

NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost – October 3rd, 2021 (11:11 am) – IN PERSON AND ONLINE

CREATED TO LIVE NOT ALONE

Edited Friday, 1 de October de 2021

NBLC_SVC_100321.docx

Psalm 128 / Genesis 2:18-25 / Hebrews 2:1-13 / Mark 10:2-16

The Lutheran Church usually follows the Lectionary. The lectionary is a series of Bible readings for each week on a three-year cycle. I like using the lectionary because it prevents me from preaching on a few favourite (and easy) texts all the time.

Sometimes I have difficulty understanding some Bible readings. Sometimes I am thinking with my own thoughts, wrongly, that my opinion is better than God's opinion. But, often when I deal with a biblical text that I find challenging — when I burrow to its depths, I often find that I discover unexpected blessings.

A text on divorce is obviously difficult in a world in which divorce has become more common. The text from Genesis is only a bit easier because it gives some beautiful images of marriage that many people have found difficult to duplicate.

There are many people, including some here today, for whom the subject of marriage or divorce is difficult or even painful:

- We have a number of single persons or single parents, most of whom would probably love to meet Mr. Right or Miss Right.
- We have a number of divorced people, many of whom have gone through terrible pain in the process of their divorces—many of whom may feel terribly guilty.
- We have people who are in difficult marriages and don't know what to do.
- We have widows or widowers who have lost their husband or wife and are grieving or feel alone.
- We have lots of people who are lonely and would like not to be lonely.

As we look at this passage from Genesis, we see that God created man and woman as a way to meet real human needs. God said, **“It is not good that the man should be alone”** (Genesis 2:18).

God created us to need other people. Just think of all the ways that people go about meeting their needs for relationships with other people. We have friends at church, in social circles, in political activities, and at work. In fact, for many people, work has replaced the neighbourhood as the primary place to meet people. We have

often found that we know things about people at work quite well, but about our neighbours we know almost nothing, or nothing at all.

Recognizing that “It is not good that the man should be alone,” God created woman and man together as a beautiful way to meet human needs. His intention was – and remains – that marriage be a lifelong relationship.

However, many marriages fail to capture that lofty standard today. Many people find it difficult to find a suitable mate. Others find themselves with a partner who is abusive or who is faithful. Others find themselves in a marriage in which communication is difficult and the thrill is gone.

Divorce has become more common and normalized in society. There are lots of reasons for this. For one thing, in the past women were more dependant on men, but many women today can support themselves financially, so are not as constrained to remain in difficult relationships. For another thing, Hollywood and romantic novels have created unrealistic expectations. Sometimes we lose track of the fact that marriage has its not-so-romantic side. The psychologist Joyce Brothers¹ put it this way: *“Marriage is not just spiritual communion and passionate embraces; marriage is also three meals a day, sharing the workload and remembering to carry out the trash.”*

I think that a part of the problem is that we have come to accept divorce as a natural part of life. With divorce being such a common occurrence, it is sometimes difficult to remember that lifelong marriage is the goal.

We need to recover the beautiful image of Genesis 2. We need to recover the image of the man and woman created in the image of God — created specifically as suitable mates for each other — created as lifelong partners. That is what God intended for us.

What does our text have to say to those who are divorced among us?

The acknowledgment found in Deuteronomy is turned by these particular Pharisees into permission for divorce. But remember, here, in this text of Mark, we are not talking about our modern egalitarian model of marriage and divorce, but a system where men have all the power, where the sexes are treated unequally, and where a divorced woman has very little hope for the future.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joyce_Brothers

These Pharisees understood the letter of the law but altogether neglected the reference right but get the spirit wrong. Jesus points out that Moses would never have written that exception just to allow for a divorce to happen as a normal thing, but because of THE HARDNESS OF THE HUMAN HEART IN THIS WORLD OUTSIDE EDEN!

Jesus was trying to say to them that "YOUR HEARTS ARE NOT RIGHT WITH GOD! If we human beings were sinless then marriages would always work, and Moses wouldn't have written about what happens when they don't!

Jesus addresses each one of us and says the same thing. *Don't you get it? YOUR HEARTS ARE HARD! Or YOUR HEARTS ARE HARDENED AGAINST GOD AND HIS WILL!* But please note this, and note it well. He's not just challenging the idea of divorce. He's challenging every last one of us, even if we have been married happily for six decades. The problem of the hardened heart is not limited to divorced people but is common to us all. In some, it becomes manifest in a marital break-up. In others, it shows itself in a marriage that remains together but is lifeless. In still others hardness of heart appears in a failure to forgive our friends, in a judgmental spirit toward our children or parents, or any of the other forms of sin in which we humans become trapped. The divorced are not worse and not better than the rest. We all find ourselves in the same place: outside the gates of Eden because we sin. Our hearts are turned away from God.

It is important that we say: Divorce is not something normal before God. Marriage is. So Divorcing is not a "right" from the Christian perspective but something that breaks the original order of Creation. We understand though that there are some situations in which remaining married could lead people to commit even more sins and they have to make the hard decision of breaking up. But still, we don't want to consider marriage so lightly as to say if there are problems, even little problems, "get a divorce and move on". We will always consider divorce to be a last, not first, resort in a relationship.

Christians, remember this. In Christ, there is forgiveness. In Christ, there is always the possibility of a new beginning. There is hope and there is peace promised by Christ. What sin breaks up in us Christ binds it back together. He is the One to whom we can always resort as we need comfort, restoration and starting over again.

At a certain point in our text this morning, Jesus stops talking about hard hearts. Instead, he takes us by both hands and looking at us with that expression of compassion, hope, and remembrance, calls us back to a time before time, back to

when our home was the garden, back to the intention of God at creation. God made them male and female. Delightfully different. Wonderfully equal. Intended to be one flesh. No hardness of heart. No games, no secrets, but naked and unashamed.

We read in Genesis that the woman was made from the man's rib. It's said in Jewish tradition that the reason for this peculiar procedure is that woman and man might be intimate and equal. The woman was not made from man's head so that she should be superior, nor from his feet, that she should be inferior, but rather from a bone near his center, near his heart, that the two might be equal and intimate inside marriage.

Marriage is not a problem to be solved. It is a mystery to be lived. It is not a business deal subject to a cost-benefit analysis. It is a means by which wife and husband can participate in the kingdom of God — and do so in the comfort of their own home!

God has created us with a need for relationships and has provided different ways to meet those needs. I am always impressed with the importance of the church in the lives of so many of our people. Worship, Sunday school, Confirmation Class, music lessons, meetings, Souls Harbour Meal, etc... activities in the church and out of the church all bind us together into relationships that sustain us and keep us connected with the Word of God. There are many other ways that God meets our needs for people. God is good all the time because He concerns about us in many ways and anywhere, He help us in any way.

We will never recover fully the beauty of Eden this side of Heaven. But we can live to seek Christ's help in restoring ourselves and to try to live with to the image of God in which we were created - **in Jesus Christ alone**. We can seek the company of Christ-like people, with good principles that try to live in this path too. And we can thank God that, even though we have allowed his image to be defaced in our lives, he forgives and loves us - and opens new possibilities to us every day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

(Pastor Paulo Brum with the collaborations by Pastors Lucas Albrecht and Terry Defoe)
(Reviewed by Lucas Albrecht, Shelby Antonowitsch and Terry Defoe)