

## Scripture

Genesis 2:18-24

Psalm 8

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

Mark 10:2 -16

### The Sanctity of Human Relationships

The second creation story is told in our Old Testament lesson today. This passage describes how God created the first man, out of the dust of the earth. Sensing that it was not good for man to be alone, he made a helper as a partner - first by creating animals and birds and every living creature. While these new creatures were helpful, they were not man's equal.

So God put the man to sleep and created a WO-Man out of Man's rib - the last of my bones and the flesh of my flesh. God intended for these humans to be seen as equals - made of the same materials. The passage concludes with a statement that projects a man will leave his father and mother and cling to his wife so that they become one flesh. The new couple were not ashamed of their nakedness. They lived happily together in the Garden of Eden UNTIL - they violated God's commandment and ate fruit from the Tree of Knowledge and Evil.

Before they did, the man and the woman were not vulnerable in their nakedness. Their shame did not fall on them until they violated God's mandate to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. Once they did, they felt shame for their nakedness.

We know that these scripture passages were written by scribes long after the fact - a compilation of oral histories inspired by God. So we need to take them with a grain of salt and prophetic wonder.

For instance, eating from the tree of knowledge and evil which God warns about in the passage right before the one we read today - is considered by some to be the original sin. A better interpretation is that this passage describes how the maturing of individuals into civilized life involved damage of connections between the Lord God, man, woman and earth. As people living in the 21st century, we can see the origin of problems that continue to afflict civilized society and limit the ability of our human existence to emulate God. One of the curses that God levied against Adam and Eve is captured in Genesis 3:16. "To the woman he said, I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing."

For those of us who have given birth to a human being, we can relate to this curse of God. Perhaps that's why our menstrual cycles are called "the curse."

In the Gospel passage read today, Jesus is being tested by the Pharisees - who wanted to trap him by asking him a controversial question. "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

Jesus responds by answering with scripture from Genesis: “God made the male and female...what God has joined together let no one separate.”

To understand Jesus' answer, it is important to remember the social location - what the Jewish culture of Jesus' time thought about divorce.

In the Ancient Near East, women had very little rights. If divorce was initiated by the husband, his former wife had no access to property - her options were to return home to her birth family, or resort to prostitution to earn a living.

Under Mosaic law - the man could write a certificate of dismissal and divorce his wife - is what the Pharisees questioned Jesus about. Notice how Jesus responds to their trick question - Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for YOU. The Pharisees were looking to trap Jesus like John the Baptist was damned for questioning Herodias' divorce so that Herod could marry her. John's prophetic stand against the legitimacy of Herodias' divorce led to his beheading. Some biblical scholars interpret the Pharisees' questions of Jesus with a similar motive - they want Jesus to be killed by Roman officials.

But Jesus doesn't fall into their sand trap. Instead he turns the question around - “Because of YOUR hardness of heart, (God) wrote this commandment for you.”

Later, Jesus tells his disciples that when a couple divorces his or her partner, and remarry, they commit adultery. This proclamation by Jesus has led to

centuries of hurt, anger and confusion by couples whose marriages don't work for a host of reasons, and divorce seems to be the only available option.

Jesus knew that the children of a failed marriage are often vulnerable - and need help in healing the effects of their parents' broken relationship.

Perhaps that is why the final paragraph of today's Gospel lesson reveals Jesus rebuking his disciples who tried to keep little children from seeing him.

The innocence of childhood parallels the innocence of Adam and Eve in the Garden. They don't know what they don't know. God, through Jesus, is telling us that we must become like little children - innocent and devout in our belief in God - in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Today marks the beginning of our Sunday School year. After the children return to join you in your pews, we will invite them forward during the announcements so I can impart a blessing from God to them, to you as parents and to their teachers.

Jesus loves the little children and his advice to his disciples and to the other adults in his presence is to help us repair our broken relationships with God and each other so we can live into the promise that God has for each of us.

LOVE is the answer - at the heart of all healthy relationships with our spouses, our partners, our family and friends is LOVE. When love is missing we become isolated, fearful and lonely. Treating everyone with respect and honoring the innate dignity of every human being is God like - God loves all

of us regardless of our ethnicity, sexuality, gender. We can score a hole in one when we love one another as God loves us.

Let us not fall into the trap of hardness of heart - but rather be open to the universal love, acceptance and mutual respect that you hold for each of us.

Help us, dear Lord, to be more like your beloved Son so that we can love each other as you love us.

AMEN.