

“Love and Marriage”

**First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
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New Testament Lesson: Luke 20:27-38

Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 25:5-10

Wasn't that Old Testament lesson a hoot!?! The family of the brother who refuses to marry his widowed sister-in-law will be known as “the house of him whose sandal was pulled off.” Those nutty Israelites and their list of laws to follow.

And yet, there is a purpose to the Law as given by God through Moses. For instance, the law about marrying your widowed sister-in-law served to ensure that a widow who had no sons to perpetuate the family name would not lose everything.

Sadly, women at the time were not permitted to own property. So without a husband or son, the widow would have nothing. So, you see, God's law is given in order to take care of us, and particularly those marginalized by human law or practices.

Now I'm not going to get into the letter of the Law versus the Spirit of the law, since we covered that a few weeks back. But I will point to how Jesus fulfills and embodies the Spirit of marriage, of deep family relationships, and family-like friendships.

As we look at marriage – since that is the relationship asked about in today's New Testament lesson – please keep in mind that this teaching can also be applied more broadly, to a certain extent, to any close relationship that binds two hearts together, everything from best friends to married couples. The question is what makes these heart-to-heart relationships so important, and how do we remain faithful to them?

In our reading from Luke, we learn that “some Sadducees ... came to (Jesus) and asked him a question, ‘Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.’”

And then they go on to imagine that all six of the man's brothers married the widow and died before she had any children. “In the resurrection,” they ask, “... whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.” This creates quite a problem for Jesus, who assures us that the resurrection is real. The Sadducees are trying to get Jesus to either denounce the resurrection or defy the Law.

And in typical Jesus fashion, he takes what would be a problem for anyone else and turns it into a blessing for us. We are blessed by Jesus' teaching about marriage, whether you ever married or not, whether you ever will be married or not.

As I said, the Spirit of what Jesus is teaching can be applied to all relationships that bind hearts together. Marriage and all such heart-to-heart relationship are a gift from God. Because we live in a fallen world, where we have separated ourselves from God through our defiant and misguided ways, God gave us the gift of a binding relationship with one another, and particularly when two hearts are bound together in love.

Two people bound together in the Spirit of love fulfill for each other's deep, human needs; they share wondrous and surprising joys; they create together neither could do individually. All of this is a gift from God to lift us up and protect us amid the struggles of life.

When the Sadducees try to trick Jesus, it is this Spirit of marriage that Jesus points to in response. Instead of being caught in their trap, Jesus turns to one of the greatest gifts of God, the Spirit of love and faithfulness.

Just imagine if you were able to turn to the Spirit of love and faithfulness whenever you feel trapped or tripped up. Imagine the protection, affirmation, comfort and care you would feel and receive.

I'm talking about the kind of Spirit that can take the worst day ever and somehow wash it all away with one kind word or a gentle, loving touch; a Spirit that can heal the deepest wounds between two best friends, a Spirit in which generosity and abundance easily overcome need and wants.

Who wouldn't want to know more about how to tap into that Spirit?!? We all would. After all, that's what we're doing here today, and every Sunday, every Wednesday at LOGOS! This is a place where we learn about the Spirit of love and faithfulness, and how to carry it with us throughout life.

The really cool thing about Jesus' teaching today is that he not only teaches us how to meet our deepest needs, share our greatest joys, and create in the most wondrous way possible – all of this by preserving at all costs our God-given heart-to-heart relationships – Jesus not only teaches us this, but he takes it to a whole 'nother level!

Jesus elevates his teaching about marriage to the level of our relationship with God. He says, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage.”

Here, Jesus points to marriage as a foretaste of what’s to come in the fullness of our relationship with God. In the here and now – in this age, as Jesus puts it – we enter into heart-to-heart relationships with each other in order to enjoy and manifest the gifts of our relationship with God.

In the fullness of that relationship with God, we lay aside our earthly confines and receive the embrace of God heart-to-heart. As it says in Revelation (21:4), God “will wipe every tear from (our) eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more....”In other words, in the fullness of God, all our needs vanish and there is pure joy and oneness with all creation.

This is the promise for those who enter into a heart-to-heart relationship with God. And the only way for us to do that is through Jesus Christ, God incarnate. The ancient Israelites needed the Law to bring them into right relationship with God and one another. We have the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

And here we see that the fullest expression of that right relationship with God and one another available to us here and now is the type of heart-to-heart relationship found in Christian marriage. Not perfect – because we are not perfect – but nonetheless full of promise and hope and blessing.

In a study of 351 marriages which had lasted at least 15 years, both husbands and wives consistently listed the following seven statements, in the identical order with No. 1 being the most important:

- No. 1 – My spouse is my best friend.
- No. 2 – I like my spouse as a person.
- 3 – Marriage is a long-term commitment.
- 4 – Marriage is sacred.
- 5 – We agree on aims and goals.
- 6 – My spouse has grown more interesting.
- 7 – I want the relationship to succeed.¹

¹ From an article in U.S. News & World Report, cited in Total Quality Marriage by Dr. Neil Chadwick, webedelic.com/church/tqmf.htm.

Now imagine if you were able to say each of those statements about God: God is my best friend. I like God as a person. My relationship to God is a long-term commitment, AND sacred. I agree with God's aims and goals. God has grown more interesting. I want my relationship with God to succeed. Just imagine! Doesn't that type of relationship with God sound great?

But do we truly live our lives as if our best friend is God, in a sacred commitment, sharing the same aims and goals, always interested in what God is doing, wanting that relationship to succeed at all costs, giving ourselves completely and faithfully to God, like a marriage.

Ask yourself, what difference would such a heart-to-heart relationship with God make in your life? What is one thing you could do to create that type of relationship with God? If you – and I – were to pray about and discover that type of relationship with God, just imagine how effortlessly all your needs would melt away. Imagine how joyous and creative your life would be, just by putting God first, as if in marriage. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

O God, our souls ache for those whose souls are aching. We grieve with those experiencing grief.

Bring them comfort as only you can. Let them know that they are not alone, that you are with them and that we stand beside them, too.

At the same time, O Lord, we also rejoice with those who are rejoicing. We celebrate the ways you are blessing and providing for those among us.

We give you all the glory for the great things being done.

We know that you are God of the broken and the joyful –that in both you are good, that in both you are sovereign.

Thank you for knowing each person in this sanctuary and meeting us where we are, whether in need or in abundance, struggle or blessing.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray saying together:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;**

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.