

Date: October 7, 2018

Scripture: Genesis 2:18-24

Title: RELATIONSHIPS

Pastor Billy Strayhorn tells about a certain church which held a Sunday service patterned after those in colonial America. The pastor dressed in long coat and knickers, and the congregation was divided by gender: men on the left side of the aisle and women on the right. At collection time, the pastor announced that this, too, would be done in the old way. He asked the “head of the household” to come forward and place the money on the altar. The men instantly rose. To the amusement of the entire congregation, many of them crossed the aisle to get money from their wives.

Thanks to the #MeToo movement and the number of women speaking out about sexual harassment, people are suggesting that 2018 might really be the year of the woman. Who can doubt that women are finally establishing an equal footing with men in the workplace, as well as in general society? It’s interesting to note that the current 115th United States Congress now has 22 female Senators out of 100, two more than both the 113th and 114th Congresses, and an all-time high. The numbers are still not equal, but they’re moving in that direction.

Popular writer Kathleen Parker in an online article adds her voice to those who think that 2018 might finally be the Year of the Woman. She notes that many of the original goals of the women’s movement have already been reached. Women now outnumber men in college, graduate schools and medical and law schools; three of the nine Supreme Court justices are female; and, incrementally, women are reaching what Parker calls the dubious objective of serving alongside men in combat roles. Then in her humorous way she adds, “Nor would it be wise to underestimate women’s determination to clean House . . .” then she adds in parenthesis “and Senate.”

Today’s scripture lesson may be very helpful to us as we determine the roles of both men and women in our world today.

We turn for our understanding to the first book of the Bible. In Genesis 2 we read these words, “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, God then 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.” What a fascinating story. God doesn’t want man to be alone so he takes a rib from man’s side and makes a woman to be his companion.

The first thing that we can say from this lesson from the book of Genesis is, that human beings are made for relationship. “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone.’” That’s true! It’s not good for human beings to be alone. People are made for relationships. That’s a practical statement of fact. This doesn’t necessarily refer to a spouse, although that works for most people. We need family, but we also need friends. Having family and friends is good for our health.

Lisa Berkman of the Harvard School of Public Health has found that older people with more friends, are much more likely to recover from a heart attack than people with few or no friends or social supports. Another study demonstrated that people with no friends were three times more likely to die than those with at least one or more sources of social support. A friendly face, says one author, may be just as health giving as an aspirin or vitamin E. It’s not good for our health, for us to be alone. It’s also not good for our emotional well-being.

Author J. Allan Petersen tells about a flight he took on a 747 out of Brazil. Midway through the flight he was awakened from sleep by a strong voice announcing, “We have a very serious emergency.” The emergency was that three engines had quit because of fuel contamination and the fourth was expected to go at any second. The plane began to drop and turn, preparing for an emergency landing.

At first the situation seemed unreal to Petersen, but when the steward barked, “Prepare for impact,” he found himself, and everyone around him praying. Petersen’s prayer was quite revealing. As he buried his head in his lap and pulled up his knees, he said, “Oh, God, thank You. Thank You for the incredible privilege of knowing You. Life has been wonderful.” Could you pray a prayer like that in such an emergency? As the plane approached the ground, Petersen’s last cry was, “Oh, God, my wife! My children!” Petersen survived. As he wandered about the airport in a daze after he disembarked from the damaged aircraft, aching all over, he found he couldn’t speak, but his mind was racing, “What were my last words? What was the bottom line?” As he remembered, he had his answer: relationship. Reunited with his wife and sons, he found that all he could say to them over and over was, “I appreciate you, I appreciate you!”

In Genesis it says, “It is not good for the man to be alone,” and that’s true.

The second lesson we learn from Genesis is: **Both man and woman are created in the image of God.** In Genesis 1:26-27 we read, “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.’”

Did you get that? Both men and women were created in the image of God. There’s no hint in this verse that one is to be subservient to the other. There’s no hint

that one is favored over the other. There's no hint that one is spiritually superior to the other. God created humanity, male and female in his own image, and that means that there's an innate dignity in the life of woman. There's also an innate dignity in the life of man. There can be no place in the Christian family for violating the sacred dignity of either.

There are differences between men and women and that's part of God's miraculous and wonderful plan. In most homes there's a division of responsibility, but that division of responsibility needs to be fair and equal. Because there's a dignity accorded by our Creator: a dignity innate in our very nature, male and female, partners together, children of God . . . created in His image.

Now, just because men and women are both created in God's image and therefore are equal partners doesn't mean they are exactly alike. No two people in the world are exactly alike, regardless of their gender. That's what makes life interesting.

Every once in a while, something comes across the Internet that's so amusing. Have you seen the one that features a wife and a husband writing in their individual diaries about the same event? Here's the wife's version: Tonight, I thought my husband was acting weird. We had made plans to meet at a nice restaurant for dinner. I was shopping with my friends all day long, so I thought he was upset at the fact that I was a bit late, but he made no comment on it. Conversation wasn't flowing, so I suggested that we go somewhere quiet so we could talk. He agreed, but he didn't say much. I asked him what was wrong; He said, "Nothing . . ." I asked him if it was my fault that he was upset. He said he wasn't upset, that it had nothing to do with me, and not to worry about it. On the way home, I told him that I loved him. He smiled slightly, and kept driving. I can't explain his behavior. I don't know why he didn't say, "I love you, too." When we got home, I felt as if I had lost him completely, as if he wanted nothing to do with me anymore. He just sat there quietly, and watched TV. He continued to seem distant and absent. Finally, with silence all around us, I decided to go to bed. About 15 minutes later, he came to bed. But I still felt that he was distracted, and his thoughts were somewhere else. He fell asleep; I cried. I don't know what to do. I'm almost sure that his thoughts are with someone else. My life is a disaster. That's what appeared in the wife's diary describing their evening. Here's what appeared in the husband's diary: A two-foot putt . . . WHO misses a stupid two-foot putt!

Yes, men and women are different. And, as Paul noted, not everyone is meant to marry. Still, we need someone to give us moral support. It's not good for man or woman to be alone. We were created for relationships. We're all created in the image of God. That means we are all equal in God's eyes and deserve to be treated with dignity as children of God.

Here's the final thing to be said: If you are in a marriage or relationship, it's your responsibility to make that relationship works, if at all possible. It's also your partner's responsibility too, but you can't determine his or her behavior. You can only

determine yours, and the Bible is clear that Jesus took marriage and relationships very seriously. But, Jesus never expects anyone to stay with an abusive spouse or partner, but, under normal circumstances, we're to do all we can to make our marriages and relationships work.

Studies show more and more, that divorce and separations are no real solution to problems. Counselors who, a decade ago were advising couples to go ahead and separate, are now recommending people to hang in there and try to make it through the storm. That has been God's plan all along. Even those of us who are in a good marriage or relationships can make it better by inviting God into that relationship. To build a better marriage and relationship, you and I need to be better people, and that requires the Grace of God. Are we willing to offer our marriage and relationships to God? Are we willing to pray that God will help us make any changes in our own life that may be preventing us from being the kind of person our partner yearns for?

God takes relationships seriously. It's not good for us to be alone. We were created for relationship. Again, it doesn't mean that we must have a marriage partner. Some of the greatest Christian saints were and are single persons. But we do need a community.

We're all created in the image of God. We deserve to be treated with dignity and to treat others with dignity. This is God's will for our life. May God bless our families regardless of how those families may be configured. May we love and support one another as God intends as we Trust, Believe, and have an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen