

Proper 22A (Pentecost 18), 2009

Text: Mark 10:2-16

Title: "A Spouse's Faith"

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Families define us. They make us who we are. They give us people to care for and people to care for us.

You were born as someone's son or daughter. God gave you a place within a family. He didn't create you as an isolated individual, but a member of a family.

When God became man, He was born into a family. He had a mom and a dad, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins.

Families are important to us. Our mission statement here at Faith is, "Reaching out to build Christ-centered families of faith."

Having a family of faith means having Christ at the center. He's the one who holds everyone together. It's not about having a picture-perfect family where everyone gets along and everyone behaves and no one ever fights. Families of faith are real families who have their questions and doubts and fears. But through it all, families of faith have Christ at their center and look to Him for all things.

Mothers of faith pray and beg and plead to Christ for their families. Fathers of faith look to Christ to strengthen their faith. Children of faith receive everything they need from Christ, and in turn care for the other children in the family. And within our family we share a common faith that holds us together.

Today Jesus turns our thoughts towards marriage. Marriage is the starting point for our families—the union of husband and wife, blessed by God. From this union God's gift of life flows on through the gifts of children.

I realize that not all of you are married. Some of you hope and look forward to being married. Some of you may never marry. Some of you have been married, but are now single once more as death has taken away your spouse. Some of you have been through the painful process of divorce.

Whether you're married or single, widowed or divorced, it's important for you to hear Jesus' words.

If you're married than Jesus' words define your marriage. Your marriage is not what you make of it, but what God instituted in the beginning.

If you're not married, chances are you know people who are- your parents, your brothers and sisters, your kids, your grandkids, other people in your life. As they struggle with the challenges of married life, the Lord will give you opportunities to echo His words. The world around us is very confused when it comes to marriage, and will have plenty of opportunities to speak our Lord's clear words on marriage.

Marriage is where it starts. Marriage was one of the Lord's first gifts to humankind. God made Eve especially for Adam, that the two of them would be the parents of us all.

Children are conceived by the sexual union of man and woman. God intends this to happen only with the context of marriage, so that children have the benefit of both father and mother together for life.

Now many single parents have acted courageously in raising children on their own. They have worked hard to support and care for their children all on their own. But that's not the way that God intended things to be. Man and woman coming together as husband and wife blessed by God. That's the way God intended things to be.

Jesus' words make it clear who's doing all the work in a marriage, who makes the marriage. It's not the husband. It's not the wife. It's the Lord. The Lord is the busiest, most active person in any marriage.

Jesus says, "What God has joined together..." God is the one who brings husband and wife together in marriage and joins them as one. God is the one who marries any couple.

That's not the way we normally think of things. For us, husband and wife make a marriage. It's about our love. It's about our commitment. It's about our choice in who we want to spend our life with. It's about us. Sure, we ask the Lord to bless our wedding, our marriage, our choice of a spouse, but we're ultimately the ones responsible. It's all about us.

That's how we think. But that's not what Jesus says. Jesus says, "What God has joined." God is the one who marries two people. He puts them together. Whether you were married in the church or in a courthouse, whether it was huge wedding or a small family affair, in all cases, God is the one who puts two people together.

And that's a good thing. If it were all about you, and your love and your commitment, you would be in trouble. Your love fails. Your commitment fails. Every day you fail to live up to your wedding vows. You put yourself and your own needs in place of your spouse's. If it were up to you to keep your marriage together, your marriage would not last.

Thankfully, God is the one who puts us together. Husbands and wives are married not because they decided to get married, but because God declared them to be husband and wife. And His care for us is what keeps us together.

The Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer told two young folks as they were getting married, "It is not your love that sustains your marriage, but your marriage that sustains your love." You say

fall in and out of love with your spouse. You may have doubts and questions if you married the right person. But your marriage does not depend on such things. God has joined you together.

God joins married people together for a purpose. The word “joined” here is literally translated “yoke.” Yokes are used to keep oxen pulling in the same direction. For married folk, God joins them together to pull in the same direction, to work together and cooperate in everything. It keeps us from going our own way, and simply pulling in the direction we want to go.

The yoke is not meant to come off.

Jesus said, “What God has yoked together, let man not separate.” God does not separate two people whom He has joined. But sometimes we do. Sometimes we are so selfish and sinful that we’d rather remove the yoke and go our own way. Often there’s another whom we think would make a better match, and so we forsake our spouse, the one the Lord has joined us to, and join ourselves to another. The Lord calls this adultery.

If you want to see what marriage should look like, look at Christ and His love for the church. See His care for His church as He washes her clean in holy baptism, presenting her to himself without spot, stain or blemish. See Jesus’ care for the church as He feeds her with His own body and blood. See Jesus’ care for the church as He hangs dying on the cross, sacrificing His own life for His bride.

The church did not deserve Christ’s love. It could not be earned. Yet Christ loved the church and gave His own life for her. Even when we sin, when we give our love to others and are unfaithful to Christ, He still loves us and welcomes us back.

Christ-centered families of faith begin with Christ-centered marriages. Christ-centered marriages are not perfect marriages where husband and wife never fight and always get along. All husbands and wives are sinful and will fail and disappoint one another all the time. A Christ-centered marriage is not centered on your love for one another, but on Christ and His love and forgiveness.

In a Christ-centered marriage, husbands and wives don’t love one another because of silly things like looks or income. Husbands and wives don’t love another because somehow they’ve earned or deserved it. We love because Christ loves us. We forgive because Christ has forgiven us.

Do you want to be a better husband or wife? Do you want to be a better mother or father? Do you want to be a better son or daughter? Do you want Christ at the center of your marriage and your family?

Then come, be filled with Christ’s love and forgiveness. Hear His words. Receive His body and blood. Be made like Christ so that His love and His forgiveness flow through you to the rest of your family.

We are reaching out to build Christ-centered families of faith, reaching out to bring others in, to bring them hear to font, pulpit and altar, where Christ transforms us, re-centers us, and makes us a family of faith.