

**“It is not good that the Man should be alone...”**

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. Proper 22, Year B. October 4, 2009. (Text: Genesis 2:18-24)

Has anybody read the first two chapters of Genesis lately? ...No? I didn't think so. We proud, scientific, 21<sup>st</sup> century people don't take the Book of Genesis very seriously. And I'm not telling you that because I'm about to pick a fight with Darwin or make some argument against the theory of evolution.

I think we should read Genesis and take it seriously because there's *profound truth* in those old, old stories — tales that were told first around campfires in the Bronze Age — maybe even in the late Stone Age — and then repeated for a thousand years before they were ever written down. It's a shame some people want to ignore them or make jokes about them just because they're primitive and unscientific, and not descriptions that could be substantiated by paleontology or archaeology if we just knew the right places to dig.

This morning's reading from Genesis is one of those thought-provoking old stories. I want to talk about it today because I think it will give us insight into the male-female human relationship we know as “marriage.” Marriage is falling into disrepute in our age. You probably knew that already. Lots of couples are skipping getting married these days. The divorce rate was climbing during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but in the 1990s it started falling. But that's because the marriage rate in America is now declining.

Genesis offers two “creation stories,” one in the first chapter, and a somewhat different one in the second — part of which we just read. This shows us that people a long time ago knew that God's own truth was contained in a variety of *dissimilar* stories handed down by their ancestors. And the fact that two such tales described the same events differently didn't mean either of them was “better” than the other, or that one was “right” and the other was “wrong,” or that the two had to be forcibly harmonized and their lack of similarity explained away. People didn't worry about such things in the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Ancient people knew something we would do well to re-learn: namely, that the great truths of the Universe are often both this-*AND*-that,” not either this-*OR*-that.” At the heart of all wisdom we usually find a paradox.

One thing almost everybody remembers from Genesis is that after God divides the sea and the dry land, and after he creates the sun, moon and stars, and after he creates the plants and the living creatures, it says, “*and God saw that it was good.*” At the end of the sixth day, the last day before the Creator gave himself a holiday, Genesis says “*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was all VERY good.*”

Genesis doesn't tell us God saw anything *not* good about his creation, not until after God had already created Adam (a name which, by the way, simply means “The Man,” or “The Human Being”) and put Adam in the Garden of Eden. But pretty soon the Creator noticed something *not* good. He said: “*It is NOT good that the Man should be alone.*”

Don't pass on quickly from this little verse! It's a key to understanding human life. “*It is not good that the Man should be alone,*” is something we all know from personal experience. *Human beings were created for community*, for partnership, for sharing the joys and sorrows of life together — not just in marriage, but in all kinds of other ways as well. Theologically sensitive people might ask, “Well, couldn't fellowship with God himself have kept Adam from being alone?” No, fellowship with God could *not* meet Adam's need for community. And why not? Because God is “Other.” God does not have a body. God is pure Spirit. In his love and wisdom, God the Creator discerned that

we human beings would need incarnate, “physical” companionship if we are not to be alone and feel lonely.

One truth we learn here in Genesis is that people who do *not* have a life partner, a spouse, a wife or a husband, should also “not be ALONE.” Times of solitude are good and necessary if we’re to develop into spiritually and psychologically mature, healthy individuals – but *loneliness* is something else again. *Loneliness* is the absence of human, personal love, friendship, intimacy and mutuality. Times of solitude are healthy. But loneliness is bitter and sad.

Remember the Beatles’ song, *Eleanor Rigby*?

*Eleanor Rigby picks up the rice in the church where a wedding has been.*

*Lives in a dream.*

*Waits at the window, wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door*

*Who is it for?*

*All the lonely people. Where do they all come from?*

*All the lonely people. Where do they all belong?*

And don’t forget poor old Father McKenzie, “*writing a sermon that no one would hear. No one comes near.*”

Genesis tells us that God does not want any of his children to be “lonely people.” That’s one reason for the CHURCH. That’s why Christ gathered a *community* of disciples around himself and taught them to love one another as he had loved them. It is unthinkable that anyone should be a child of God and a disciple of Christ and be left all alone. We were created for community. The Church is the place where no one should be lonely.

In Genesis, because the newly created human being is alone God creates what the King James Version of the Bible called a “helpmate” for him. “Helpmate” is a wonderful translation of the Hebrew word which means something like “*helper-as-partner.*” Elsewhere in the Old Testament this word is also used to name God’s own relationship with his people, so it can’t imply that a helpmate is subordinate or second-class.

To find a helpmate for Adam, God started out by forming animals and birds from the dust of the ground, exactly as he had formed Adam, the way a potter makes useful things from clay. God breathed into all of them the breath of life, just as he had done with Adam. Then he brought them to Adam, “the Human Being,” to let him name them. But Adam saw none of the animals as a helpmate. Therefore, according to this lovely old story, God had a new idea. (You can just imagine him snapping his divine fingers and saying, “*I’ve got it!*”)

He made the Woman, but not out of the clay from which he had already made the Man and the animals. Instead, he did something new. So that the Woman would be part of the very *same* act of creation as Adam, “the Human Being,” and therefore a fitting helpmate for him, God took *part* of Adam – a rib from his side – and from it he made another human being, the Woman!

The Woman was different from the Man, but in a sense she had been with him all along, hidden within the Man’s own self. The two had always been part of one another and always in the likeness of God. As Genesis goes on to say in a later chapter: “*When God created Adam, he*

*made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them, and he called THEIR name Adam.”*

When God brought her to the Man, Adam spoke for the very first time, and his words were: *“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.*

A Hebrew scribe who put the ancient creation stories together to make the Book of Genesis injected a bit of his own commentary right here, so readers wouldn't miss the life application. He wrote, *“Therefore, a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.”* Notice that nothing is said yet about procreation, about child-bearing. The Man and the Woman were created to be two halves of a single whole —partners, helpmates, lovers, friends.

The Man and the Woman were created in the likeness of God and meant to feel both whole, and wholly *connected* to God. But, God knew that for his human children to experience what connection and wholeness feel like – even a little bit, even fleetingly – they need a flesh and blood “helpmate” to be their “other half.” Joan and I often say to each other, especially after we've been through something difficult or challenging or maybe just tiring: *“We really are a TEAM, aren't we?”* Those of you who are familiar with us know that we're temperamentally quite different from each other, but in the deepest ways, the ways that count the most, Joan and I are two halves of a single whole. I hope all married couples would say the same thing. —Remember this husbands, your wife is God's gift to you just as much today as the day you were married. She's part of you, a gift from God that has made you whole. And, wives, your husband is part of you, God's gift to you in just the same way.

Lest anyone think my message this morning is only for married couples, let me say to those who are single, unmarried, or widowed, whether young or old: this applies to you too. *It is not good that the human being should be alone.* Trust that God has a gift for you. God gives a variety of “helpers,” companions, partners, friends, and “teammates,” to be with those who are alone, to share their life. Loneliness is a burden the Creator does not want any of his children to bear. So, be open to what God is offering, and trust in his deep love for you. And remember also to stay open to the possibility that God might want to send *you* to share your life with someone else – maybe as a wife or husband, or simply as a friend. God created us for himself, to bear his own likeness and receive his love, and the Creator sends us to share that love with one another, in all the different forms of human community.