

## “Partners”

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UCC at The Villages, FL  
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*World Communion Sunday*

Gen. 2:18-24

Mark 10:2-16

*The Lord God said,*

*“It isn’t good for the man to live alone.*

*I need to make a suitable partner for him.” ’*

*Gen. 2:18*

Let us pray... O God,

Thank you for those you send to us as Beloved Friends and Soul Mates.

Teach us how to be good partners, to show love and be loved  
just as we are loved by you.

Amen

Got this from a church member – with some adaptation:

*And God promised men that good and obedient wives  
would be found in all corners of the world.*

*Then, God made the earth round*

*just to show She had a sense of humor...*

That’s right!

God didn’t promise to give us spouses who would do our will,  
anticipate our whims, and fulfill all our wishes  
and any other unreasonable expectations.

Oh, gentlemen, I also mean you, too, and not just speaking to the ladies –  
just want to be clear about that...

OK, I am veering into politically incorrect territory,  
but just to make the point that we all can be deceived  
by our expectations of those we love and who love us.

Don’t we expect our true love – our “soul mate”,  
to understand us and appreciate us and want the best for us?

I’ve heard it put this way that our ‘soul mate’  
is actually the one who knows what buttons to push to drive us crazy –  
and then pushes them!

Well, that’s not quite the way it is,  
but rather a ‘soul mate’ is the one who pushes us and challenges us –  
and brings out the best in us.

Willard, p.2

Recently, I talked with a friend who was planning to go to his daughter's wedding and he was concerned that – as the father of the bride, he would have to say something at the reception.

So, I asked him,

“How do you & your wife get along?”

He said,

“We fight like cats & dogs!”

I asked,

“How long have you been married?”

He said,

“54 years!”

I said,

“Yeah, but you fight fair, right? Tell them that.”

And a smile came to his face...

Still there are spouses who push their partner's buttons to hurt them to control them.

There are some couples where divorce is a way out for one or the other or both.

Divorce in America is roughly 50%, and according to one internet source that breaks down to 41% for first-time marriages, 60% for second marriages, and 74% for a third time.

<http://www.divorcerate.org/>

Our Gospel lesson is one that we preachers would prefer to avoid.

Divorce is a subject that can be very sensitive for congregations.

Yet it is one subject about which Jesus had quite a bit to say.

*[when] he said to [his disciples],*

*"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." Mark 10:11-12 [RSV]*

And all the beautiful – and romantic imagery of being created male & female and the two become one that Jesus spoke about immediately before just heaps guilt onto the suggestion of divorce for any reason.

In my paraphrase of this text, I interpreted Jesus' words this way:

“Whoever divorces a woman just to marry another woman, commits disloyalty against them both.

And the same is true when a woman does this.”

This does narrow the issue of why someone would seek divorce down to the arbitrary changing of partners just to have a “trophy wife” – or a “trophy husband”, for that matter.

Willard, p.3

But the consequences of divorce for whatever reason  
are implied with the anecdote that follows

about people bringing their children to be blessed by Jesus.

Contact with children becomes an issue when parents split up  
and that can even still be a factor with grown children –  
though it is a choice they make.

Therefore, Jesus, understandably, comes down hard against divorce  
to prevent dishonoring women and losing contact with children.

Women and children would have been especially vulnerable in Jesus' day  
and still are in traditional societies – but truth be told, in our own as well.

There is a clue, though, that Jesus may actually justify divorce  
by something he says in his initial conversation when

*[the Pharisees] said,*

*"Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce,  
and to put her away."*

*But Jesus said to them,*

*"For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment."*

The 'hardness of heart' is a buzzword for 'unforgivable sin' –  
the habit or unwillingness to change one's internal attitudes and behavior,  
the sin against the Holy Spirit of love  
that becomes a sin against another person's spirit.

And this suggests that Moses permitted that law for divorce –  
not as a loophole, but to protect women and children  
from domestic abuse.

It is only as children that we may enter heaven – and that's the way it should be,  
and by that I don't think Jesus meant to be naïve,  
but that it is never too late to be innocent –  
or rather to choose innocence, to choose love with an open heart  
that affirms the Beloved – whether that is  
God, family, friends, your pets, as well as a life-partner.

You pretty much have to approach marriage the same childlike way;

Though we would like to think it's true that

"Love is never having to say you're sorry",

that only works if you're always willing to say, "I'm sorry" –  
and "I forgive", too.

Willard, p.4

In the Beginning, God was looking around for a 'suitable partner' for Adam, like Brontosaurus, Cave Bear, Puppy Dog, but nothing was quite a match. But then God took a rib from Adam's side – and provided a partner for him, such that Adam cheered, "Here is someone like me!"

It is not easy to find that perfect match  
and we are not really guaranteed that anyway.  
But when you find that person you want to share your life with,  
that's a gift from God that no one – and no law  
should be permitted to separate.

That is one of the great lessons that the GLBT community has taught me –  
the joy of finally finding a partner.  
I know how tough it is as a heterosexual person to do that,  
but to persevere against the challenges of a society  
that ostracize and discourage honest, loving relationships –  
and to claim that love anyway... is a model to be followed.

And when we are lucky to find someone, our true love, our 'soul mate',  
isn't it God we really seek?  
There is a Jewish prayer, entitled "Yedid Nefesh", that speaks of God  
as the one we would love and the lover we would be...  
Hear now, this beautiful prayer-poem...

Willard, 5

*Soul mate, loving God, compassion's gentle source,  
Take my disposition and shape it to Your will.*

*Like a darting deer will I rush to You.*

*Before Your glorious Presence humbly will I bow.*

*Let Your sweet love delight me with its thrill,*

*Because no other dainty will my hunger still.*

*How splendid is Your light, illuminating the world.*

*My soul is weary yearning for Your love's delight.*

*Please good God, do heal her; reveal to her Your face,*

*The pleasure of Your Presence, bathed in Your grace.*

*She will find strength and healing in Your sight;*

*Forever she will serve You, grateful, with all her might.*

*What mercy stirs in You since the days of old, my God.*

*Be kind to me Your own dear child; my love for You requite.*

*With deep and endless longing I yearned for Your embrace,*

*To see my light in Your light, basking in Your grace.*

*My heart's desire, find me worthy in Your sight.*

*Do not delay Your mercy, please hide not Your light.*

*Reveal Yourself, Beloved, for all the world to see,*

*And shelter me in peace beneath Your canopy.*

*Illumine all creation, lighting up the earth,*

*And we shall celebrate You in choruses of mirth.*

*The time, my Love, is now; rush, be quick be bold.*

*Let Your favor grace me, in the spirit of days of old.*

God does not promise that we will find a spouse or Soul Mate in this world,

and even if we are so lucky and blessed to find such a person,

they still can't fulfill all our expectations.

For what we seek in such a person is no less than God –

so, you have to accept your loved one as they are,

just like you hope you are accepted for who you are .

But what God does promise is to be that Beloved One who loves you

no matter what, come what may.

Amen

*Our lesson from Genesis 2:18-24 tells about the concluding act of Creation  
when God created Eve to be with Adam...  
[This was the beginning of human relationships...  
with couples therapy soon to follow...]*

The Lord God said,

“It isn’t good for the man to live alone.

I need to make a suitable partner for him.”

So the Lord took some soil and made animals and birds.

He brought them to the man to see what names he would give each of them.

Then the man named the tame animals and the birds and the wild animals.

That’s how they got their names.

None of these was the right kind of partner for the man.

So the Lord God made him fall into a deep sleep,  
and he took out one of the man’s ribs.

Then after closing the man’s side,

the Lord made a woman out of the rib.

The Lord God brought her to the man, and the man exclaimed,

“Here is someone like me!

She is part of my body, my own flesh and bones.

She came from me, a man. So I will name her Woman!”

24 That’s why a man will leave his own father and mother.

He marries a woman, and the two of them become like one person.

Inspired by Mark 10:2-16

And the Pharisees approached Jesus, asking him,

“Is it allowed for a husband to divorce his wife?”

Yet Jesus said to them,

“What did Moses direct you to do?”

So, they said,

“Moses permits that a legal document of divorce  
be written and she be dismissed.”

Then Jesus answered them,

“It is because of those of you who are dangerously abusive  
that he wrote this exception.

Yet at the beginning of Creation,

God made human beings, both male and female.

For this reason, one leaves father & mother to be with a partner.

And the two become one entity,

no longer vulnerable, because they are together.

Therefore,

those whom God has brought together in love,

must never allow anyone to come between them.”

And when they were back home in Capernaum,

his disciples asked him about this again.

And Jesus said to them,

“Whoever divorces a woman just to marry another woman,  
commits disloyalty against them both.

And the same is true when a woman does this.”

And some people brought their little boys and girls to him

so that he would touch them to bless them.

But the disciples scolded those who brought these children.

Yet seeing this, Jesus was displeased and said to them,

“Let the little ones come to me and don’t block them!

They are what the Beloved Community of God’s Kingdom is all about.

I’m telling you the truth,

whoever isn’t open to receive the Kingdom of God like a child

won’t find it open either.”

And embracing the children,

he laid his hands upon them to bless them.

Mark 10:2-16

[2] And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked,

"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

[3] He answered them,

"What did Moses command you?"

[4] They said,

"Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away."

[5] But Jesus said to them,

"For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.

[6] But from the beginning of creation,

'God made them male and female.'

[7] 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother

and be joined to his wife, [8] and the two shall become one flesh.'

So they are no longer two but one flesh.

[9] What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

[10] And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.

[11] And he said to them,

"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her;

[12] and if she divorces her husband and marries another,  
she commits adultery."

[13] And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them;  
and the disciples rebuked them.

[14] But when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said to them,

"Let the children come to me, do not hinder them;

for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

[15] Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God  
like a child shall not enter it."

[16] And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.