**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“As Christ Loved”**

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Ephesians 5:22-33

After each day of creation, God looked at what He had created and declared "it is good." That is, of course, until on the sixth day, when He got to Adam. When He looked at Adam, whom He had made in His own image, He saw that Adam was not good because He was alone. Adam had already been given his job; he was created to care for God's creation. God looked at Adam and declared that Adam couldn't do it alone. He needed a helper, so God gives him a helper, and Adam calls her ‘woman.’

God formed Adam out of the dust of the earth, but Eve is formed out of the rib of Adam. They are forever linked; they are two bodies yet of one flesh. Even before the fall, God establishes the holy estate of marriage. Love and marriage are one of the most prevalent metaphors in the Bible. In the Old Testament, when the children of Israel go after other gods, they are often described as being unfaithful, prostituting themselves even. Already in the Old Testament, we see God using marriage to help people understand their relationship to Him.

Marriage is one of the few things that survives our fall into sin. Marriage is integral to God's story of salvation. As soon as Adam and Eve fall into sin, God promises them that their offspring will defeat Satan. He will crush his head, and Satan will strike His heel. As we look at the Old Testament, however, it doesn't take too long to see marriage being abused. Even before Seth is born, Adam and Eve have an evil great x5 or x6 grandson named Lamech who has multiple wives. Lamech also, by chance, seems to be a big fan of murder. Abraham steps outside the bonds of his marriage when his wife convinces him to have a child with their servant. Jacob has two wives and several concubines. David has many wives, as does his son Solomon. It's not hard to find examples of broken marriages in the Old Testament.

It's probably easier to find bad examples of marriage than it is to find good examples in the Bible. You would think that God would have just given up on marriage after all of the ways it has been abused, and yet, He doesn't. It doesn't matter how often it is abused, it doesn't matter how twisted it becomes, God keeps coming back to marriage.

Jesus talks about marriage all the time; He uses it in parables many times and He even argues with the pharisees about it. Everything before the fall was perfect, without sin, without blemish. Everything worked the way that God created it to, even marriage, especially marriage. God is unwilling to give up on marriage. In marriage, God has given us a shadow of perfection; God has given us a shadow of His love for us.

Even in the most imperfect, beaten down, and dysfunctional marriage, you can still see a shadow of Christ and His love for us. You can see Christ because a broken marriage reveals everything that marriage should be. Every marriage is broken in some regard; we are sinful people. The curse that is laid upon Eve at the fall is this, "Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."

From the fall on, husband and wife are pitted against each other. People are sinful. Husbands either lead too harshly or don't lead at all, they mess up, they make mistakes, they do things that they shouldn't, they make bad decisions, and their families suffer because of them. Wives struggle to forgive, they lose their patience, they try to step out of their role as helper, try to take control. Every marriage goes through one of these difficulties at some point. Yet still God doesn't give up on marriage. God takes the bad and the difficult things of this life and He turns them to His purposes. When we see our own failures and the failures of others in their marriages, we can better see the faithfulness of Christ.

Christ is the husband who loves His bride perfectly. He loves you perfectly; He will never abandon you, forsake you, be unfaithful to you, or lead you in a way that you should not go. Christ loved His bride so much that He sacrificed His own life so that we might live.

Our world today seems to have all but given up on marriage. They have taken the good and perfect gift and have done their best to pervert it. Notice in our reading for today that there isn't any gender-neutral language; it isn't spouse love your spouse. It is husband love your wife; wife respect your husband. The world would tell you that love is love. The world wants to define love however it would like, but here in Ephesians, we see how God defines love: husband and wife. Christ and His church. There are plenty of false teachers who would have you believe that the Bible is silent on homosexuality, but it's just not true. Marriage was created for man and woman; we see it right here.

Adam wasn't good enough, so God created a woman for him. Together, they were perfect. Eve made Adam what he needed to be, just as Adam made Eve what she needed to be. One husband cannot be the head of another; one wife cannot submit to another. The theological karate that some of these false teachers do in order to try and convince people that the New Testament supports homosexuality is astounding. It all comes down to the same question: do you believe, really believe, that God's Word means what it says? Or do we use our own desires to understand God's Word?

Homosexuality is not the only perversion of marriage that is prevalent in our world. Divorce is rampant; we get sick of one spouse and decide that it's time for a new one, and in doing so, we rip ourselves apart. "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." When we abandon the one to whom we have joined, we tear apart our own flesh. Sure, we self-justify and try our best to make excuses, but the Bible is clear: it’s sexual immorality or abandonment by an unbeliever. There is nothing about self-fulfillment or happiness in there, there is definitely nothing about "falling in or out of love."

To be clear, abandonment takes many forms; a husband who has abandoned his role as a protector of his family and has instead become an abuser has abandoned his family. He doesn't love his wife as Christ loves the church; he hates his wife, and he hates Christ. An abuser has not only abandoned his family but has abandoned his God. People my age are getting married later and later; the median age of women who get married in the US is 27.5 and for men its 29.5. When sex is separated from marriage, when a couple is living together already, why get married?

I could go on, but I hope it's clear enough now. Marriage is broken, it's infected with sin. Every marriage is infected with sin except one: Christ's marriage to you. It doesn't matter how many times you have abandoned Him; it doesn't matter how many times you have neglected Him; it doesn't matter how many times you have wanted to be your own god and make you own rules: He has not abandoned you. He loves you and cares for you, and He is ready to welcome you back.

We have all sinned, we have all made mistakes, we have all stepped out of God's design for marriage. But Christ has not; He has forgiven you for every mistake you have made in your marriage. Every perversion of His good gift has been forgiven, just as every perversion of any gift that God has given you has been forgiven. You have been forgiven by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross for you. In the waters of Holy Baptism, God has washed you and made you new. He has claimed you as His Holy Bride.

The Church is the bride of Christ, and in His marriage to you, He can redeem anything, even your marriage, as broken as it might be. God can fix it; He takes broken and dead things and makes them new again. He can do that to your marriage if you follow Paul's guidance for today. Wives submit to your husbands, and husbands love your wives sacrificially, putting their needs before your own.

Not only will Christ redeem your broken marriage, but one day, Christ will redeem your broken bodies. One day, He will call you out of your grave. One day, you will see the perfection that is already yours through Holy Baptism.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.