

THE MAKING OF A GOOD MARRIAGE

Hearing our theme for our sermon, some may be tempted to think, “Well, this sermon has nothing to do with me?” Maybe you are not married, perhaps you have been the victim of divorce, or sadly you are a widow or widower. Certainly my intentions are not to make anyone feel left out, guilty, or sad, mad, or bad. But I believe our sermon today has a lot to say to everyone present, Someday you might get married, or married again. Maybe you know someone who is thinking of getting married, or someone who is struggling in his or her marriage. Or, someday you might find yourself in a conversation and suddenly your Christian values on marriage are challenged. It would be good if we understand what marriage is really all about. And more important, what does God teach us about marriage.

So that brings us to the question, what is marriage? Someone once quipped, “Marriage is a great institution...if you are ready for an institution.” Another quipped, “Marriage is the triumph of emotion over all sound reasoning!” But I think Milton Berle said it best. “Marriage is like a three ring circus. First comes the engagement ring, then the wedding ring, and then the sufferingring!”

Now seriously, all kidding aside, what is marriage all about? Let’s go back to the beginning, to creation. Let’s look at God’s Word. After all, God is the authority on marriage. He designed it so God should know how it is suppose to work. Let’s look at our text: Genesis 2:18. “And the LORD God said, ‘**It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper for him.**’”

Based on Genesis 2:18, the Biblical description of a good marriage is that marriage is a partnership! The Hebrew word for “helper” implies a true partnership. In this partnership both the husband and wife joyfully give, care for, love, share, and forgive each other. In this partnership, each is concerned with the welfare, success, needs, and care of the other. In this partnership there is a mutual giving and caring, receiving and returning. And when it is God’s will, for the procreation of children. St. Paul adds in 1 Corinthians 7:2 that marriage is a wonderful antidote for sexual immorality.

Contrary to some beliefs, marriage is not a function of the church. It is the function of the state. A person can be legally marriage regardless where they are married. Many marriages have nothing to do with a church. Are only marriages performed in a church or by a pastor recognized by God? Of

course not! The state's prime interest in a marriage concerns property: who owns the property, who gets it the time of death, and who is liable for the indebtedness of the property.

And don't buy the argument that "marriage is just a piece a paper." It is more than just having a license that recognizes you are married. There is a public proclamation in marriage. Genesis 2:24 implies that there needs to be a **public awareness** or **acknowledgement** when two people are married. There is a sense of joy telling the world, "She is my wife!" or "He is my man!" As we celebrate marriage this weekend, we do so with a spirit of joy and thankfulness for our spouses.

Do you know which nation has the highest divorce rate? The United States! The divorce rate in our land of plenty is 50% (Half of the marriage will end in divorce.) How can it be when we live in a nation with one of the highest standards of living, we have such an abundance of treasures and material things? That is sad! Apparently money and possessions don't buy happiness nor lasting marriages.

There is another sad commentary on marriage in America. True or false: Christians in America have a much lower divorce rate than non-Christians? The answer is **False!** Sadly, atheists and agnostics have a lower divorce rate than many Christian denominations. Conservative evangelicals, including "Born Again Christians" have the highest rate of divorce among Christians. Lutherans, we, and the Catholics, rank the lowest at a divorce rate of 21%.

So much for the notion that marriages are made in heaven! They are not! They are made here on earth as the result of a lot of hard work. A good marriage does not just happen. Also the making of a good marriage has very little to do with a couples' attractiveness, income, possessions, or education. What makes for a good marriage? Think of these characteristics: hard work, faithfulness, commitment, forgiveness, dedication , unselfish love, honesty, and a great sense of humor. To make a good marriage always takes two committed people working hard, dedicated to each other and to the proposition that divorce is NOT an option. It is sad if one is not committed. It is sad because one's choice can affect the marriage and life of the other.

People might fall out of trees, but they don't fall out of love. People make the choice not to love someone. Love is a decision. What is the best model of this truth? God's decision to send Jesus to sacrifice His blood and pay for

our sins instead of having us suffer the punishment we deserve to suffer. God chose to love sinners; God chose to love sinners and send His Son to take our place. God chose to save us through Jesus. God made the decision!

One of the most insightful passages of Scripture on the making of a good marriage is also one of the most misunderstood passages. In Ephesians 5:22 and following, St. Paul gives great advice to husbands and wives. Husbands are to act like Jesus and sacrifice for their wives, and wives are to love, respect, and trust their husbands as the church (the bride) loves, respects, and trusts Jesus. If only more men would act like Jesus, the divorce rate among Christians would rapidly decrease!

There are many temptations that threaten marriages every day. One is selfishness. We live in a world that worships the self to the point that we ignore the needs of others. Sometimes selfishness expresses itself in abusive behavior. A second is unfaithfulness. Sexual unfaithfulness is not just for politicians and pro athletes. Nor is unfaithfulness just sexual. In the vows we promise “to love, honor, and cherish; to remain true and faithful for better or worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, and to be faithful unto death.” When we fail to honor or cherish our spouse, when we bail out when we lose our fortunes or the other is overcome by illness, we are unfaithful. The third temptation is the perversion of marriage. This is done when two people live together rather than marry. I am in no way a homophobe, but this idea of same sex marriage is unbiblical and wrong. I don’t care what the political correctness police or even other Christian denominations say, same sex marriage is wrong! And the fourth temptation is **our culture**. Our society no longer holds marriage as being sacred. Cheating spouses, people cohabitating, and womanizing are often glamorized in books, magazines, and movies. Today some in our society suggest that marriage licenses, like dog licenses, car licenses, and hunting licenses, should be renewable. If you don’t want to stay married, don’t renew your license. People argue that since we are living longer it’s hard to stay married to the same person. We want variety, freshness, and the right to change our minds. Folks, marriage is meant to be a lifelong commitment. Choose your spouse wisely! The making of good marriage requires constant commitment, hard work, love and forgiveness, determination and mutual sharing.

I’d like to tell you the story of two couples. I call it “A Tale of Two Marriages.” Both couples made the vows before God’s altar to be faithful and true, to love, honor, and cherish, and to love each other forever in better

or worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer. Both husbands claimed to be Christians, men of God.

One Saturday morning Sandy sat on the edge of her bed nursing her 3 month old daughter while her husband, an M.P. in the Air Force, slept beside her. Their 5 year old son was in the living room watching Saturday morning cartoons. The boy noticed his father's gun left wrapped in the holster on the T.V. Curiosity got the best of the boy and he pulled out the gun. It discharged and the bullet flew through the wall and hit Sandy in the neck. Instantly she became a quadriplegic. She could not lift a fork to her mouth, swat a fly off her nose, hold her baby, dance with her husband, or make love.

Her husband immediately said, "Wait a minute, I didn't bargain for this when I got married!" First he refused to care for her. So her family moved her to a nursing home. Her insurance provided her with a registered nurse to give her the proper care. Her husband no longer brought the children to see her. He had a parade of women move in with him. Then he filed for divorce. Wisely, the judge denied his request because Sandy would have lost her medical care. A few years later, she died, I am certain, of a broken heart.

The other marriage involved Fred and Anna. Anna was pregnant and one day she slipped and fell. In the process, due to a freak fall, she became a paraplegic. She could not push a vacuum, ride a bike, dance with her husband, or make love. Yet Fred, instead of trying to get out of the marriage, saw this as an opportunity to show his love for Anna.

Long before there were guidelines for homes being handicap accessible, Fred built a house with the doors, shower, light switches, and sinks all compatible for wheel chair confined people. He built a ramp for her to enter the house. He encouraged her to learn to drive and bought a van specially equipped for her to lift herself into the van and drive with just her hands. She had a full time job. And yes, she gave birth to a health daughter.

A few years ago Julie and I saw them when I was invited back to Concordia Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne to preach at their 100th anniversary. We happened to see Fred and Anna in a restaurant on Saturday night, celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary.

Now, what made the real difference between the marriages in "A Tale of Two Marriages?" One husband was a Christian in name only while the other

lived his Christian faith. One was unfaithful in keeping his vows and his promise was worthless, the other was totally committed to his vows and was faithful to his promise. Fred had what it takes to make a good marriage. Do you?

One way to insure a lasting, good marriage is to walk with Jesus as a couple! Together worship regularly, study His Word, and step out in faith and live the Word. You will find the strength to care and give, love and forgive your spouse forever and a day.

May God bless the marriages of all our members as we celebrate God's gift of marriage. With Jesus we can make a good marriage.

INJ, amen.