripture this word for "helper" is often used for God who is mighty and delivers us. So there is no rank or superiority. It just means someone who can help us serve God's ultimate purposes. God gifts Adam with a helper who corresponds to him, who relates to him on the deepest levels, emotionally, psychologically, and physically. Someone uniquely and specifically designed by God to help us achieve our life goals.

But the most important one of all: spiritually. God does not intend for anyone to go through life alone. God wants every human being to enjoy the blessing of connection to him. And his design for marriage is hint at something more. God wants this deepest and most intimate of human relationships to hint at the bigger, more important relationship God desires for every man, woman and child. And marriage provides a unique way partnership to helping us see the fellowship God has created every one of us to enjoy.

And that's what makes so many of the examples we see so tragic. The ways society tries to rewrite God's rules for marriage tear away at God's bigger purpose. The ways we try to adapt marriage and tweak it to make it fit with our own purposes fade out God's deliberate design. Every act of selfishness, every self-centered effort inside marriage is a rebellion against God's ultimate goals for us. When we look at another person as our spouse or potential spouse and scheme up all things we can get from them, how they can give us what we want, the different ways we can use them to realize our expectations without even considering what we could give, we are turning our backs on a design with deeper meaning.

What we see in marriage just magnifies the bigger problem in any of our human relationships. Of all our closest relationships or our most valued relationships or even our most cherished relationships when they are at their best, none of them can give us what we were created to enjoy. At their best, they can only give us a partial glimpse.

Only Jesus can give us what we are created to enjoy with God. Only Jesus never suffered from sinful selfishness. Only Jesus never looked at another human being and thought only of what he could do for them, never what he could get from them. Jesus is your ultimate helper. Jesus came to this earth so you would never have to be truly alone, completely and permanently abandoned by your God. Only the selflessness of Jesus creates a restored relationship with God. Only his sacrifice, giving himself, giving all of himself for all of you, would restore you to the original relationship God created you to enjoy with him. Only Jesus had this single goal for his entire life. Only Jesus had this one purpose for coming to earth to give you the one connection every soul needs, to bring you back to enjoy the full benefits of a perfectly restored relationship with God.

And then Jesus equips marriage to fulfill some pretty special functions. Brought back to your Creator, husband and wife are able to enjoy the one flesh connection God created for them. They can so completely identify with the needs of the other to understand their spiritual purpose will even surpass the psychological and emotional and physical connections they enjoy. Husbands and wives see each others flaws and selfishness more clearly and more often than anyone else. So we are uniquely equipped to forgive each other and enjoy our restored status with God. We are able to stand back in awe and amazement at the gift God provides just as Adam did. The selfless service in a marriage will testify to way God uniquely equips husbands and wives to testify to his ultimate fellowship with us. The work of Jesus is the only way this is possible

But it's also the goal of every human relationship. Single people are still able to proclaim God's good purposes. If you are interested in getting married, you can use this divine design to evaluate a potential spouse. How could this person be a blessing from God? Can this person be a way God blesses you with companionship, a healthy avenue for sexual activity, a possibility for children and family? How can you serve them as a helper? And how can they serve you as a helper who works with you to glorify God and to carry out your ultimate purpose in life? All of your friendships and all of your romantic relationships proclaim there is something more than just what you can get out of that relationship.

Tomorrow you might wake up to the news that the Supreme Court has changed the definition of marriage. This afternoon you might read headlines on magazines in the grocery store checkout aisle giving you hints at what you can get out of life. And yet Genesis shows us God's unalterable blueprint for marriage. Marriage serves God's bigger purpose. All of your relationships in life serve to show you that no inter person can be the ultimate helper. Your deepest and most intimate relationships just foreshadow your ultimate relationship with your God. Through Jesus you have God's ultimate helper. The relationship God gives you in life help point you and keep you focused on Jesus as God's ultimate helper for all of humanity. Amen.

+ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever! Amen. +