

The Twentieth Sunday of Pentecost

October 11, 2015

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, in your bountiful goodness keep us safe from every evil of body and soul. Make us ready, with cheerful hearts, to do whatever pleases you; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! I will proclaim your name to my people; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you. Alleluia! (Hebrews 2:12).

Sermon Text: Genesis 2:18-24

Someone asks the question at almost every wedding. At the head table sits the newly married couple—two people who once spent years living independently, but now live united together. They sit, facing their guests, smiling and nodding and acknowledging every speech and toast made in their honor. Finally, they hear it; you hear it—that oft-asked question. An elderly couple plucked from the crowd, a microphone shoved in their face, pressed to answer: “How do you make marriage last?”

A wedding an odd place to ask that question, it is not? I mean, the couple just got married and it would seem that the thought farthest from their mind is “How do you make marriage last? As odd a time to ask that question, I would guess that many stop to listen, hoping to pick up some highly-sought-after advice.

“How do you make marriage last?” Type that question into Google and in just seconds you get some 13.5 million results. Websites promise 30-some-steps to a happy marriage (with pictures included!). Other websites try to paint a happier picture of marriage by pointing out a declining divorce rate— no longer stuck at 50%, but instead hovering around 30-35%. An American group even researched this question, revealing: “The secret to a happy marriage is kissing and saying ‘I love you’ 10 times a week and

Genesis 2:18-24

¹⁸ 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 beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. 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 of the air and all the beasts of the field.

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 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 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

going on three dates a month” (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2557336/The-secret-happy-marriage-Tell-partner-I-love-10-times-week-three-dates-month.html#ixzz3o0VzyERo>). These are just the responses from the internet; it does not include advice from relationship-help books, therapists, or television shows!

The myriad of results appear to point out a very real problem facing many: how do you make relationships last? The problem is not something new. Our gospel reading records a group of Pharisees asking Jesus how to end marriage ([Mark 10:2](#)). Jesus refers them to Moses’ command, given some 1500 years earlier! ([Mark 10:3](#); [Deuteronomy 24:1-4](#)).

Why the difficulty in maintaining such an intimate relationship? From where does the trouble come? How is the problem solved? **WHAT MAKES MARRIAGE PERFECT?** It takes *the perfection of Christ, the reflection of Christ*.

I mean, if you want to know **WHAT MAKES MARRIAGE PERFECT**, you really have to start with the Person who started marriage and what he intended marriage to be. After all, that is really where a perfect marriage begins— in perfection.

Our reading from Genesis carries us into that newly God-made Garden of Eden. It takes just six 24-hour days and the Word of God’s mouth to create absolutely everything. Light marks the day; darkness the night. The sky floats over land, bodies of water, and plants. Birds fly; water animals swim; land animals run free ([Genesis 1:1-24](#)). Saving the prized jewel of his creation for last, God scrapes together the dust of the earth, carefully shapes man’s body, his intelligence, emotions, and breathes into him the breath of life ([Genesis 2:7](#)).

After that one final breath, God recognized his creating work was not quite finished. **The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”** Loneliness was “not good” just for Adam— God knew it was “not good” for men.

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. 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. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. What do you think went through Adam’s mind? I mean, imagine him sitting on a rock as God brings all these creatures to him. He sees their skin, their posture, their feet, their hair— and he names them by the things they can do or how they look. Yet, that is the problem. Some animals are arriving in pairs— and they look exactly alike. Others come alone, but they walk on four legs, they do not speak a human language, they do not hug Adam, or share his feelings. He quickly realizes something our world still knows: people and animals are different; their relationships are different— and that was “not good.”

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 closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. God makes a perfect solution to this problem. He does not speak and (poof!) a woman appears. No, he takes a bone guarding the heart of his prized creation. Then he fashions (literally “builds”) the perfect partner for man. He shapes someone who looks like man, someone who can converse with man, someone whose emotions and feelings are the matching puzzle-piece to man’s personality. No wonder Adam sings:

**“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken out of man.”**

Do you still sing that same song? No, I am not asking if the world sings that song. I am not asking you to point fingers at how our world defines marriage or treats marriage or the lack thereof. No, the question is for you to answer. Do you treat marriage, relationships, in this perfect atmosphere in which they started? Do you selflessly consider your spouse’s needs just as important as your own bones or you own flesh? Do you take conversations and actions in the kindest possible way? Do your own words and actions gently seek to strengthen your relationship? Do your words and actions demonstrate to your children that God’s gift of a spouse is one of his greatest blessings? Do you your words and actions follow the union of one-man/one-woman as God Almighty intended it to be?

WHAT MAKES MARRIAGE PERFECT? Perfectly selfless love for the other, where every fiber of our being considers the needs of others as valuable as “my bone” and “my flesh.” Since a perfect marriage means that we perfectly love our spouse more than we love ourselves, we will never find the answer for a perfect marriage in us, will we?

Instead, the answer for that perfect marriage is found in the One who instituted, who started marriage. That perfection comes from Christ. When the world veered away from what its Creator wanted, Jesus Christ stepped in to bring us back to God. Christ loved you, just as husbands love their wives— and he did it better than any other husband has ever loved. He loves you so much that he puts aside his interests, puts aside the praise of angels, puts aside heaven—all in order to make sure that you are happy for all eternity.

He comes down as the perfect Groom, the One who gives his all. You, me, steeped in selfishness, drenched in sin, he washes us clean with his own innocent blood. Even though it costs his life, he willingly pays that price to save you and me.

You see, **WHAT MAKES MARRIAGE PERFECT** will never be found in our own efforts— and you might be an extremely good spouse. No, the perfection of Christ has made you his bride— you, the Church of believers. His perfect love for you fuels you to *reflect* that perfect love of *Christ*.

After all, **WHAT MAKES A PERFECT MARRIAGE?** The only way we have perfection within our relationships is when we better ponder that relationship Jesus has with us. How did Christ love his bride, how did he love you? The Son of God laid down his life to death. Why would he willingly endure the wrath of God even though he is perfect? Why would he suffer at such great lengths so that you could be rescued from hell? Because he loves you. He loves you with an undying love which moves him to walk up Calvary, to be stretched out on a cross, to suffer, and to die for you. Yes, as the perfect Groom, he knows that you need physical things— food, clothing, health, home— yes, but goes farther than the physical in order to save you from the spiritual. The perfect Groom snatches you from the jaws of hell so that you become his own bride ([Ephesians 5:22-27](#)).

How do you respond to that love? *We love because he first loved us* ([1 John 4:19](#))

How does that love come out? It flows from the relationship Jesus has with you. Your love reflects what God intends marriage to be. **For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.**

“One flesh” is how God designs this marriage relationship. To be united in the presence of God, to commit yourself to your spouse, to imitate that selflessness for all the days of your life. To (quite simply) consider your relationship with the love with which you love yourself. So, you admit your shortcomings and failures and you forgive your spouse’s shortcomings and failures—reflecting that forgiveness Christ shows you. You meet your spouse’s concerns and worries in ways you know are best— reflecting the same way God meets your needs. You joyfully reap the blessings of this “one-flesh” relationship— reflecting the same joy Christ has in calling you his bride.

Yes, it will not always be easy to selflessly give yourself to others. Frustration will pull you to yell and insult and argue. Selfishness will tell you to worry about your own wants, demands, wishes ahead of anyone else’s. Temptation to hold personal grudges will exist. Because we still wrestle sinful desires, we will sometimes fail to reflect that selfless love of our Savior.

When that selfish head rears up, go to the cross. See such selfless love give you eternal life! See the empty tomb and know this is your empty tomb. See the Savior rise into heaven, knowing that you will soon follow after him.

That perfect marriage is all hinged on the Savior’s perfection. Because Jesus gives his perfect life to death, you are declared perfect before God! With Christ’s perfection on you, you reflect that perfection in your relationships— whether you are married or not.

See, our relationships all reflect that perfect love of Jesus. As married couples, you demonstrate selflessness to your spouse. As parents, you put that selflessness into action with your children, tending to their every physical and spiritual need. As those unmarried, you work to find someone to share that “oneness” with, someone who fits your personality, who meets your needs, who reflects the love of Jesus in all they do.

Google may have some 13.5 million results on “How do you make marriage last.” Websites promise 30-some-steps to a happy marriage (with pictures included!). Other websites try to paint a happier picture of marriage by pointing out a divorce declining from 50% to around 30-35%. American groups can research the question, revealing: “The secret to a happy marriage is kissing and saying ‘I love you’ 10 times a week and going on three dates a month.” All of this advice might be helpful and beneficial in building and maintaining relationships.

Yet, a marriage, a relationship, in which Christ is kept at the center gives that perfect marriage. Why? Because it all hinges on his perfection! He is perfect for you, changing your identity from “divorced from Christ” to “Bride of Christ!” Christ’s perfection for you has made you his own.

That perfection in Christ moves you to reflect your Savior’s love. It is what you do naturally; you cannot help it. Seeing the selflessness of your Savior moves you to selflessly care for the needs of those around you.

So, how do you make marriage last? How are marriage troubles removed? How are relationship problems solved? **WHAT MAKES A PERFECT MARRIAGE?** You know the answer. **A PERFECT MARRIAGE IS MADE** on *the perfection in Christ* and in *the reflection of Christ*.