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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Pentecost 20 (Proper 22B), Series B
Saturday, October 6th, 2018
Sunday, October 7th, 2018 (LWML Sunday)

Sermon: The Blessing of Woman
Text: Genesis 2:18-25

Focus: God created woman to be a helper to her husband.

Function: That they would love and honor their spouse as God intended.

Structure: Story-Framed

Locus: “We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other” (SC, 6th Commandment).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Today’s Scripture readings are all about the blessing of family. Our Gospel lesson talks about divorce and remarriage. Psalm 128 expounds upon the blessing of children and grandchildren. And even in our Epistle, we are told, the Lord Jesus is “not ashamed” to call us *his* brothers and sisters (Heb. 2:11). And in our Old Testament reading, of course, we hear about *the very first* family, when God arranged the first marriage between Adam and Eve. Traditionally, we celebrate the first weekend in October as “LWML Sunday” in honor of the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League. But today could also have been called Family Sunday.

God delights in families! Each of us grew up in a family, even if we had non-traditional parents or lived in foster care. And even if you are single or divorced, you still have a family of faith right here at church.

But sadly, the very first human being on earth began his life as a solitary individual, as we discover in our reading from Genesis 2. God created Adam to work and take care of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15). But Adam had no one to share his life with besides the animals and the Lord. During the creation account of Genesis 1, at the end of each day God called what he made good (e.g., 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). But after making Adam, for *the very first time* in

history, God called something “*not* good.” “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’” (Gen. 2:18, ESV).¹

Many pastors preach this verse at weddings. But the statement, “It is not good that the man should be alone” is not just about marriage. It’s true of all human beings. We are meant for relationships. God created us for communion with him and community with each other. There is nothing wrong with solitude for meditation and prayer. I myself am more of an introvert than an extrovert. That doesn’t mean that I don’t like people, but it means that being around people takes energy out of me rather than recharging me. Nevertheless, we all need family, friends, and others with whom we can share our life. “It is not good that the man should be alone.” God’s command to love our neighbors as ourselves presumes that we will not live lives of isolation.

Being the loving Lord that he is, when God saw that it wasn’t good for Adam to be alone, he decided to remedy the situation by making “a helper fit for him.” It’s important to pause and consider this phrase before quickly moving on. The old King James Bible translated this phrase as “an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18, KJV). The New International Version renders it “a helper suitable for him.” All of these translations could be misunderstood in English to mean that somehow God would make a helper to Adam’s liking and acceptance. But Adam did not create a profile on Match.com and then wait for God to check off his want-list. No, *God* knew already and had in mind what Adam needed. Eve was not a mail-order bride. She was created to be person who corresponded to Adam. The Hebrew literally says, “to be his opposite.”

We have an old, romantic saying that “Opposites attract.” And nowhere was this truer than with the creation of Adam and Eve. They were total and complete opposites—true complements. Despite the feminist doctrine that men and women are the same, they are, in fact,

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise specified, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

opposites. They have different gifts and different callings. And that is a good thing! They are equal, but they are *not* the same. (*Aside:* By the way, this idea of complementary opposites is one of the reasons why homosexuality does not fit with God's design. When a man and a woman love each other, they yearn for "the other," the one who can fill in their gaps. But when a man lusts after another man, or a woman desires another woman, he or she craves not their complement, but their mirror image. In this way, you can say that there is nothing more narcissistic than homosexual attraction).

God created Eve to be Adam's "helper." She was not Adam's slave, roommate, "pet," or maid. She was not a mere object for sexual pleasure. This word "helper" means more than an assistant or even a companion. The word helper implies no superiority of man over woman. In fact, quite the opposite!

Throughout the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for "helper" (*ezer*) most often refers to the divine aid given by *God!* In Deuteronomy 33, God is the helper "who rides through the heavens" to come to our aid (Det. 33:26). In the Psalms, David calls Yahweh his "helper" (e.g., Ps. 30:10; 54:4). Yahweh declares himself to be the helper of orphans (Ps. 10:14). And in Psalm 72 Yahweh is the one who rescues the poor and needy "and him who has no helper" (Ps. 72:12). Moses even named his son Eli-ezer, which means "My God is my helper" (Ex. 18:3). Clearly, the Hebrew word *ezer* means a helper who comes from a position of *strength!*

God created Eve to be Adam's helper, just as we are all called to love and serve our neighbor. The Bible says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!" (Eccl. 4:9-10). I believe it is no accident that God's prohibition against eating from the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is juxtaposed with

God's declaration that it was not good for the man to be alone. God knew that Adam stood a better chance resisting temptation and keeping his commands if he could do so in *community*. Eve's main job as Adam's helper was not to be barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen while he worked in the garage or the Garden. Her job wasn't even to hold the ladder. Her job was to help him obey God's command. God intends his Word to be heard in community—in the Church—not just off alone in a cave or a corner somewhere. Hermits are nice enough, I suppose. But helpers are better!

God created Eve to be Adam's helper—and his opposite—because no proper helper was found among the animals. So the same God who got his hands dirty and made Adam out of mud, put the man to sleep and did a little sacred surgery. He put Adam to sleep and removed a rib, which he built up into the form of a woman and brought her to Adam's bedside (Gen. 2:21-22).²

When Adam awoke from recovery, the beautiful sight before him overwhelmed him. He took one look at Eve and said, "Whoa! *Man!*" And that is why she is called "woman" to this day... Well, not exactly! The Hebrew words for man and woman *do* sound alike (*ish* and *ishah*). And the woman was taken out of the man, just as every human being comes out of woman ever since. But what Adam actually did when he saw Eve was to break into Hebrew poetry:

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man" (Gen. 2:23).

It seems like almost every pop song is a love song (and every country song is a breakup song!). But the very first love song was this verse from Adam's lips elicited by the beauty of the very first woman.

² The Hebrew word used for Eve's creation in 2:22 is *banah*, "build," not *asah*, "make," as in v. 18.

“Therefore,” Moses adds by way of commentary, “a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife...” (Gen. 2:24a). It surprises us that in a patriarchal culture, the *man* should be the one to leave his parents and forge a new family with his wife. But that’s the way God wired us. Men grow up and move out of their parents’ homes (unless they are thirty-year-old man boys who fail to launch!). But women cleave to their husbands even as they retain a strong connection to their families of origin. As the old saying goes, “A son is a son ‘till he weds a wife; a daughter is a daughter all her life.”

“And they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24b). Coming together, Adam and Eve created one shared life, “one flesh.” The woman was taken out of man and formed from man. But in marriage they become *one* flesh. Adam’s missing rib is found in Eve. To quote the movie *Jerry Maguire*, “You complete me.”

“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:25). The union of Adam and Eve was literally a match made in heaven, marked by intimacy, love, and trust. They were naked, but they were unashamed. They had nothing to fear, nothing to hide, nothing to cover up. They could be fully present and transparent to one another—in a way that *we cannot* be with other human beings in the fallen world today.

We don’t know how long this perfect marriage lasted in the Garden of Eden. Was it years, months, days, or mere minutes before the serpent slithered into view? Tragically, Adam and Eve did not live up to their callings. Rather than helping Adam to keep the Lord’s command, Eve tempted him to break it. And Adam failed to protect her against the serpent’s lies. For where was he when she took her first bite of forbidden fruit? He was *right there* with her. “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the

eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband *who was with her*, and he ate” (Gen. 3:6).

After that fateful taste of fruit, a cold breeze blew through the Garden, and a shiver went down their spines. Suddenly, they saw that they were naked and exposed. They tried to cover themselves with leaves, and when they heard the Lord, they ran and hid. Their relationship broke down in blame and shame. “Lord, it’s the fault of the woman you gave me!” and “The devil made me do it.” And ever since then, men and women have been competitors in the Battle of the Sexes. Even though both were born in Eden, we now say that men are from Mars and Women are from Venus. And it’s nearly impossible for them to see eye to eye because of our “hardness of heart” (cf. Mark 10:5). Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise to scratch out a living in the dirt away to the east of Eden. Now we struggle with bitterness and betrayal, adultery and divorce. And there we have dwelt ever since.

But even if Paradise is lost, hope is not. In a cryptic comment, the apostle Paul assures us that “she will be saved through childbearing...” (1 Tim. 2:15). I used to scrunch my eyebrows at this verse and wonder how giving birth to babies would save a woman from her sins. But it’s not just her sins; it’s yours and mine too! And it’s not just any baby, but one in particular. In Genesis 3:15—right in the middle of cursing and punishment—God promises the world a Savior, when he tells the serpent:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15).

One male descendant of Eve (“her offspring”) would crush the head of the serpent and save us from our sins. That special seed is Jesus, who came down from heaven and entered human flesh through the womb of Mary. We are saved through childbearing, because the virgin Mary gave

birth to the Son of God. And “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Jesus crushed the head of the serpent on the cross.

So even though a woman led us into temptation and out of Paradise, God also used a woman to pave the way for our salvation. No, Mary is not a co-redemptrix with Christ. But she *was* his mother. And we are saved through her child bearing our sins to the cross and grave.

And now we no longer have to live in doubt and fear of one another. No more blame, no more shame, no more hiding and covering up. Instead we speak the truth to one another in love, without sacrificing either truth or life (Eph. 4:15). Now we love and forgive one another (Eph. 4:2, 32). We “bear one another’s burdens and in this way fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1). Husbands and wives love one another. Children obey their parents. Wives submit to their husbands. Husbands die for their wives. Workers obey their masters. And all of this is out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21).

“It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). And now, because of Christ, we don’t have to be alone ever again. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.