

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany
15 January, Anno Domini 2023
Ephesians 5:22-33

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Beloved of the Lord,

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Our Lord very purposefully chose the occasion of a wedding to perform His first miracle. So we have the opportunity to consider the great gift of marriage which God has bestowed upon creation. With the multitude of voices all shrieking about how antiquated true marriage is and yet, strangely, demanding that their aberrations of it be counted equal to marriage between one man and one woman, it is good for us as children of God to stop and consider just exactly what marriage is and for what purposes God has given it so that we may rightly treasure it and live in it to the glory of God. Marriage is given to us as a gift to be enjoyed. It is a blessing when we live in it according to God’s Word, not only to us but to the whole world.

To know just how important and God-pleasing marriage is consider that man wasn’t complete without it. “It is not good for man to be alone.” As God stretched out the heavens, as He brought order to the creation, He built a reflection of Himself into the very fabric of the universe, a creature superior to all the others in this - God carefully fashioned man and then breathed into man the Holy Spirit. Man was given union with God! Man was created to be God’s vice-regent in creation, carrying out God’s will and enjoying a perfect unity and conversation with God. But Adam could not be an adequate reflection of God being alone. And no other living creature could be a complement or helpmeet for Adam; none could adequately reflect the relationship between God and man because none were like him. God is not alone. God is one but He is most certainly not alone. He is Triune - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A perfect and eternal fellowship of love and unity. So loneliness could not and would not do for man.

And it would not do to have simply another Adam for God isn’t three of Himself. There is distinction and order in the one undivided substance of the Godhead. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father and the Spirit proceeds from them both. But the Father is not begotten, nor is the Spirit. Creation was not yet complete. Everything was not yet very good because man, unlike God, was alone. Thus, in an eternal and beautiful mystery God placed among us an icon of Himself and His relationship to us - God created Eve of the bone and flesh of Adam and brought her to Adam and united them as one flesh, thus instituting and sanctifying the holy estate of marriage. Now creation was very good for man was finally complete, he was fully man because he had woman - bone

of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Now man and woman together were a full reflection of God, of Christ and the Church.

Of course, the world in all its wisdom would have you believe this is nonsense. The world, just like its devil father, loves loneliness, it prizes selfishness and self-gratification above all. It loves to pervert and confuse. It claims that men and women are interchangeable and can even be changed into one another. But this is because Adam forsook his role as husband and chose himself over his Lord and his beloved bride. Adam buckled as Satan attacked his marriage by attacking Eve. Adam refused to speak the Word he had been given by God. He refused to defend his wife and thus all of humanity from lies and death. Adam and Eve swapped roles and the consequences were damning for us all. His selfishness brought about the curse of death, separating us from God, destroying the unity which we enjoyed with Him. That separation from God also meant a permanent wedge had been driven between husbands and wives, men and women, making them jealous of one another, turning them against one another so that they were merely using one another for their own purposes and advantages.

Hence the sexual revolution that has plagued this world and left in its wake a flood of destroyed lives, broken homes, and sad, unanchored children who are blown about like tumbleweeds. Nearly half of the joyous wedding celebrations today end in the bitter war of divorce. Children embark on a futile search for love and belonging in all the wrong places and only end up hurt. And those marriages that do endure are filled with struggle and crosses as sinful desires rise to the surface and seek fulfillment. Many others have come to despise and avoid marriage completely, hopping from bed to bed, living together apart from marriage, running at the first sign that they aren't happy or are asked to sacrifice for the good of the other.

But marriage isn't about you. Truly marriage is about everyone except you. That is its blessing. Behold, Christ our Lord and His beloved bride, the holy Christian Church - the true and model marriage after which all marriages are named. Behold the true husband, Jesus, who takes nothing from His bride except her sin. Her debt becomes His and He takes full responsibility for it and for its payment. And the payment is steep - His Blood. But that is no matter. He will most certainly and gladly bear it. That's what real husbands do. It doesn't matter that we have acquired this debt completely on our own. He paid it, all of it, and required nothing from us. And in return He gives us His blessing, forgiveness, and salvation.

In Christian marriage there are no assertions of right or power. There is headship exercised in all gentleness and humility for the elevation of the bride. There is feeding with the Word of God and daily bread. There is protection. There is love and unrelenting devotion, no matter how far we have wandered. The Lord Jesus always stands ready to forgive and receive us back. That is a true man and true husband. That is the only and true godly strength. No domineering. No abuse. No demands. Not an

ounce of selfishness. Only selflessness and truth and faithfulness and devotion. Always and only love. Always seeking the good and defense of your bride. This, men, boys, is your example, your role model. Only in the Lord Jesus do you see what a real man and husband is and ought to be as God created them to be. The office of husband is a divine and holy calling that comes with great responsibility, not the least of which is that you must lay down your life for your beloved wife to protect her, to tend to her, and to care for her. This is what Jesus has done for us. He has laid aside His own glory to save us, to die for us and rescue us from eternal damnation. In the same way, our wives are to be our chief concern. A good husband is a humble man who recognizes the daunting position to which the Lord has ordained him. He knows his own weaknesses and sins and confesses them, seeking the Lord's mercy in Jesus and praying for the Lord's strength and wisdom. Men, we have fallen far short and need to seek the forgiveness of our Lord who has entrusted us with this sacred responsibility and the forgiveness of our wives to whom we vowed to be as Christ and who need us to be faithful that they may be faithful. When we fail, when we cast aside the God-given responsibilities that we willingly committed to, they and the whole world suffers.

Likewise, wives, God has in His wisdom so ordered your holy office as to receive the love of your husband as the Church receives the love of Jesus. You are the benefactors. It is for the Church which Christ died and it is for you that your husbands must lay down their own lives. And in response you are to receive the good things which your husbands give you as from the Lord, acknowledging in faith the majesty of the office hidden under such weak and frail frames. As the Church is not the head of Christ, so the wife isn't the head of the husband, and in faith we know that to be good. In faith, there is no fear or need to quarrel about equality because it is a fruitless conversation rooted in unbelief. Gentleness and faith are the marks of a God-pleasing wife who does not fear but trusts her heavenly Father and the institution and order which God has given and to which He Himself has called her. The Christian wife recognizes that she is an integral part of the living picture of her true Lord and His beloved bride, the Church. You are not less than your husband, but wondrously different. His perfect complement and he yours. And as the Church daily repents for straining against the headship of her Lord, wives so to must you repent to your Lord and to your husbands and pray for the faith and strength to submit to your husbands' headship as to the Lord.

And let's not forget that the love of God, being always directed outward, is the source of life. Thus the love of husband and wife, ideally, has as its fruit the ongoing work of creating new life, bearing and raising children not just to populate the world but to populate the kingdom of God, to bring them to the font and to teach them to know and trust in the God who knit them together and who redeemed them. Children are a heritage from the Lord. The selfish world doesn't believe this because children require our time, our attention, our resources. They make noise and messes. They slow us down. They don't want what we want. This hatred was on full display this past week as nearly half of

the House of Representatives voted against requiring that life-saving care be provided for children who survived an attempted abortion. Lord, have mercy upon us!

But how blessed we are to be surrounded by them, to hear them Sunday morning singing at the wrong time, saying “Amen” loudly because it’s the only part they know so far, even getting a little fussy and wiggly. They are learning and growing and how blessed are we to be the ones to teach them and nurture them and draw them to Christ, who wants all little children brought to Him.

There is no one among us who can claim innocence here. We have all stumbled before and during marriage. And in doing so we have given the world a false picture of Christ and His love for us. We have treated marriage as something that is only meant to enhance the life of the individual rather than create a new thing through which God shows Himself to the world. We fail to defend and uphold marriage as a joyful estate and rather join the world in denigrating it, speaking poorly of our spouse, speaking of marriage as a bondage and inconvenience. We encourage people to stay away from it as long as possible. We elevate careers and self over this holy institution with all of its God-given promises.

Let us confess our sins and flee to the true Bridegroom who stands eternally ready with His mercy, ready to forgive and receive us back even though we have been so utterly unfaithful to Him. Even though we have made a mockery of His gifts and abused them to our own advantage, He is always faithful and would have us at His table that we might feast on the meal of our salvation, His Body and Blood, that we might be restored to Him. He will not abuse or use you. He will never take advantage of you for His own sake. He has already born your guilt and covered your shame with His own robe of righteousness.

And then let us extol this great gift of marriage. Let us pray fervently to bless all who enter into it. Let us pray that those who desire a godly spouse may be granted one and that they may wait patiently and faithful until that day. Let us sing the praises of the union of husband and wife to our children and grandchildren. Let us embrace our spouses warmly and treat them with the utmost gentleness and affection in the sight of the world so that they may see the love of Christ for the Church. Let us set aside our vanity and our fear and receive this good gift from God in faith. Let us rejoice in the good gift of children even as our heavenly Father rejoices over every single one of His baptized children and is always desiring more.

Parents, let us teach our children to love and desire marriage and children above all other things. Fathers show your sons how to treat women in a godly way, as a true man should - to make their needs your chief concerns, to be gentle with them, to elevate them, to be Christ to your wife feeding her daily with the Word of God. Teach them that jobs are simply a means to the end of taking care of your family, nothing more. Teach them to walk humbly before the Lord, praying daily for help and strength and wisdom, reading

the Scriptures to them and faithfully bringing your families to the house of the Lord every week that the Lord may feed all of you, that He may forgive all of you, and that together you may receive His gifts and sing His praises with the rest of the family of God. Show your daughters what kind of men they should demand for a husband - a respectful, gentle, strong, faithful Christian husband who takes his role as head deadly seriously, dying to himself to give life to his household.

Mothers, teach your sons how to respect women and to understand that there is no greater joy than to be husband to a godly, pious wife and that a wife is a treasure and gift from God that is to be desired and sought after. Teach your daughters the great joy and responsibility of being a wife and mother even as the Church is the mother to us all who gives us life and nurtures us in the things of eternal life. Teach them to be modest with their bodies and that any man who would demand otherwise is no man.

Parents, play an active role in helping your children choose spouses. Talk about marriage and help them understand what marriage is and why God has given it the way He has given it to us in Scripture so that they may avoid the tragedies of the worldly view of marriage and sexuality and family. Take advantage of every opportunity to put your children in contact with other Lutheran kids that they may find a spouse. Let your own marriages be filled with respect and forgiveness, laughter and joy. Let them be ordered according to the Word of God that it may be a blessing to you, to your children, to the church, and to the world. Teach your children to love who God has made them by speaking highly of both men and women. Ground their identity in the waters of Holy Baptism and the promises of God.

Children, listen to your parents. Let them teach you what God has said and given in marriage. Let them help you find a godly spouse. God has given you your parents to help you and guide you in this. They have been married and know what to look for. They love you and want you to enjoy the blessings of a Christian marriage. Ask for your parents' wisdom and advice because they love you. Don't listen to the world about marriage. They don't know anything about marriage because they don't know the God who instituted marriage. Learn from the Christian marriages that surround you and seek the same for yourself. There is truly no greater joy and comfort in a world gone mad and collapsing on itself, in a world filled with struggle and heartache than the surety and constancy of a faithful, Christian spouse to whom you can speak the comforting words of Christ and who can speak those same words to you and support you in your need. You are not better alone. Careers and financial security come and go. Your spouse is there to stand beside you till death do you part in sickness and health, for richer or for poorer.

May God continue to richly bless this institution and all who enter into it so that through it those lost in the darkness and selfishness of this world may see a true reflection of the light of Christ and His love for His Church. Your marriages are pleasing to God. They are His gift to you and His continued work in this world. Treasure this gift. Know that

your Lord, Jesus Christ will defend it and through it continue to richly bless you as He pours out His life and salvation to His dear Bride, the Holy Christian Church.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.