

Sept. 19, 2010

Genesis 2:18-24

“One Flesh”

So, here we are, gathered after WEEK ONE of The Grand Sweep, 365 days from Genesis to Revelation. We have completed one of fifty-two weeks of reading, as we read the entire Bible in one year.

And you can't say the reading was boring this week! These chapters of Genesis are jam-packed with action!

J. Ellsworth Kalas makes a poignant observation in his sermon ideas for this curriculum. He points to an amazing truth: ***God gave us a perfect beginning and will lead us to a perfect end; but we have to work at the middle..***

In the Garden of Eden all was good. In the promised realm of God, which Christ will bring in final victory at the end of time, all will be good—death and sin will be no more.

But in the middle, we are often in a muddle. We don't live as God intends us to live. We stumble and fall. But God offers us forgiveness and a new beginning, step by step as we turn to him for guidance.

One of the functions of Scripture is to offer us guidance—to show us something about the life God intends for us. The text I selected for today provides an image that God wants us to embrace.

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone.”

I once spotted a bumper sticker that made me chuckle:

The Lord God created man. Then he rested. The Lord God created woman...and no one has rested since!

I have two questions for us this morning:

- What does this creation story from Genesis tell us?
- Do we believe it?

Ok, first: what does the story of God's creation of man and woman tell us? I'd like to clear up some misconceptions. This Genesis story does tell us

about the relationship between the man and the woman. It does NOT tell us that the woman was less, or secondary to the man. The reading has been used to teach that, through emphasizing that the woman was “drawn out of” or “derived from” the man.

But the creation needs to be understood as a whole. We are told that God created humans, male and female. The creation of woman is NECESSARY to the completion of creation. The theologian Phyllis Trible suggests that the creation of the woman was the crowning event in the narrative and the fulfillment of humanity. I have seen another bumper sticker, which seems to reflect Trible’s viewpoint: *Adam was a rough draft.*

I’m not sure Trible is right, and the bumper sticker carries things a bit far-STILL, we need to get the point: The story of creation does not give greater importance to either the man or the woman. Bible commentator Cuthbert Simpson has stated that verse 23 has been improperly translated from the Biblical Hebrew. Instead of reading, *She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man*, the more accurate translation would read: *She shall be called woman because she was taken out of HER man.* Think what the bumper sticker creators might do with that one: *Eve was a butterfly; Adam was her cocoon.* !!

Ok, you get my point. Wrestling with this passage in an attempt to see which is the greatest or who has most brownie points with God is ridiculous. Fussing over those issues leads us to miss the real message:

It is not good for a man to be alone. ‘
It is not good for a person to be alone.

God created us to be together. Very close. Bone of each other’s bones. Flesh of one another’s flesh. So tightly woven together that even the words that name us are parts of each other: man, woman.

Genesis 2:18-24 speaks powerfully and tenderly of male-female relationships, of the gift and beauty of marriage. But I think God carries this further. Adam and Eve, as the emblems of the first people that ever existed, actually represent humanity. All humanity, you see, are bone of each other’s bones, flesh of one another’s flesh. Full humanity can only be found in community, in an understanding that we are all part of the family of God, that we are ALL ONE FLESH.

That is the message of this text- the answer to question one.

Now we come to the second question: Do we believe this? Do we believe that we are ALL ONE FLESH? Do we believe it is not good for a person to be alone? Or do we have a bumper sticker faith that declares: “O Lord, I’d rather be alone! You get together with a woman and just never get any peace!!” OR, “You spend ten minutes with a man and you KNOW this guy is at BEST a ‘rough draft!’”

What do you think? Do we even BEGIN to accept that, with all people in all places, our bones, flesh and names are related to and belong to each other?

I have served five churches over 23 years. I have known members who did not give to the church, because they knew some of the offering went to Africa; some went to black colleges long supported by Methodists. I have appealed to congregations for financial help for a Chicago church that was dealing with fire damage, located in a rough neighborhood. And people said, “The big churches in Chicago should help them; this isn’t our problem.” So often we find ourselves thinking, “Why should we support those OTHER people? Why not my OWN people, OUR children, OUR community, MY family?”

Today’s Scripture tells us why. Because when we are different from each other---- as different as a woman is from a man----- we are still called to accept we are ONE FLESH: bone of bone, flesh of flesh.

As we receive the daily news, we are called to hear the stories as stories of OUR people, OUR flesh- people far away; people nearby yet immeasurably distant from our daily lives.

Joan G. Evangelisti has written of the death of her alcoholic brother, a homeless Wisconsin man. In her words, *Behind every homeless American there is, somewhere, a family in pain. No man is an island. Not you, not I, not the man, with no toes who died in his car on a parking lot in Milwaukee.....He was somebody’s father, somebody’s son, somebody’s brother. He was MY brother. No man is an island. We are all, during the course of our lives, connected, attached, part of a whole.*” The homeless are bone of our bones, flesh of our flesh.

It is not good than anyone should be alone.

We are all one flesh.

Oh, it's not easy. God never told us it would be easy. Muddling through the middle between the Good Garden of Eden and the final conquest of sin and death IS NOT EASY. But still God proclaims it:

We are all ONE FLESH.

Can we see it? Do we believe it? Is it the truth? Can we live it?

Everyone. Bone of my bones. Flesh of my flesh. ONE FLESH. AMEN.