

Sermon #1,180: Genesis 2:18-24

1-17-16, 2nd Sunday After Epiphany, Bethany-Princeton MN

(Hymns: 167, 490.1.7.11.12, "O Father, At Creation," 172; comm.. 318, 190)

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT: GOD CREATED MARRIAGE

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, as the Word of the Father You joined our first parents that not only they but all couples wedded according to Your institution might leave their father and mother, be joined to each other as husband and wife, and become one flesh. Despite our sins against this commandment, You do not forsake our marriages but promise to abide with Your blessing. We ask You to guard and keep the sanctity of marriage in our families whole and undefiled. As we go about our vocations as married or single, help us to be quiet but firm defenders of marital faithfulness and sexual purity to our children, friends, and community in word and deed. Amen.

The Text, Genesis 2:18-24. ¹⁸ And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." ¹⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. ²¹ And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. ²² Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. ²³ And Adam said:

**"This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man."**

²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ the Bridegroom, in whom each person who has sins against the 6th Commandment is cleansed by His blood so

that they do not have spot or wrinkle or any such thing: Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What is amazing about the catechism words on the 6th commandment is what you don't hear. The 6th commandment,, the one that mentions adultery, brings to mind so many things that bad and wrong.

What comes from “*every impure desire, word, or deed in matters of sex*” (ELS Q. #64) is a long list. It includes fornication and cohabitation, or in today's slang: hooking up and shacking up. It includes homosexual activity, gender confusion, and the making and using of pornography. It includes marital unfaithfulness. It includes crude jokes, suggestive music videos, and R-rated movies and ads. The 6th commandment also condemns unscriptural divorce as sin, and not only divorce but all the sinful anger, arguments, and unforgiveness within marriage prior to divorce.

When you hear “6th commandment” you think of all these negative things. Young people of every generation since the '60s get turned off to the church, often blaming it on how the church speaks on the 6th commandment, all the “what you can't do with your body.” No-no-no, don't-don't-don't. They hear it as a basically negative message.

But did you notice that when we said the 6th commandment and then the catechism's “*What does this mean,*” there were only positive statements? It is the only one of the Ten Commandments where the meaning has no negatives. It would seem to us that of all the commandments it would be the one most full of no's. But instead there are two positive statements: (1) “that we lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed,” and (2) “that husband and wife love and honor each other.”

So what's the deal, is Luther ignoring all the 6th commandment sins, sweeping them under the rug? No, not at all! The 6th commandment is anchored in something that happened before there was ever a sin. It's here in Genesis 2:18-24, the historical account of the first marriage. This is when God created marriage – “*at the beginning (Mt 19:4).*”

This is still the most important Bible passage on the 6th commandment, and on the subject of marriage. The words of the Lord to Adam and Eve did not become irrelevant after the fall into sin. In fact, when Jesus was asked about marriage and divorce, all He basically did

was to quote this passage! It's recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. So the words of Genesis 2:24 show up four times in the Bible.

The second chapter in Genesis isn't a second creation; it highlights things about the creation of the world in Genesis 1. One thing it spends a lot of time highlighting is marriage. In Genesis 1 we hear that God saw everything that He had made – including, on the sixth day, the creation of male and female – and ***“God saw that it was good.”***

Not only did God see that marriage was good, but in chapter 2 we hear Him say that it is good: ***“It is not good that the man should be alone,”*** God says. So when He takes care of that, when God carefully creates woman out of the man and brings her to Adam – we go back to God's words, ***“it is not good that the man should be alone,”*** and now hear God saying His creation of marriage is good. Adam as the first preacher pronounces, bestows, God's blessing on woman, on God's creation and choice of her as Adam's wife, on marriage. God says it is good.

You need to hear that. Marriage is good because God made it. Your marriage is good because God made it. Your future marriage is good, and you can wait in faith and hope, because God promises to make that marriage for you. He fearfully and wonderfully makes the man or woman that He wants to join you with. He has fearfully and wonderfully made you. What your body is like, what your spirit is like, how you fit together in similarities and contrasts, this is all by God's design.

So when you are tempted to give up on it, or to be bored with it, or to undervalue or not appreciate your wife/husband and what you have in your marriage, remember that your marriage is good because God says it is good. He made it. He made you and brought you together. This is also true for single people, and Christian youths who have not been married yet. God is making a marriage for you even now, as you strive to do God's will to lead a chaste life, which the catechism emphasizes.

But, we ask, what about all that bad stuff? People who are divorced or separated have a hard time saying that their marriage was good. What about when a marriage turns into a chorus of “but I want this” and “well, I want that” and “you don't give this to me” and “you don't do this for me”? Even in what we think of as the best marriages, we can look back and be ashamed by how much of this there is.

This is not the fault of God's creation. It is the fault of sin which entered the world. You can see how God's gift of marriage and sex has been polluted and defiled by sin. So it's good to begin at the beginning, in Genesis 2. What Luther has us say in the meaning of the 6th commandment could've been said to Adam and Eve before the fall into sin: to lead a sexually pure life – chastity – and to love and honor each other.

The words of Genesis 2:24 are where God, ahead of time, answers all the issues and questions sin brings into marriage: **“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”** You can take every challenge to marriage and Biblical morality and answer it with this verse, as Jesus did.

There are three parts to this verse, three instructions: First is leaving, second is “cleaving,” or joining, in marriage; and third is the one-flesh union, the physical part that comes after marriage.

The order of this is not accidental. These are like a three-legged stool. If you start in the wrong order, then you are cutting off one of the legs of the stool so it can't stand. The way God designed it here is precisely to combat the devil's schemes for destroying a marriage.

I want to highlight an aspect of this that we don't talk about much: the “leaving” part which comes first: that **“a man shall leave his father and mother.”** What's important is that the first thing, according to God, is the commitment that the man makes, the man's commitment to her. There is no male “fear of commitment” in the Bible. This is the foundation for marriage, the foundation for the man to be the head of his wife, the foundation for young men not to take advantage of young women, not to use them, but to be aware of the greatest of commitments and responsibilities and what they are being trusted with. The woman is subordinate to the right kind of male headship, one who is fully committed to her. This is the basis for a good marriage built on trust.

Of course we don't have perfect marriages. Everyone is lacking in some way. You're guilty of adultery in your heart a thousand times because the culture bombards you with things that you as a Christian don't want to see and be tempted by. You don't measure up to the idealistic expectations of the wedding day. You aren't attentive enough. You don't perfectly show the self-sacrificing spirit – love – that marriage requires.

So you are tempted to think that your marriage is not good. We return to Genesis 2 – the time before sin was in the world – to get a picture of what marriage is in God’s eyes: holy and good. How can your marriage be holy again? How can you get back to what it’s s’posed to be?

The answer is Jesus Christ. He gives you this holiness. He was there in the beginning. He is the very God who made marriage, **“and it was very good.”** It wasn’t only true of Adam and Eve. This is His plan and design for you and for your own marriage. This is glorious.

It might not feel glorious. While He created marriage before the fall into sin, it was in marriage that sin came in. And sin still comes into marriage. But when the fall into sin happened, God didn’t give up on marriage. He didn’t start over. He let marriage continue, even though sin is in the picture. Not only did He not give up on marriage in Eden, but He doesn’t and won’t ever give up on your marriage. He loves your marriage. He made it and He will protect and preserve you in it.

Although sin is in the picture, what else is? Grace, forgiveness of sins. God, who made marriage and then saw Adam and Eve ruin it, made the very thing that would take the sin away and make the marriage glorious again. He sent forth Jesus, our dear Redeemer.

Jesus makes it so the forgiving of sins – by God -- comes into the marriage too. Jesus’ pure and decent life in word and deed atones for all the sins we commit in marriage, and all the 6th commandment sins you are guilty of as a single person or in the context of divorce. Not only does He take sins away, though.

What I am about to say is important also for those who are victims of sexual sin or abuse, or for those who were led into sins they didn’t want to be part of, and who often stand before God in this life filled with shame and feeling unclean. It is also important for our young people.

I want to say to all our young people that it is so important to use God’s instructions in Genesis 2:24 and to use the 6th commandment as a guide for holy living, because it is all here to protect you. When young people take their cues from the culture and society’s changing mores, and think it is OK to hook up or shack up, or think viewing porn is just normal, they open themselves up to never-ending attacks from the devil,

who produces guilt and shame and makes them uncomfortable being in church in the presence of holy things. They can end up thinking it isn't for them. This commandment is here to protect you from all that.

I will never stop telling you to avoid involving yourself in this sinful behavior at all cost, for the sake of your conscience and your soul! But I also want you to know that such sins are not unforgivable sins and that the Lord and His Church – which is also your church, and your true family – will never give up on you and do not want you to stay away, because He is your only hope and your greatest help, especially in the way I am going to tell you now and which I've been leading up to:

What Christ offers to you in the means of grace, making Himself present in His Word and Sacraments, is that He actually gives you His own holiness, righteousness, innocence and blessedness. His purity and holiness in resisting temptation and remaining without sin was for you, so that in the forgiveness of sins that is bestowed upon you He not only completely cancels out your sinful words, thoughts and actions – which is a tremendous-enough gift! – but also He gives you His perfect holiness, He cleanses you, He purifies you body, mind, and soul.

He does this when He gives you His blood. ***“The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin” (1Jn 1:7)***, the sins done by you and the sins done to you, all the sin that makes you unclean, all of it you are made clean from. Again: ***“The blood of Christ shall cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (He 9:14)*** You are cleansed to serve Him, in how you love and honor your spouse.

He gives you His blood in your baptism, for in baptism you are cleansed of sin; when the words are spoken as water is applied, Jesus blood cleanses you. So hear the promises of your baptism and rejoice that you are clean!

He gives you His blood to drink in the Lord's Supper and it cleanses you, body, mind and soul. So come, eat and drink! He, your Bridegroom, is making you His pure and holy bride, not only joined with Him but also so that in your marriage and sexuality you are clean and holy. Your marriage is good because God made your marriage, but also because in Christ He sanctifies your marriage, makes it good, and protects and preserves you in your marriage in pure love with each other. Amen!