

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Marriage and family are in view in our texts today. Marriage is God's great gift to mankind. "*It is not good that the man should be alone,*" and so the Lord made "*a helper fit for [Adam].*" And to this day, the Lord gives us the helpers we need — fit for us — that we might not be alone either. He instituted marriage: "*a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife.*"

This great gift survives the fall into sin — it remains a great blessing and joy. Our wedding rite says it this way: marriage is "an honorable estate instituted and blessed by God in Paradise, before humanity's fall into sin" (LSB *Agenda*, p. 65). But sin affects it. Sin too often takes away from marriage's joy as we fail our spouse and sin against one another; but marriage is still God's institution. And so we honor it and give thanks to God for it.

Again, the wedding rite has a wonderful summary of the blessings of marriage: "The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for the mutual companionship, help, and support that each person ought to receive from the other, both in prosperity and adversity. Marriage was also ordained so that man and woman may find delight in one another. Therefore, all persons who marry shall take a spouse in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust, for God has not called us to impurity but in holiness. God also established marriage for the procreation of children who are to be brought up in the fear and instruction of the Lord so that they may offer Him their praise" (*Agenda*, p. 65).

Thus we see how God Himself builds the house, bringing together husband and wife in a union not meant to be broken apart by man, God also filling the marriage quiver with children — "*a reward,*" the Psalmist calls them, "*a heritage from the Lord.*"

This Godly view of marriage, however, was challenged in Jesus' day and is in our own time. In Jesus' day, the issue was divorce. The men wanted to be permitted to divorce. "*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?*" the Pharisees asked Jesus. Mark records no qualification, unlike Matthew did: "*for any cause*" (Matt. 19:3). They were asking, "Can a man get a divorce? Period."

Jesus answered just as tersely — no! He pointed the Pharisees to the Law: "*What did Moses command you?*" "Sure, Moses allowed it," they responded, conveniently leaving out the part about finding "*some indecency in her*" (Deut. 24:1). But Jesus taught them what God's plan for marriage was, and it didn't include divorce. "*What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.*"

Moreover, God's plan for marriage didn't include the mischief that we see promoted today around sexuality and marriage. Jesus affirmed that in "*the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'*" A person's sexuality is

determined by God in our biology, not chosen by the person himself in an idolatrous rejection of God's creative purpose. Moreover, Jesus continued, "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*" So they are no longer two but one flesh." Only this kind of union, man and wife, can become the kind of one flesh union that God intends, that can be fruitful and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28).

Why divorce and our modern day challenges? It's because of our hard hearts, Jesus said, hearts hardened by sin and corruption. It's because of hearts turned away from God and His ways, and turned instead toward our self and our selfish ways. It's because of our idolatry.

But the Lord has a remedy for all this. It is to be made alive in Christ and given clean hearts and renewed spirits in the waters of Holy Baptism. As the Lord describes through the prophet Ezekiel: "*I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules*" (Ezek. 36:25-27).

This fleshly heart is a heart filled with compassion, Paul says, and with that compassion, he says, put on "*kindness, humility, meekness, and patience*" (Col. 3:12). Bear "*with one another,*" he says, and forgive "*each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive*" (v. 13). Hard hearts don't forgive; hard hearts bear grudges and are spiteful and cruel. New and clean hearts, fleshly hearts filled with the love of Christ forgive. Thus, Paul says, "*above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony*" (v. 14).

How different this "*more excellent way*" of love (1 Cor. 12:31), that St. Paul describes: "*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*" (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Love ruled in the beginning, rather than our selfish, hard-hearted ways, and love can rule again in our lives as we turn to Christ and follow Him.

Before I go further, though, I want to warn you. We think that many of the modern challenges to marriage and family are recent phenomena. And I suppose that's so concretely. But the seeds of the challenges to family go back more than a century. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their search for a socialist utopia advocated for the abolition of the family and for free love untethered to marriage (Richard Weikart, "Marx, Engels, and the Abolition of the Family," *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 18, No. 5, pp. 657-672, 1994). Their ideas on free love surely

fueled the sexual revolution of the 1960s that affects us today, that has devastated families, and their call for the abolition of the family fills the heads of modern day socialists and the lists of Marxist, socialist organizations' goals. Beware of them. Hold fast to Jesus' view of marriage and families — fathers and mothers and children.

For God had yet another purpose for marriage and family. The marriage rite puts it this way, "In marriage we see a picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church." That is, God not only taught us the "*more excellent way*" of love, but He instantiated it in Christ: marriage, a picture of Christ for His Church. Christ has modeled it all for us. "*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*" (Eph. 5:25). "*As the church submits to Christ [who loves her], so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands*" (Eph. 5:24). Of course, husbands and wives do this imperfectly, which is why Christ came and "*partook of the same*" "*flesh and blood*" as we have, partaking to the point of taking our sin upon Himself, partaking even of death. Truly, He became our brother "*in every respect*" so that "*he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people,*" to forgive us in our failures, to help us in our temptations. "*This mystery is profound,*" Paul says, "*and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church*" (Eph. 5:32).

With this in mind, then, there can hardly be a starker difference between Christians and the world with regard to marriage and the family. As Christians, we honor marriage and seek it out. Our young people we encourage to date with a purpose, namely, to find the helper fit for him or her, and when that person is found, to marry sooner rather than later. We don't do this, as the marriage rite says, "inadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God." We call upon Christian husbands and wives to sacrifice themselves for the other rather than seeking selfish gain — husbands as Christ loved the church; wives in submission as to the Lord — for the sake of the marriage, for the sake of the family, giving all glory to Christ our Head.

This isn't easy, especially in a world arrayed against us, and as we contend with the self-indulgent Old Adam in us. So let us kill him! Drown him! Repent! Daily! Be forgiven in Christ. "*Let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly ... whatever [we] do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Col. 3:16-17). May the new man in us "daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever" (Luther, Small Catechism, Baptism, Part 4). And when we die, Lord, grant us all a grand reunion in heaven, that we may join our voices to the heavenly Bride singing praise to Christ, the glorious Bridegroom.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.