

**Sunday, October 7, 2018 – Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**“In Order”**

Genesis 2: 18-25

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Definition Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

There's a popular notion that has been gaining ground for over a century. In the wake of the Russian Revolution in 1917 that pushed the Bolsheviks into power and began the avowed communist, atheistic Soviet government, many new ideas were tried out. Among them: no-fault divorce. If marriage is simply a human construct, not something created by nature or designed by a higher power, who is the state to require you to declare grounds for divorce? The 60s brought it to our shores. No-fault divorce was signed into law in California by then-governor Ronald Reagan and since then, some variation of it is now the law of the land in all 50 states, plus DC.

Genesis 2 presents a problem for anyone who holds that marriage is a human invention – you can reject what it has to say, you can try to explain it away, but you have to deal with it, especially Christians. Why? Because Genesis 2 makes it very clear that marriage isn't a human social construct, it's part of God's design. It's right there, in the second creation account (Genesis 1 is God-centered, while Genesis 2 takes the human perspective) – God invented the special human relationship between one man and one woman for as long as they both shall live, called marriage. It's a holy act, instituted by God, combining the visible, tangible element of two people together – the only thing that stops it from meeting the definition of a sacrament is that married people are no more favored by God or forgiven of their sins than single people are.

When God says stuff, we ought to listen and we ought not to mess with it! But it's so easy to get things out of order. We do that all over the place in our lives, don't we? Well, I can speak for myself, I do and I know that because you're not Jesus you're, like me, sinners, so you do, too.

So let's define the problem – and some of you, I'm sure, are bracing yourselves for me to dig in here on specific social issues – I already mentioned divorce in the opening of this sermon, or gay marriage, or living together before marriage... at the risk of being way too quick at addressing it, I hold to the traditional, Biblical view that if a person is married, God's plan is for one man and one woman for as long as they both shall live and that anything different than that is sin and so we all, in our own thoughts, words and deeds fall short on this – but all of those are a message for another day.

No, the bigger issue is that all of us, no matter our marital situation or lack thereof get things out of order. Just like we're tempted to fear, love or trust in other things ahead of God, we're also tempted to get things out of whack in our human relationships. If you're married, the temptation is to place things besides your spouse on top in your human priorities – even blessings, very good things – your kids, your extended family (including your parents), your friends, your work, your hobbies. If you're dating you may be tempted to push too hard for marriage, or recoil based perhaps not on what your partner brings to the table, but what you bring. If you're single, you may be tempted to be dismissive, or jealous, or cynical. And for all, married, single or anywhere in between we have the tendency to try to shove this institution that God created into our own box and make it into what we imagine it to be, rather than what God calls it. See how you don't have to be married to have a text about marriage apply to you? Scripture is always best used to examine ourselves, rather than point fingers or judgmental looks at that guy or "those people."

What gets in the way? Maybe the biggest deal for Americans especially is that we believe marriage is about falling in love. Love is a feeling. We were spoon-fed this as kids, and we lap it up as grown-ups, too. The prince and the princess have love at first sight and they live what?: "Happily ever after." And hey, guys, this isn't just for the ladies in here – we want it to feel easy and comfortable and we want have tender feelings for our gal. And in the year 2018 this has thoroughly infected all of us, because Snow White and the Seven Dwarves (the Disney

version) came out 81 years ago, which means the oldest members of our congregation were still children when all this really took hold, so it's not just the kids these days.

Almost every marriage sermon I've preached has some variation of this line – love isn't a feeling, love is commitment! It's an action, it's something that we do even – maybe especially is a better word – when we don't feel like it and we have no expectation to receive something in return.

A prominent marriage therapist, pretty much the expert on marriage and relationships statistics, his name is Dr. John Gottman, has studied thousands of couples in his "Love Lab" in Seattle over the past 30 years. A number of important truths have been gleaned from that research that he uses in his counselor training today, but a couple key ones that I'll share here:

1. Small things often – grand gestures are nice, but what really helps build a foundation in human relationships is those small things often – kind words, forgiveness, little gestures that show you're thinking of the other and that they're a priority in your life.

2. almost 70% of problems in a marriage are perpetual – the details may change over the years, but the problems are the same. This is why even the healthiest couples have been fighting the "same fight" for years.

3. Guys, listen up – one of the biggest things that helps marital connection and satisfaction is men being willing to accept their wives' influence.

4. Four particular behaviors are harbingers of destruction – criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling, or silently shutting down during conflict.

5. In the healthiest of couples, positive comments, gestures and encouragement, what he calls "bids" outnumber negative comments and gestures 5-1 – DURING THE FIGHT. It's 20-1 in non-conflict communication.

I list all of these to say this: love is an action and commitment means pouring the best of our resources – our time, our energy, our money – behind that thing to which we're committed.

This is what Jesus does for His bride, the Church. Self-sacrificial love, pouring out His very best of Himself, He gives up all, even up to and including His own life, to save Her. There are so many reasons to come back with negativity – criticism and defensiveness, contemptuous anger and silent seething – but over and over again He keeps turning toward the Church in love. Obviously Jesus is perfect and we are not, but marriage, when working mostly right, and especially when centered in Jesus, is supposed to a dim glimpse, like looking through smoked glass, at the kind of love that God has for us.

And the good news today is that same love that Jesus showed through His death for us and His resurrection and victory over death, also won victory over our sin – including the sins we commit against our spouse or against this God-ordained institution of marriage. And then here's what's cool – while we don't live happily ever after, when both people are intentionally living this out – this love action, especially when you don't feel like it, with a commitment to learning better communication and walking with each other in a self-sacrificial way, sets us up for the best odds of actually having those good feelings, that happiness, that romance – not as a goal, but as a byproduct of the love of God centering your life together.

Finally, an encouragement – if you're having issues, there are plenty of resources – counseling, marriage retreats and seminars, tools to help you communicate with each other. I can help point you to some of that. Please don't wait until it's so far gone that you've all but signed the divorce papers. Seek help now. It's healthy and it's good and no matter how bleak things are now or have been in the past, each new day is a day the Lord has made for us to rejoice and be glad in. In Christ and His love, there is always hope for tomorrow. In Jesus' name, Amen.