

St. Augustine's Sermons

Calgary, Alberta

October 14, 2007

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The Text: Genesis 2:18-25

The Title: "Fugal Interplay"

8:30 and 10:30 am, Holy Communion

The Text: Genesis 2:18-25

18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." **19** Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. **20** The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. **21** So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. **22** And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. **23** Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man."

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. **25** And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

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We come this morning to the end of Genesis chapter 2. As we have moved from chapter 1 to this point in chapter two it is like an image on a Google Earth Map. In chapter 1 it is as if we are getting the big picture of the earth from outer space. As we move to chapter 2 the angle has narrowed to take in a more clearly defined area, and as we get to verse 18 it is as if the image has narrowed in on one home and one couple. Here is an important text that teaches us what God's intention is for the husband/wife relationship.

Before we get into the passage there is something I need to say by way of a general introduction. If any of you have ever used a Google Earth Map you will know that when you try to focus on a particular street or house, the image is not as clear as you would like it to be. When I have done this with my house, although I can kind of make it out, the definition is not clean.

This is what it is like for us to look at these verses in Genesis 2. Because we live in the shadow of Genesis 3, the relationship that was intended to be God's ideal for the man and the woman has become out of focus. Therefore when we try to understand what is meant by these verses in chapter two we are left with a somewhat unclear picture. I do not think that any of us know fully in our own experience the kind of relationship depicted in chapter 2.

And yet for those who are in Christ, we need to remember that we are in the process of being redeemed so that the image of God as he intended it to be displayed in our lives is being restored. For the married among us we need to acknowledge that while we will fall short of the ideal described here, as we allow our lives to be empowered by the Holy Spirit we can continue to be renewed to more fully reflect God's intention for the husband/wife relationship.

Now a word to those of you who are not married because you are single, divorced or widowed. While I will not be addressing your situation this morning, I will reflect on what it means to be single in light of Genesis 3.

As we look at this text there are four points that I have discovered. They are these:

1. The Man and the Woman in this text are to live in a relationship of fugal interplay and balance.
2. Both have been created in a way to embody the meaning expressed in 1:27 where we read "In the image of God he created him, male and female he created them."
3. When the man and woman live in a relationship where this balance is expressed there is a unity that overcomes aloneness.
4. Such a relationship allows for the man and woman to live before each other in a way that enables true vulnerability because they know how to be present to each other.

1. The Man and the Woman in this text are to live in a relationship of fugal interplay and balance.

Because I often think of things in musical terms I want to use a musical illustration to show you the nature of the relationship between the man and the woman. What do I mean by fugal interplay and balance? A fugue is a musical form where there are different voices that play or sing the main melodic line. This line is called the subject. Perhaps one of the most famous fugues is the "Amen Chorus" from Handel's Messiah. The subject begins simply in the bass line and then builds its way up through the tenors, altos and then to the sopranos. After the voices have all had their turn with the subject there is a hand off to the strings. After the strings have played with it, all four voices come in together as the chorus builds to the finale. What is stunning about the music is the playful interchange between the voices and strings, with the trumpets and timpani adding wonderful accents.

Let's listen to this excerpt.

I think this music captures what is pictured here in Genesis 2. The man and woman are to live in a relationship of fugal interplay and balance. There is an equality expressed by the complimentary way they relate to each other.

This is made clear in the text when at verse 18 we read:

18 *Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."*

But then there is this seeming intrusion at verses 19-20.

19 Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.

This is what logicians call a non sequitur. Verse 19 seems to bear no relation to verse 18. Yet as we dig below the surface we discover something. Even though Adam is given the vocation of naming the animals and undoubtedly found companionship with them, we are told that still there was found no helper fit for him.

Now while it takes some sanctified imagination to figure out why these verses are included, here are some suggestions that can be summarized by saying: Adam is not to treat his wife the way he would the animals.

This is because:

Adam learned that woman was not to be a mere beast of burden as so often she has become in the history of the race since. There are societies where women are treated exactly like animals, where the price of a woman is approximately the price of a cow, and where women are sometimes traded for cows. But this is a violation of what Adam learned in the beginning, that woman is not like the animals. Adam did not find in the animals a helper fit for him. His wife, when she appeared, was quite different. Therefore woman is not to be treated as a slave, there to do so much work in a household.

Second, Adam learned in his search that woman is not to be merely a biological laboratory for the producing of children. Obviously it is women who bear children, but they are not to be like the animals who bear progeny as almost their sole reason for existence. Women are not to be like that. Sex has a function that is expressed through the birth of children but it also has a place to shape intimacy and mutual delight between a husband and wife independent of conception, as *The Song of Solomon* so aptly describes.

Third, Adam learned, in his search, that woman is not a thing outside himself to be used at the whim of man and then disposed of. They are to be a helper fit for him, corresponding to him. The philosophy of the *pornography industry as represented by magazines like Playboy* is the idea that woman is nothing more than a plaything for man, hence the derogatory term "Playmates" used to describe the women depicted on

Playboy's pages. But this passage directly contradicts that. Woman is to be a helper and a companion, fit for man.¹

So what then does it mean to call the woman a helper and companion? When this noun "helper" is used elsewhere in the Old Testament it is used almost exclusively of God as the one who helps his people. It is also true that when used in its verbal form it almost always has God as the subject.² There are a handful of passages where people are described helping other people and it is the same word as used here.

For instance:

Isaiah 41.6:

Everyone helps his neighbor
and says to his brother, "Be strong!"

Therefore to be a helper does not mean that the woman is to be subservient to the man. Rather it seems that this word has about it the sense that by fulfilling this vocation of helper, she will image God to her husband. I will return to this idea in a minute.

This leads me to the second point:

2. Both the man and woman embody the meaning expressed in 1:27 where we read "In the image of God he created him, male and female he made them."

There is to be a balance of roles that the man and the woman express to each other and so image God to one another in their home.

You will remember that earlier in chapter two God spoke to the man saying he could eat from any tree in the garden with the exception of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. There is a particular responsibility entrusted to Adam to reflect God's image to his wife by helping her to hear and respond to God's word. In chapter three we will see that their relationship breaks down when Adam does not interpret what has happened in the interaction between the serpent and the woman by referring back to the word of God.

¹ Ray C. Stedman THE MAKING OF WOMAN: <http://www.raystedman.org/genesis/0313.html>

² John H. Walton: *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Zondervan 2005) 176

Part of what the Bible means when it speaks of male headship is this responsibility for the man to help shape the couple's ability to hear God through his word. This seems to be the clear meaning of what Paul is getting at when in Ephesians 5 he describes headship this way:

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."

Here is a wonderful picture where Paul says that Christian husbands love their wives by helping them to be attentive to God's word. Paul says the way Jesus loves the church is by the washing of water with the word. Paul is I think saying something like this. The word of Jesus is like cleansing water. It helps us to be washed of the defilements that we contract because of the deception of the world, the flesh and the devil. One of the ways husbands are to love their wives is by helping them apply the word of God to the very real challenges of daily life. Indeed I think it can be suggested that it was because Adam did not love his wife by washing her with the word that everything becomes distorted in their relationship in the rest of Genesis three and beyond.

If the man images God to the woman through the Word, how does the woman image God to the man?

It is most significant I think that a rib was chosen from which to make woman. I know it is dangerous to teach from a metaphor or an allegory because it can be abused. There are, however, two matters connected with the rib that are genuinely applicable here:

One is that it emphasizes the essentially emotional nature of woman. Ribs are the bones nearest the heart, and are thus closely linked with the heart, which is always throughout Scripture the center of emotional life. Tears, fears, and cheers come more easily to women than they do to men most often. This emotional centre is designed to complete man for she is to be a helper fit for him, completing him.

The second thing that is brought out here is that a rib emphasizes the protective instinct in women. It is the rib which protects the vital organs of the chest and notably the heart. In fact, the Hebrew word for "helper" is the word *azar*, which means "to surround." Just as the rib cage surrounds the heart and protects it, so there is in woman an

instinctive reaction of protectiveness. C. S. Lewis has pointed this out in asking the question, "If your dog has bitten a neighbor's child, would you rather face the mother or the father to discuss the issue?"³

If you are in the mountains and come between a Grizzly sow and her cubs you had better dial 911. Help!

So we have the process of God in making woman. She is to be a companion and a helper, and does so by utilizing to the full her inherent emotional and protective instincts.⁴

Let me move onto the third thing this text shows us:

3. When the man and woman live in a relationship where this balance is expressed there is a unity that overcomes aloneness.

It is significant I think that the first time the Adam speaks in Genesis is in this passage. Before now we are told that he named the animals but no words have yet been put onto his lips. But here as we hear his reaction to the creation of the woman there is a wonderful word of celebration:

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man."

Paul I imagine had this passage in mind when in Ephesians he writes:

28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church.

Hear are two passages that declare that in a marriage where the character of Jesus is shaping the couple more fully there will be this ecstatic cherishing that will be expressed by how the husband interacts

³ Ray C. Stedman THE MAKING OF WOMAN: <http://www.raystedman.org/genesis/0313.html>

⁴ ⁴ Ray C. Stedman THE MAKING OF WOMAN: <http://www.raystedman.org/genesis/0313.html>

with his wife. If what a husband needs is to know is the nurturing supportive care of his wife, what the wife needs to know from her husband is that he truly cherishes her. This is further accentuated in verse 24 when it says that the husband will hold fast to his wife.

This phrase "hold fast" is a strong word. In the Hebrew text it is the word *dabag*, which means "to adhere firmly, as if with glue," to be lovingly devoted to a wife. In the days of Henry Ford (the first) and the Model T, someone asked him to what formula he attributed his successful marriage. He said, "The same formula as the making of a successful car: stick to one model." That is exactly what is said here. A husband is to cleave to his wife. He forsakes all others and adheres to her.

Now of course if the husband sticks to his wife it is logical that the wife will stick to her husband. However I think it is significant that it says that husband is the one who is to cling, adhere, hold fast to his wife. There is a way God has designed us that provides for the male the responsibility to let express to his wife that his devotion is directed only to her. Notice that it is the man who declares that here at last is the one who under God can be the object of my devotion. As the husband takes the initiative to cherish his wife, she will in turn cherish him.

May I suggest that this means husbands are invited by this text to understand the importance of touch and intimacy that is non sexual. To show spontaneous expressions of devotion can include those surprise flowers, holding hands as you go for a walk, that candle lit dinner or a warm embrace with a kiss on the cheek with a sincere "I love and cherish you"

When we are learning to cultivate a marriage in the power of the Holy Spirit where there is the fugal interplay and balance that allows for each to reflect God's image to the other so that unity overcomes aloneness, here then is a relationship that will allow for the man and woman to live before each other in a way that enables true vulnerability. So we read these most famous words in verse 25: "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."

This speaks clearly of openness between the husband and wife, literally, nothing to hide. They have no secrets, nothing that they do not share with each other, an openness. It is the failure to achieve this kind of openness that lies behind so much breakdown in marriage today, the utter breakdown of communication, where two sit and look at one another and say nothing, or talk about merely surface trivialities, reporting what happened to the children, etc., but with no

discussion of their problems, or what they are thinking on various issues. Oftentimes this is why they are so judgmental with one another, each one trying to get the other to agree and not being willing to allow differences of viewpoint to exist. But openness does not mean agreeing or feeling the same. It means a readiness to share with one another, completely, without insisting that the other reflect the same attitude. There is to be a complete freedom of communication, one with the other. Marriages shrivel, wither, and die when this is not true. Conversely they can become what God intended when such communication is cultivated in an environment and mutual love and care.

Now as I said at the beginning, the kinds of relationship I have just described is hard for us to see clearly because we live in the shadow of Genesis 3. And yet though the fullness of the relationship depicted here can seem beyond our experience, it is important for us to know what God's intention is for marriage.

Marriage is a relationship that originated with God, and therefore is not primarily a social construction. When we can better see what the designer's original purpose was and still is for this relationship and then as we live under grace, I pray that for those who are married they can know more fully this relationship as God intended it to be where:

There is a fugal interplay and balance whereby they embody and reflect to each other the image of God in a marriage where this balance allows for unity to overcome alones so that we can live before each other with vulnerability because we are learning how to be present to each other.

