

Sermon Text for May 31, 2015

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I Corinthians 7:1-7, Genesis 2:18-25

“When a man loves a woman”

I’m involved in a number of premarital counseling opportunities again, with one wedding just a few weeks away. For the first time I’m also doing some marital counseling, not members of the church, but it is a bit strange that after 4 years only 1 couple has approached me. Either we have the healthiest relationships in the county here at First Presbyterian, or couples just aren’t at a place where they feel comfortable going to the pastor.

I’ve told you before I love hearing about the love story of two people and then finding ways to help grow and make permanent this love story. I’m at an advantage because I have a textbook that doesn’t shy away from giving advice and insight to marriage and relationships between men and women. The Bible does not shy away from speaking about even the most intimate details of a relationship between a man and a woman. I don’t let the youth of this church read Song of Solomon until they are at least 18. It’s pretty graphic, but again all within the context of a wholesome relationship, marital relationship between a man and a woman.

And it all begins today. Today as we continue along in our journey through Genesis we have seen God create and all has been good, so far. But doay, we read about the creation of woman. Both of our Scriptures address the relationship between a man and a woman, how they were made for each other, part of God’s natural created order. But what we also find today, which is less talked about than what I just said, is how this relationship has to be based on a common theme throughout all of Scripture that marks all relationships. This relationship must be based upon a servant attitude, the man toward the woman and the woman toward the man. Let’s read.

The Apostle Paul in all of his writings takes an incredibly pragmatic approach to all issues of theology and to areas where clearly our understanding of who God is intersects directly with our daily lives. He comes at what he writes from the perspective that Jesus is going to be coming back to claim us. The second coming is right around the corner, so our time here is temporary so all that we do must be within that perspective, Jesus is coming back and he is coming back soon.

So when he says that it is better for a man not to touch a woman, or that it is better, not allowed but rather better for people to be as he is, single and able to focus entirely on Jesus Christ, he says that within the context of the imminent return of Jesus. We still believe that Jesus

is coming back, but for some reason that immediacy, that sense of tomorrow is the day, that sense, has left us.

So the advice that Paul gives us does not include the thought that you are getting into something that will last for generations, but rather whatever relationship you get into, it is the final relationship and it is done out of necessity, that relationship exists because of practical reasons. If you have burning passion, lust, a desire and a drive that cannot be controlled, then you need to get married so that you can avoid sexual immorality.

It's not a fairy tale Prince Charming comes in riding a horse and they live happily ever after. But rather to avoid sin, get married. Paul doesn't mention a man loving a woman in this context. In chapter 13 he gives us a better and more clear picture of the love that a man ought to have for a woman, let's not forget that, but not here in these verses. Here we just have the facts, get married for practical purposes.

But we can't look at a love story with just this one verse. Ephesians 5, again written by the Apostle Paul, gives us a more long-term approach to marriage that points to what needs to be at the foundation of our relationships. He alludes to it in vs. 4 where he states that the man does not have authority over his body nor does the woman have authority over hers, they are to subject themselves and their bodies to each other. Here he approaches marriage along the same lines in that each person in the relationship should be subject to one another. The man should be subject to the woman and vice-versa. Paul says in Ephesians 5:21 be subject to one another out of reverence to Christ. This is so fundamental to Paul's understanding of what a healthy relationship between a man and a woman should look like. Again, that is why when he defines love in chapter 13 of I Corinthians he says that the love between a man and a woman is patient, kind, it doesn't insist on its own way, it doesn't play the man card...you know, I'm the man so I get to decide. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and even endures all things.

At the heart of a man loving a woman is a servant willing to be a servant. I want to be sure you hear me on this point and take me seriously so I asked for a little help from the cast of West Wing:

When a man loves a woman he doesn't just love her, he serves her just as the woman serves the man just as the church, the bride of Christ serves our Savior.

Now to Genesis, but we had to establish that in order to see the beauty of this creation narrative. It should all make sense. If Paul gives us a very pragmatic approach to why a man and a woman should marry, to prevent sexual immorality, so the author of Genesis gives us a very theological approach. Let's start at the beginning, let's look at vs. 18. God has already

finished creation, he made Adam, humanity, and placed him in the garden of Eden. Everything is going as well and everything so far, has been good. Remember, isn't that what God says after every day. This is good. But look at vs. 18, from all is good, to our very first, okay, this is not good. What is it that is not good? The fact that Adam, this piece of dirt, is alone is not good.

For Paul you find a spouse to control your passion. For Genesis you find a spouse because God doesn't ever want you to be alone and feel the pain and the despair that comes with being alone. All through Scripture we see the extremes that God goes through so that we would not be alone. I will not leave you or forsake. Jesus tells his disciples I will not leave you orphaned, I will send the great comforter. It is the God's top priority for us that we not be alone, and that includes God preparing a spouse for us, for those who are to be married. This desire on God's part for us not to be alone culminates in the incarnation, in Jesus himself coming as one of us to be with us, God with us, remember, that's his name. See, this theme runs throughout the Bible, but I'm getting ahead of myself. Today, here in Genesis, is where all of that begins with God being able to identify that us being alone and feeling that loneliness is not good.

I remember after college I was convinced that God had called me to a life of celibacy, since, after all, Paul did say it is best to be single. But the moment I saw Stacy during orientation, just a few weeks after I had made that decision, I knew that this was the woman that God had made to be my wife. I knew it then, immediately. Now, it took Stacy a little longer to hear that voice of God on that one, but I'm glad she came around.

God declares that we he does not want us to be alone. Now, we know and Scripture reminds us that God is always by our side, but that's different, and here God acknowledges a difference. He was with Adam, but he did not want him to be alone. The animals and pets in our lives are like family, I know, but that's different. God had the animals come before Adam so that he could name them. So what's the difference? When God creates woman, out of Adam, she reflects that same image of God that only humanity can understand and can live in. At the core of being made in the image of God is that we are created to be in relationship who find their purpose in living lives of servanthood for each other. This is where we find the key concept of any relationships, but especially a relationship between a man and a woman in marriage.

We would never say that we have a relationship with our pets where we are servants to each other. But when the woman was created Adam could say: "At last, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." We are no different, we belong together, God made us, literally, for each other.

What Scripture tells us about the way God planned for a man to love a woman and for a woman to love a man is a relationship that advocates balance. God urges mutuality not hierarchy, interdependence and not enmity, uninhibited love as opposed to bigoted emotions. The relationship between a man and a woman is God's antidote to being alone. It is not good for any of us to be alone.

There was a point in history when God's plan that came to be realized was one in which this model of love which is based on servanthood would be played out by God himself. Sometimes if you want to get a job done, you have to do it yourself. So God came as one of us, as Jesus the Christ. And what does Philippians 2:5-11 tell us about Jesus and the relationship that he had with us? He loves us so much that he became a servant to us, even to the point of dying on a cross. When a man loves a woman, when our God loves us unconditionally.

I know the topic of the day in our society especially in professional sports is the way in which a man showing his love for his woman has become toxic and even dangerous and violent. 50 Shades of Grey is another way in which this has become an accepted theme in our culture. As a father of three daughters it sickens me to think that this is the world into which they are stepping. But the way in which Scripture depicts the creation of man and woman and the model of servanthood that is given to us should remind us that our textbook teaches something very different from what we hear around us.

When a man loves a woman, he serves her. When a woman loves a man she delights in his presence. It is the same relationship that we as a church should have with each other. We serve each other, we look to see how we can build each other up, we love each other, because we have a model in Jesus who showed us how and gave of his life not only as an example, but as the ultimate sacrifice for our sake, so that we could approach our God. Thank you Jesus. Amen.