

What does a wise man say to his wife? Nothing. He is a wise man. I have now proven to Fr. Roman that I too, can be funny. Maybe.

Our Old Testament and Gospel readings are both about our intimate connection to God. Typically, that word is reserved for deep relationships of a romantic nature, yet I would ponder with you: what relationship is closer than that of our creator and ourselves.

It is out of this relationship, where we are created, just a few verses before that God created us from the “dust of the ground,”<sup>1</sup> in order that we might be part of God. The Creator so wanted us connected to the rest of the earth that we are part of the ground. It is this image that we invoke on Ash Wednesday acknowledging that some day we will return to dust, to being part of God’s very self.<sup>2</sup> It is this dust that reminds us we can be connected to God and our creation. Moving forward, when God differentiated humans, according to Genesis,<sup>3</sup> God made one from the other. God made us to be both partners with each other, and in a sense, with God, yet also to understand we are to serve and worship our Lord.<sup>4</sup>

It is both our differences and our deep similarities that give humans the opportunity for an intimate relationship with each other. With friendships, and as we hear about in our Gospel, with a marriage relationship.

We are to be united and joined together. We are to strive for connection. That is why the pandemic is so hard; we strive to connect and that is very difficult on Zoom.

There are many things a couple remembers in their marriage: Their honeymoon, their first home, and their first fight as a married couple. It is the first time when a couple experiences

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:7

<sup>2</sup> Mitchell L.L. (1996). *Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and the Great Fifty Days*. London: A Cowley Publication.p.3

<sup>3</sup> We see a shift in language in the Hebrew language at this point. The full explanation can be found: Wolf, Lisa. (2021) Working Preacher. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-27-2/commentary-on-genesis-218-24-5>

<sup>4</sup> See the reflection from Brueggemann. (2005). *Theology of the Old Testament* Fortress: Minneapolis. p.528

some separation from each other. Some sense of something being not right. Now, I have learned much from my husband over the past twelve years: patience, the best times to have serious conversations, the meaning of blessing someone's heart.

So many lessons.

When I look at couples for an example, I look for couples who have been married for decades (66 years to be precise). Archbishop Desmond Tutu, said he has known moments of pure joy and moments where joy shrivels in the heat of bitter argument. Yet his idea of marriage comes from the ancient liturgies exploring people to love rather than try to be in love. Love is an action. These are his words about how our love is meant to mirror God's love:

“Perfect love is not an emotion; it is not how we feel. It is what we do. Perfect love is action that is not wrapped up in self-regard, and it has no concern with deserving. Instead, perfect love is love poured out. It is self-offering made out of the joy of giving. It requires no prompting. It seeks no response and no reward. God's love is perfect because God always and only performs acts of love.”<sup>5</sup>

If we continuously strived to act this way, all of our friendships would be on solid ground. Marriages would be easier. God understands we are human and fall short. God give grace. Jesus dreams for more. That is what our connection to God is like: whether we desire the presence of the creator in our life or not, God is ready to take our hand and lead us back to an eternal connection. The Pharisees asked Jesus a question to try and trick him, ““Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”<sup>6</sup> Jesus had other plans. Rather than talking about division, instead of talking

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<sup>5</sup> This section on Desmond Tutu is from *Made for Goodness And Why this Matters*.(2010) Chapter 2: Stop “Being Good” HarperCollins. The quote is from p.24. The book is co-authored with his daughter, Mpho Tutu. His daughter is no longer a priest, has divorced, and is remarried to a woman. The pain she speaks of likely mirrors many peoples struggles with marriage.

<sup>6</sup> Mark 10:11 Soards, Marion. Dozeman, Thomas. McCabe, Kendall. (1993). *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary Year b: After Pentecost 2*. Nashville: Abingdon. p.77

about legality, not quoting Deuteronomy,<sup>7</sup> Jesus focused on all of God's creation's natural connection and unity with God Jesus told the Pharisees humans were created to be "one flesh." He wanted the answer to be clear: to remind us how we were intimately connected to God in the Garden of Eden. That is how close we should remain with each other. Jesus is lifting up those who are unprotected and separated.<sup>8</sup> The two become instantly connected in our passage.

It is with this idea of connection that Jesus invites those listening to think about divorce. I would tell you today that God is reminding those in the crowd to remember the possible intimacy of Eden. Jesus is linking humanity's hand with God and reminding them that, yes, they can find this connection within each other.<sup>9</sup>

I recognize that this text seems disjointed. It might feel harsh. Yet, when you look deeper at the scripture, it turns out the Readings are about being united to God through Christ. The text in Mark is what God dreams and hopes for us. It is also about protecting the vulnerable. God dreams and hopes for us to have fulfilling long marriages with one person without divorce.

Pastorally speaking, we know that divorce happens and when it does, so many hearts are broken. To me, from everything I have researched this is not a passage of condemnation. The

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<sup>7</sup> From Mark for Everyone: 'But this wasn't answering Jesus' actual question, which was 'What did Moses command?' Jesus doesn't say Moses was wrong with the 'permission' in Deuteronomy; but he insists that one should go back to Genesis, to the account of creation itself, to discover the creator's will. (Jesus and the Pharisees both assume, of course, that Moses wrote Genesis.) Genesis is where you find the command in question." Wright, N.T. (2001). *Mark for Everyone*. Knoxville: Westminster Press.

<sup>8</sup> This is one of two creature stories. Note: This creature is not alone, there are birds and animals of the land. In the Garden of Eden, God has several creation moments. At first, if we read the text the human seems at least non-gendered first. The creation can enjoy the plants and the fish. Personally, I would love to spend a day with creation, just sitting on the beach and reading under a palm tree. This sounds divine. Yet, The Creator knows that more is needed. Something to fulfill this creation. Here is where we see the first indication of gender. Of separation. Of one part coming from another. See the translation done: Wolf, Lisa. (2021) Working Preacher. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-27-2/commentary-on-genesis-218-24-5>

<sup>9</sup> This idea is from: Wright, N.T. (2001). *Mark for Everyone*. Knoxville: Westminster Press.

topic of divorce is one of those best dealt with in pastoral conversations and small groups. What Jesus speaks of here is God uniting us together.<sup>10</sup>

The Pharisees are asking about legalistic points. Jesus talks about love. The Pharisees ask about divorce. Jesus talks about the importance of marriage. The Pharisees are truly asking about division; and Jesus is truly talking about the ultimate unity. He uses an example of way we encounter The Creator through marriage.

Jesus is, of course, being subversive. History has taught Jesus how dangerous talking about divorce can be for someone. Remember that John the Baptist ended up with his head on a platter after declaring the marriage between Herod and Herodias unlawful.<sup>11</sup> Jesus understood the trap being laid before his feet, and therefore, he came up with a clever reply, as he had done many times before<sup>12</sup> and one that undertook the deeper question at hand. Think now of a marriage and all the people who are united through this action: blending of families. Jesus is encouraging these connections to be continued. He is encouraging this unity to be strengthened.

Dreaming together is a profoundly powerful part of marriage.<sup>13</sup> It is through these dreams that a couple is able to shape their future. Whether it is something simple: buying a house and having children. Or something more complex, such as overcoming the incredible prejudices of Apartheid such as the Tutus. These dreams, these visions, unite a couple. It is this dream that Jesus shares with us. He reminds us that Moses allowed for divorce, Jesus said, “only because of

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<sup>10</sup> For a further explanation of this see Doyle, C.A. (2021). Hitchhiking the Word.

<http://hitchhikingthebible.blogspot.com/2012/10/proper-22bordinary-27bpentecost-19.html?m=1>

<sup>11</sup> Mark 6:14-29; see the comments on how this is connected to divorce in Wright, N.T. (2001). *Mark for Everyone*. Knoxville: Westminster Press. p.131

<sup>12</sup> Mark 2:9; 2:17; 2:27; 3:4; and 7:15 See the full comments on Jesus' quibs from Doyle, C.A. (2021). Hitchhiking the Word. <http://hitchhikingthebible.blogspot.com/2012/10/proper-22bordinary-27bpentecost-19.html?m=1>

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, K.A. (2005). *The Spiritual Practices of Marriage*. Monclova: CLB Press. pp.27-46

your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you.”<sup>14</sup> God never intends for separation or discord among beloved creation

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<sup>14</sup> Mark 10:5

Yet Jesus tells us, from the beginning of humantime, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’<sup>15</sup> Again, Jesus is lifting up unity. If I were writing this reference to Deuteronomy 24 I would give it a huge asterisk: it is not condoning divorce, rather is protecting the female. If you read the text in Deuteronomy in its entirety it is very much about protecting the woman so that she is not seen as an adultress when she remarries, which in Moses' time, as a woman she would very much have needed to remarry in order to protect her social status.<sup>16</sup> Flash forward to Jesus' time. Divorces were being issued too quickly by men against women. It is clear that Jesus is trying to protect women. Similar to the Old Testament writers, He was striving for justice for all. Jesus is endorsing unity. Unity and deep connection in marriage rather than certificates of divorce written with superficial intentions.

This brings us to the children. As I said before, it feels disjointed to move onto small children, yet if you think about the place of children in Jesus' culture the shift between children and protecting women is not that large. Remember, God brought Jesus to us through a woman.

It was Mary, a real woman who nurtured and fed the Christ child with her body. Their relationship was, by necessity, intimate. Jesus was raised from a child by a woman. He knew that children were undervalued. In that culture the place of children was lower. We have this idea, in Western civilization of child development. This is a recent practice. In Jesus' time, children were not the primary focus, they were secondary in families and society. Yet here, Jesus is saying even these, the least of society must be listened to in order to understand God. In this text, Jesus is saying, I was once this small and knew more than you can possibly understand. These children

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<sup>15</sup> Mark 10:5-9

<sup>16</sup> See the notes on Deuteronomy in Soards, Marion. Dozeman, Thomas. McCabe, Kendall. (1993). *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary Year b: After Pentecost 2*. Nashville: Abingdon.

are full of insights as well. Jesus is encouraging us not to throw out the thoughts of these children. He is reminding us that our connection to children comes from our very souls, from the earth to which we are bound, and sometimes from our very bodies.<sup>17</sup>

We must look at our readings today and conclude: God created us for each other. Whether we are in marriage and forever connected to someone or hold an abiding friendship, we were made for relationships. If we look at the text from Genesis it is easy to see that yes, God created us in glory to be connected to each other and tangentially to the rest of the earth.

The Creator very much wishes for us to nurture and grow this relationship rather than step away from it. Even in times when we find strife, when we disagree, Jesus wants us to find a connection. God desires for us to see Him in each other. Jesus' dream is for us to overcome all obstacles. He is constantly walking with us, even when we push him away. This is done in the hopes that we can be finally and truly united through Christ.

So today, we are called to unite others to God through Christ. We are asked to stand with people in unity even when we disagree. Jesus wants us to constantly and consistently support each other even when the world around us promotes division. Each of us must come up with specific ways to live out this challenge. The answer certainly begins with mirroring God's love. Amen.

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<sup>17</sup> This point is a furthering of the idea from Bishop Doyle about children's place in society. Doyle, C.A. (2021). Hitchhiking the Word. <http://hitchhikingthebible.blogspot.com/2012/10/proper-22ordinary-27pentecost-19.html?m=1>