

"INCOMPLETE"

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 22)

October 6, 2024

Zion Lutheran Church

Fort Wayne, Indiana

TEXT:

The Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

Genesis 2:18 (ESV)

I first studied this morning's Old Testament Reading many years ago--the first time I ever preached on it, in fact. Even back then I realized from the start that I was confronted here with a "political correctness" nightmare. That is even more the case today. This text of Scripture could be (and has been) applied to any number of the controversial "hot button" issues of our day. It goes without saying that it addresses the subject of marriage being an exclusive lifelong relationship between one male and one female (and, believe it or not, Christians in some countries who have said that have been jailed for so-called "hate speech"). It at least implies something about the roles that husbands and wives are to assume in their relationship with one another (but what it says, because it is not in tune with the feminist thinking of today, could amount to "fighting words" for some). And it most definitely reveals to us the fact that humans have superiority over the animals, but even that will no doubt cause offense to at least some people.

The truth is that the passage before us today, while it does to some extent address every one of the issues that I've just mentioned (and a lot more), transcends all of them. What I mean by that is that this text is not primarily about sexual ethics or about gender equality or inequality or about "animal rights," although there certainly are implications here for all of these topics. This text of Scripture speaks about something much deeper and more profound than any of these matters. It speaks to us about who we are as creatures of God--as men and women--as husbands and wives--as the people of God in Jesus Christ. Let's listen closely to what the Word of God has to say to us in this account of the creation of woman so that we might better understand ourselves and so that we might be better equipped to use the power of the Gospel to live as the people that we were created to be.

One thing that this passage of Scripture tells us about ourselves is that we were created to live in community. This is a real indictment against something that I happen to think is one of the worst scourges of our time, and that is individualism. Individualism is an attitude that causes people to see themselves as being totally

independent and private entities who are self-sustaining and self-promoting. People with this mindset are of the opinion that they don't need anyone else and that they have no responsibilities toward anyone else. It is this attitude of individualism that has foisted upon us the obsession with privacy and individual rights that we have witnessed in recent years. And don't for a minute doubt that this attitude has very serious social consequences. Abortion on demand, the entire LGBTQ+ agenda, the gender identity issue, and the selfishness and greed that seem to be driving so many people today are all born of an attitude of individualism that says: "It's all about me. I'm my own person. I'll do whatever I want to do and call it whatever I want to call it, and, in fact, force everyone else to call it what I want it to be called. And it's nobody else's business."

Well, that's not exactly what God had in mind when He created us. Notice what He says about the first man He created in the verse before us: "It is not good that the man should be alone" The God who created man to have fellowship with Him also made man male and female so that they might have fellowship with one another. And even if the man was not able to see that he was incomplete without his mate, God saw it--and did something about it. In creating us male and female with a natural attraction for and interdependence on one another, the Lord was establishing the marriage relationship and the family that grows out of that relationship as a pattern for society and for the Church. It is in the family that we learn how to interact with others in a way that is respectful and beneficial to all, and what is the Church, after all, but the family of Jesus Christ? In making the woman out the man's rib the Lord was making it very clear that the man and the woman share a common origin--a common life--a common humanity.

Another thing that we learn about ourselves from this passage of Scripture is something that Jesus Himself tried to teach His disciples repeatedly, and that is that our relationships with others are to be characterized by humility, love, and service. Some people have cited the Genesis account of the creation of woman to argue in favor of the superiority of men over women while others, using this same passage, contend that it teaches the equality of women and men. The truth of the matter is that this passage is not so much about the status of men and women as it about their interdependence. What God says to us about our humanity in the creation is the same thing that Jesus says to and about His disciples: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (*Matthew 20:25-28*).

This teaching of Jesus is a lot more than mere words. His life and ministry, at every turn, exemplified humility and love and service. He who is the Lord and Creator of all things made Himself the humble Servant of all. He did this not because of any gain or benefit that He might acquire from it for Himself, but solely for the sake of sinners like us, so that we might enjoy the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God, and the sure hope of everlasting life. He who is the only true God permanently united Himself with our human nature so that in heaven we might share in the divine glory that was His from all eternity. That is what love really is: the total and complete giving of self for the sake of the beloved. And it is this love of Christ that inspires, motivates, and empowers us to love in return, as John the evangelist states so simply and yet so eloquently in his First Letter: "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Our identification and status as the children of God in Jesus Christ are no accident. This was all a part of creation from the very beginning, just as marriage and family and community were. Just as "it [was] not good that the man should be alone," neither is it good for us as Christians to be alone. And just as Adam was incomplete without Eve, so we as individuals are incomplete without one another. Husbands and wives, fellow citizens, fellow believers in Christ--all are called to be together not so that one might lord it over another or so that one might assert his or her rights over against the other, but for mutual love and service. The Good News is that Jesus has not only shown us how this is done; He has done it for us and His Holy Spirit continues to give us the motivation and the strength that we need to live in His grace and love all our days, loving as we have been loved and forgiving as we have been forgiven for the glory of His name and the common benefit of all.

Amen.

May the Lord bless your hearing of His Word, using it to accomplish in you those things for which He gave it. May you be enriched and strengthened in faith that you may leave here today to go out into our world armed with the whole armor of God, prepared to be able ambassadors of your Savior Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it. Amen.