

## Sermon followed by Service

September 22, 2024

Mark 10:2-12

The bride and groom were standing together before God. Before God and family and friends they were about to answer one of the most important questions of their lives. “Will you take this woman to be your wife? Will you take this man to be your husband? Will you be guided by the counsel and direction God has given in his Word? Will you be faithful to her, cherish her, support her ... will you help him in sickness and in health as long as you both shall live? If so, answer, ‘I will.’” Then, before God and the world, he looked deep into her eyes ... she looked deep into his, and together they answered: “Whatever. We’ll see.”

With their hearts beating, they exchanged rings and the minister said: “I now present to you man and wife.” And the ladies thought: “how cute,” and the guys thought: “I wonder if there’s open bar at the reception,” and all together they clapped and thought: “Whatever.”

“Whatever” ... sounds so romantic, doesn’t it? So loving it makes our hearts warm inside. Hearing our loved one promise “whatever” makes us want to reach out in love ... hearing “whatever” makes us want to give ourselves to serve them the rest of our lives, doesn’t it?

No, it doesn’t. “Whatever” may be more honest than “I do” or “I will.” But it doesn’t sound romantic or loving or like

much of a promise at all. So why do so many married people say: “Whatever”? And not just married people, but unmarried people playing together like they’re married people ... why do so many pretenders and boyfriends and girlfriends say “Whatever”?

Because playing whatever is easier than trusting and loving. Playing whatever is easier than sacrificing self the way that real love does. “Whatever” is easier than “I trust you with my life and my heart and my everything.” “Whatever” is easier than “I give myself to God and to you to take care of you the rest of our lives.” “Whatever” is so much easier than giving the heart and making the sacrifices that real love and marriage take.

But “whatever” sounds so ugly, doesn’t it? So instead of saying it out loud, our world of love pretenders just thinks it. Instead of saying it out loud, our world of pretenders says “NO” to God as they say “YES” to our wants and our fears and our feelings because no one should ever have to say “NO” to their feelings, right? There was a time I could stop there, enough said. But today, “no one should ever have to say ‘NO’ to their feelings” doesn’t sound silly; it sounds right. That’s what our world is teaching us. That our feelings - “I love you ... I love you not” are wiser than God. And that our world’s feelings about homosexuality and same-sex marriage, and hooking up, and divorce are wiser and more right than God. And so we set our feelings up as god and we do whatever.

And God cringes. God cringes. Jesus cringes. Because God designed marriage to be the closest of relationships, the safest, the purest of relationships, to reflect the relationship he

wants with us. So when God sees what this world has done with marriage, he cringes. When he sees what we have done with our own marriages, he cringes. Because God gave his Son to be husband for the church, husband for us, to care for us and make us inseparably one with God. So when we twist God's design for marriage, when we are unfaithful to God's design for marriage, God cringes in hurt and in anger.

God could have turned away, walked away, written us off. Instead God sent Jesus for us. Not as sex police to condemn the world. Not as marriage counselor to teach us. But Jesus came to give his life for us, to take our place. Accepting our filth as his own, Jesus was lumped together, shamed with the dirty ones. Taking our guilt as his own, Jesus was charged as the pretender, mocked as the fake and the fraud. Taking our place, Jesus was condemned as the unfaithful one. And God gave to Jesus what we had coming for making our feelings to be god in place of God.

In turn, Jesus took all the charges against us, all our dirty little secrets, everything that would shame us on earth and in heaven. He tore them up. He washed them away, forgiven and gone. He sees you and calls you: Faithful and Pure, Clean and Right. He sees you as the world's most beautiful bride; better, he sees you as heaven's most beautiful bride. He calls you right for life with God, right for life in heaven. Why? To win your heart ... to give you his love ... to share with you the glories of his heaven. And to set you and your family up for his blessing in this world.

Jesus wants the best of God's blessing for you and your family. So, in our lesson, when Jesus was questioned about marriage and divorce, Jesus didn't settle for "whatever." He didn't turn to the marriage experts of the day. He didn't base his answer on public opinion. He didn't try to go with the flow of people's thinking and feeling. No, Jesus wants better for you. He wants you and your family blessed by God. So Jesus went straight to God's plan for marriage – **“at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”**

In God's perfect world, God could have designed marriage to be whatever - whoever, however, whenever, for however long. But God wants better than whatever for us. He wants husband and wife to know their hearts and their hopes and dreams are safe together "til death do us part." He wants husband and wife to be loved and respected without distraction or competition. He wants children to grow up feeling safe as mom and dad surround them with peace and love. He wants children to grow up learning from mom and dad how to love and care for each other. He wants husbands and wives and moms and dads and children to learn God's love and to experience God's love as they love and take care of each other. So God didn't say "whatever." God said: "Here's my design. Here's my way to bless you."

We live in a world that would rather say “whatever” to get whatever it wants. But we have a heart touched by Jesus, a heart alive with the Spirit of Jesus. So we don’t settle for whatever. We don’t deal out whatever. Instead we share the heart of Christ. How? If you have a husband or a wife, don’t treat them as a whatever. Treat him, treat her as one of God’s most precious blessings, God’s wonderful match for you and your heart. If you are looking for that match, or if you think you’ve found that match, don’t treat him or her with whatever dirt, whatever pretending the world thinks right. Treat him, treat her as a pure gift with a heart made pure in Jesus. And if God blesses you to live without that special match, know this - that God has his special Someone for you, just as he does for the rest of us. Someone who isn’t just a whoever or a whatever, but Someone who is the Prince of heaven and the Son of God. In Jesus, God gives us his perfect Match to make us complete. In Jesus, God gives us his perfect Someone, his perfect Son, to give us life right with God forever. And that, my friends, is better than “whatever.” Amen.

September 21 & 22, 2024

### SERVICE OF THE WORD

**IN OUR WORLD TODAY ...** we can feel so pressed and so distracted/destroyed, so pushed and pulled ... and who gets pushed and pulled and pressed and distracted/destroyed with us? Those closest to us in our families. In the pushing and pulling and distracting/destroying, what sometimes seems to be the solution? Distracting ourselves with someone or something from outside our marriage ... and so destroying what could be such a blessing for us.

**IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ...** we see God's plan in marriage to keep our hearts and families safe and blessed!

#### OPENING HYMN

*"Blessed Jesus, at Your Word"*

Hymn 919

Blessèd Jesus, at your Word we are gathered all to hear you.  
Let our hearts and souls be stirred now to seek and love and fear you,  
by your teachings, sweet and holy, drawn from earth to love you solely.

All our knowledge, sense, and sight lie in deepest darkness shrouded  
till your Spirit breaks our night with the beams of truth unclouded.  
You alone to God can win us; you must work all good within us.

Gracious Savior, good and kind, Light from Light, from God proceeding,  
open now our heart and mind; help us by your Spirit's pleading.  
Hear the cry your Church now raises;  
hear and bless our prayers and praises.

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, praise to you and adoration!  
Grant that we your Word may trust, confident of our salvation,  
while we here below must wander, till we sing your praises yonder.

#### INVOCATION

**M:** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

**C:** **And also with you.**

+ CONFESSION OF SINS AND ABSOLUTION +

M: We have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. But we have disobeyed him and deserve only his wrath and punishment. Therefore, let us confess our sins to him and plead for his mercy.

C: **Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. But trusting in Jesus, my Savior, I pray: Have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin, and take away my guilt.**

M: God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever. You are his own dear child. May God give you strength to live according to his will. **Amen.**

+ PRAYER AND PRAISE +

M: In the peace of forgiveness, let us praise the Lord.

**HYMN (No Introduction)**

*“O Taste and See”*

**Hymn 965**

O taste and see that the Lord is good.

Blessèd are they who take refuge in him.

Your Word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.

Your faithfulness continues forever. O taste and see that the Lord is good.

Blessèd are they who take refuge in him.

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Loving God and Father, the blessings of marriage and family come from your gracious pleasure and careful design. Lead all who value these gifts to follow your path of wisdom so that they may enjoy the fullness of your love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

*Genesis 2:18–25*

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called 'woman,'  
for she was taken out of man."

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**



PSALM OF THE DAY

*Psalm 127D*



1 Un - less the LORD the house shall build, the wea - ry  
 2 In vain you rise at morn - ing break, in vain your  
 3 Yes, chil - dren are a great re - ward, a gift from  
 4 How blest are those whose lives are cheered by chil - dren's



build - ers toil in vain; un - less the LORD the  
 late - night vig - ils keep, and drain - ing days of  
 God in ver - y truth; as quiv - er full of  
 growth in strength and grace. With - in their house no



cit - y shield, the guards a use - less watch main - tain.  
 work par - take— those whom God loves fall fast a - sleep.  
 ar - rows stored are chil - dren giv'n in days of youth.  
 foes are feared, for God keeps watch with - in that place.

SECOND READING

*Ephesians 5:21—6:4*

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”

This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” —which is the first commandment with a promise— “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

#### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Alleluia.

#### **GOSPEL**

*Mark 10:2–16*

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

“What did Moses command you?” he replied.

They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them.

When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

#### **APOSTLES' CREED**

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

#### **HYMN OF THE DAY**

*"Lord, When You Came as Welcome Guest"*

**Hymn 763**

Lord, when you came as welcome guest to Cana's wedding feast,  
the bridal pair, divinely blest, found all their joy increased.

Now give your presence from above that these, by vowing true,  
may show their pledge is like the love between the Church and you.

Preserve the vow these two shall make, this circle round their life,  
this golden ring that none may break which makes them man and wife.

Your daily mercies let them share, all threats of harm destroy;  
by this their vow divide their care and double all their joy.

On all who thus before you kneel your joyous Spirit pour  
that each may wake the other's zeal to love you more and more.

O grant them here in peace to live, in faith and hope and love,  
and after earthly days receive the crown of life above.

**SERMON**

**Mark 10:2-12 (Sunday)**

**James 3:13-18 (Saturday)**

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

**HYMN**

*"Love in Christ Is Strong and Living"*

**Hymn 726**

Love in Christ is strong and living, binding faithful hearts in one;  
love in Christ is true and giving, may his will in us be done.

Love is patient and forbearing, clothed in Christ's humility,  
gentle, selfless, kind, and caring, reaching out in charity.

Love in Christ abides forever, fainting not when ills attend;  
love, forgiving and forgiven, shall endure until life's end.

**OFFERING**

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## PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Loving Lord, according to your wisdom and will you bring us together into families. We pray today for the special interests of our Christian homes.

**In your mercy, hear us, Lord.**

Make our families dwellings of joy and schools of character. Grant to those who are married true love and unbreaking loyalty for the sake of their children, to be models in their communities, and for the welfare of society.

**In your mercy, hear us, Lord.**

Protect us from the spiritual enemies of our household, from quick temper, cranky moods, thoughtless words, and selfish pleasures which rob marriage of love and deprive childhood of joy.

**In your mercy, hear us, Lord.**

Guide and guard us as we move through the changes of family life, from early joys to hectic support to aging reflection. Provide the wisdom we need to enjoy the transitions of life.

**In your mercy, hear us, Lord.**

For the sake of our society, whose foundations are in the family, we pray for the homes of others. Spare men and women from marriage vows lightly planned, carelessly made, and easily broken.

**In your mercy, hear us, Lord.**

Protect us and others from evils which deplete households, degrade children, cheapen love, and dishonor old age.

**In your mercy, hear us, Lord.**

Hear our prayers for our extended families and for the family of believers. Channel your strength to those who are hurting without healing and those who grieve without comfort. Calm the distraught and give guidance to the confused. [We pray especially for... *here name the person and the cause of the petition.*] Hold those we love in the arms of your grace.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

*Silent prayer*

O Lord, for the sake of your Son and with the power of your Spirit, give us strength and wisdom to build our homes in the shadow of your gracious and forgiving love.

**In your mercy, hear us, Lord, and grant us your blessings. Amen.**

#### **LORD'S PRAYER**

**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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

#### **CLOSING PRAYER**

M: O Lord God, our heavenly Father, pour out the Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep us strong in your grace and truth, protect and comfort us in all temptation, and bestow on us your saving peace, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

#### **BLESSING**

M: Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Live in harmony with one another. Serve the Lord with gladness.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

## CLOSING HYMN

*“Oh, How Good It Is”*

Hymn 731

Oh, how good it is when the fam’ly of God  
dwells together in spirit, in faith and unity.  
Where the bonds of peace, of acceptance and love  
are the fruits of his presence here among us.

### *Refrain*

So with one voice we’ll sing to the Lord,  
and with one heart we’ll live out his word,  
till the whole earth sees the Redeemer has come,  
for he dwells in the presence of his people.

Oh, how good it is on this journey we share  
to rejoice with the happy and weep with those who mourn.  
For the weak find strength, the afflicted find grace  
when we offer the blessing of belonging. *Refrain*

Oh, how good it is to embrace his command  
to prefer one another, forgive as he forgives.  
When we live as one we all share in the love  
of the Son with the Father and the Spirit. *Refrain*

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### **Marriage Ministry Coordinator**

First, Niagara Falls, then Galena, then Milwaukee, then Libertyville. Every few years, Lisa and I go on a Marriage Retreat. We always learn something new (and wonderful) about God’s gift of marriage and each other. We always grow in appreciation of God’s gift of marriage and each other. You may remember that our Libertyville marriage retreat was 3 Sunday evenings together with supper and the opportunity to: 1) grow in God’s grace and wisdom, 2) grow in our relationship with our spouse, and 3) encourage couples much like us.

I’d love to go to Niagara Falls again; I’d like to go to Galena again; I’d be ok with going to Milwaukee again; but staying in Libertyville again just might be best for us together.

We have resources for a 3-session retreat (60-90 minutes each session). We’d love to have a coordinator, a couple, a team set us up\* for our own St. John Family Marriage Retreat. Talk with each other, and then let’s figure out how to make this work - for the good of our families and the glory of our God!

\*scheduling, promotion, set-up ...