

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Attend a Lutheran wedding, probably a Christian wedding, and you could find two of the Scripture texts assigned for today: Genesis 2—the institution of marriage; and Mark 10—Jesus’ teaching on marriage and divorce. One customary text is missing—from Ephesians 5—not to worry, because I’ll cite it.

But don’t think that this sermon will be like a sermon prepared for the occasion of a wedding. Texts are the same, but the context is different. In fact, I begin this sermon by asking your forgiveness. If this sermon comes across as though I’m talking about THOSE sinners OUT THERE, I’m sorry. I repent! Please forgive me. That’s not my intent, but that we should be called to repentance. If this sermon comes across as a bunch of Christian moralizing, and not as a message of salvation in Christ, I’m sorry. I repent! Please forgive me. That’s not my intent, but that the Gospel should predominate. If this sermon brings you low in repentance, but doesn’t pick you back up, I’m sorry. I repent! Christ has redeemed you by His blood and forgives you!

Still, here goes...some of you may know that I meet periodically with a group of Christian pastors, not just Lutheran, but Christian pastors with a Trinitarian confession—Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist. It’s called Shepherds United. There we talk about and are instructed on issues troubling our world. Shepherds United is especially focused on three issues: life (or if Dr. Scaer had his way, we would call it the issue of stopping the slaughter of our babies), religious liberty, and marriage and the family. These are the three: life, religious liberty, and marriage and the family. Clearly, our everyday life is darkened by these storm clouds. All three affect us deeply.

Regarding life, we don’t welcome children as we once did, as Jesus does. Children are often seen as burdens and as obstacles in the way of us realizing our dreams—not as blessings from God, not a reward, not a heritage of the Lord. That’s especially so if the parents have a quiver full of them. For example, in 2017, Bill Nye, the so-called “Science Guy,” asked whether families should be punished for having “extra kids” (I’m assuming that means 3 or more), and “a bioethicist at Johns Hopkins University, said he believed it was a good idea” (New York Post, April 26, 2017). Though not forced to like in China, our own society has said to women ever since the 1970s, “Fine! Kill your babies if you want!” Lord have mercy! Sixty million and counting here since 1973! Indeed, how will our murderous generation be considered in the future? Hitler killed 11 million people; Stalin perhaps 30 million. Surely our generation will supplant Hitler and Stalin as the most ruthless of killers!

But there are dark clouds of religious persecution, too, that are sweeping across our nation. East and west, north and south, ominous things are happening. In

California and Washington State, in Colorado and Arizona, and across our nation, states are seeking to compel the speech and actions of Christians with no regard for these “undesirables” conscience or for their reputation or livelihood. And even with the Supreme Court ruling against them, the states seem little deterred.

And the clouds are dark and low regarding marriage and the family. They have been for some time, for the current challenges to marriage didn't begin with same sex marriage.

Indeed, from the time of Moses to our own, man's hardhearted sinfulness has caused married men and women to seek divorce. That's not to say that all divorces are themselves sinful. Indeed, Jesus gives one such case where divorce is permitted: marital unfaithfulness: *“whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery”* (Matt. 19:9).

Nevertheless, we should remember that neither Moses nor Jesus commands divorce even in cases of infidelity. God does not want it! *“What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”* Rather, follow *“more excellent way”* of love (1 Cor. 12:31), that St. Paul says, *“is patient and kind,”* that *“is not arrogant or rude,”* that *“does not insist on its own way,”* that *“bears all things [and] endures all things”* (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Along with compassion, St. Paul says, put on *“kindness, humility, meekness, and patience”* (Col. 3:12). Bear *“with one another and,”* forgive *“each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive”* (v. 13). And then St. Paul says, *“above all these put on love,—there it is again— which binds everything together in perfect harmony”* (v. 14).

It's our lovelessness, our selfishness, our hardheartedness—our sinful nature that is at fault. We must subdue it! Kill it! Drown it! Repent! Don't cast aside this good gift of God—your wife, your husband, your family. Don't separate what God has joined together.

Of course, from the 1960s on, marriage and the family have been under a severe storm warning, in the U. S. especially, due to the so-called sexual revolution, a revolution “more profound than the Reformation in its social and political effects” according to Rod Dreher, author and commentator (Rod Dreher, “The Religion of Sex,” *The American Conservative*). It has wreaked havoc on our morality, on our faithfulness, on our marriages, on our families. People follow its tenets with a kind of religious fervor; in fact, it has become the dominant religion in our once predominantly Christian country. Dreher has called it “the New Gnosticism,” replete with “blasphemy laws and heresy trials.” It has an orthodoxy, and anyone who challenges that orthodoxy will be dismissed or, if need be, destroyed.

We have lost our way! Self-indulgent sexual pleasure is the all-encompassing goal of this new religion. Unrestrained self-expression defines who one is...as a

person, it teaches. Many have been converted by its hedonism. That seems far better than the staid and sober teachings of Moses and Jesus that institute and uphold marriage: husbands, “*hold fast to your*” wife; or of Paul: “*Husbands, love your wives*” and “*Wives, submit to your own husbands*” (Eph. 5:22, 25).

Of course, a religion needs a sacrament, and in 1973, this religion’s sacrament, abortion, was legitimized. With it, we were taught, women were unshackled from the oppressive patriarchy that promoted marriage. One must have it, or else women can’t be free to have as much meaningless, “consequence-free” sex as men.

Consequence free? Hardly! Out-of-wedlock births. Sexual assault! “Me Too.” Nevertheless, heretics of the sexual orthodoxy must be tortured and destroyed, burned at the stake if possible. And there are more consequences: the diminution of marriage, the destruction of the family. These are the fruits of this new religion. God save us!

And He has. He has not only taught us the “*more excellent way*” of love, but has demonstrated it: Christ for His Church; and His Church for Him. He 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, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church*” (Eph. 5:32).

With Christ in mind, then, there can hardly be a starker difference with regard to the sexes between the Christian religion and this modern religion of sex. As Christians, with everyone to be sure, but especially with our spouses, we are to consider ourselves as last and servants, as we heard several weeks ago. For Christian husbands and wives, it’s not about seeking our personal pleasure, but seeking to serve our spouses’ needs. Husbands, it’s about sacrificing yourselves for HER sake, like Christ did for the church, to sanctify HER, cleanse HER, present HER in splendor, spotless, wrinkle-less, holy and without blemish. Wives, it’s about sacrificing yourselves, submitting to your husband’s headship as the church does to Christ. Each of these goes against the new Gnosticim’s orthodoxy of doing all things for your own personal pleasure. But it’s the more excellent way—for life and liberty, for marriage and family.

And you know that's right! Mostly because God's word says so, but also scientifically, because our little 50+ year experiment has caused so much destruction. You know it, and yet you still must contend with that self-indulgent Old Adam in you. So I say again: Kill him! Drown him! Repent! Daily! Be forgiven in Christ. "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ... whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Col. 3:16-17). God grant that the new man in you shall "daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." And with the light of Christ reflecting from you, may the dark storms of this life be chased away until we receive the light of life.

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