

It's About Companionship, not Sex!

Addressing the Anti-Relationship Proposition 102 at Shadow Rock UCC

October 26, 2008

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Genesis 2

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

19 Now God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. God brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam ^[h] no suitable helper was found. 21 So God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, God took one of the man's ribs ^[i] and closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then God made a woman from the rib ^[j] that God had taken out of the man, and God brought her to the man.

23 The man said,

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

24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

25 The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Footnotes:

- a. Genesis 2:2 Or *ceased* ; also in verse
- b. Genesis 2:5 Or *land* ; also in verse
- c. Genesis 2:5 Or *land* ; also in verse
- d. Genesis 2:6 Or *mist*
- e. Genesis 2:7 The Hebrew for *man (adam)* sounds like and may be related to the Hebrew for ground (*adamah* it is also the name Adam (see Gen. 2:20).
- f. Genesis 2:12 Or *good* ; *pearls*
- g. Genesis 2:13 Possibly southeast Mesopotamia
- h. Genesis 2:20 Or *the man*
- i. Genesis 2:21 Or *took part of the man's side*
- j. Genesis 2:22 Or *part*
- k. Genesis 2:23 The Hebrew for *woman* sounds like the Hebrew for *man*.

An elderly couple toddled into the local McDonalds and ordered one combo meal. The husband helped his wife sit down and then he sat down across from her. She took some napkins and spread them out in front of them like placemats and he took the food and began to divide it up between them. He gave her a few fries and then he gave himself a few fries until they were all distributed. Then he cut the cheeseburger in half and placed half on her placemat and kept the other half.

I watched them do this and could not help but notice how tender they were with each other. I also noticed that the husband began to eat but she just sat there and patiently watched him.

It occurred to me that with the economy the way it is maybe they could only afford one meal and so I offered to buy another meal for them. She said, "No thank you. We share everything."

I decided to be a little more insistent and offered again but she responded the same way, "No thank you. We share everything."

After this had gone on for what seemed to be quite a while, I could no longer stand it and so I asked the woman, "I understand that you share everything and what a beautiful witness of sharing, but why don't you eat?"

He spoke up at this point and said, "It was my turn to use the teeth first."

(From Joke of the Day on the Internet)

What a beautiful witness of sharing and companionship. I use this joke to introduce the concept of sharing and companionship because this is what Genesis 2 is about. This passage is at the heart of some very hurtful and disrespectful promotion of anti-relationship propositions in our country. Currently, here in Arizona, I am talking about Proposition 102 which is the anti-relationship proposition but disguised as the pro-marriage proposition. This morning I want to continue the hermeneutic and methodology I have used all this month when talking about faith and politics. I have been encouraging us to use a larger framework by which we can think about these things. I want to do this because too often scripture is used as a weapon to tear down and this is most evident in the issue of same sex relationships. Journey with me this morning.

Verse 18 reads and I paraphrase, "After God formed from the ground all the beasts of the field and birds of the air, God evaluated the situation, specifically the human situation. In God's evaluation God found it lacking." Please note that this is a metaphorical story and the ancient storyteller is setting up a situation where God's creating work is incomplete and God senses this but is not sure how to fix it.

For the sake of clarity let me make some obvious points.

- 1.) This is not a literal moment by moment account of what happened at Creation. I say this because too many people read it literally and the point needs to be made.
- 2.) There are two Creation stories and each has a specific meaning and I want us to focus on the second one because this is the one that is used as a foundation for a hateful and fearful political agenda.
- 3.) The Creation story in Genesis 2 is about the following truths:
 - a. Part of the human condition is being alone and needing other human beings to meet our deepest companionship and intimacy needs.
 - b. God cares very much about our emotional and spiritual well being and God brings God's creative power to bear on the human situation.
 - c. The passage is about an intimacy gap not a sexual gap.

Let us go back to the story. In the next verse we have a parade of animals. God senses Adam's loneliness and creates all these animals and God can tell if any of these other creatures have the potential to meet Adam's emotional and spiritual needs by what Adam names them. I have this fun image in my head that God is working hard and creating all these things like a child uses Playdo. Grab a ball of Playdo, and press and rub it real fast between the palms of your hand and throw it in front of Adam.

God says, "OK, what's that?"

Adam responds blandly, "Ummm, a snake."

"Doesn't flip your gizzard in the right way does it?" God asks.

"It's alright, I guess." Adam responds with resignation.

"Let's keep working at it." encourages the Creator.

The story teller has all of these potential companions being paraded by Adam but none of them are quite right. We know the rest of the story.

So God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, God took one of the man's ribs ^[i] and closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then God made a woman from the rib ^[i] that God had taken out of the man, and God brought her to the man.

23 The man said,

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

Through this story we gain the insight that the right companion is not just any animal but another human being, and there are specific qualities about this relationship. I think these qualities can be understood in the roles of helpmate, teammate, classmate, and first-mate.

A helpmate is the person who takes over when you cannot go any further. Where your strength ends their strength begins.

A teammate is similar but a little different. A teammate is the one who has strengths that are different from your own. Your combined strengths make up for each other's weaknesses and so together you are a complementary whole.

A classmate is the person who you learn with and your learning is not just about the outside world but about the internal world of yourself and who you are together, and the learning never ends. Be a student of your companion.

We know the term first-mate as a nautical term which means the first person the captain turns to for authority and responsibility regarding the operation of a ship. It has a hierarchical meaning in its most common context but this is not what I mean. I want us to think in terms as the first person we turn to for our deepest needs and who we esteem first and above all others in our lives. For me, Peg, is my first mate not because she is second in command around our house. She is my first-mate because she is my best friend and we have made a commitment to not live separate lives but to build one life together. She is the first person I turn to. She is the person I esteem above all others because she is also my helpmate, my teammate, and my classmate. Sometimes I forget. Sometimes I allow myself to get so caught up in my work that I forget to esteem her first but she reminds me and in that reminder I become centered and anchored.

If you want to hurt your companion to the bone, then esteem another first and above your companion. I believe this is one of the things that are so hurtful about adulterous affairs. An unfaithful companion acts in disregard of the person they have promised to love and esteem first and above all others.

So, I make the case that this passage is not about sexuality. It is about humanity. God says it is not good for man (ish) to be alone and so, from a bone close to the heart, God created a complimentary life partner, (isha), a woman. The point is complimentary companionship; not sexual companionship.

So, let us address the literal interpretation that is so harmful. Given the time and culture that this story was created, hetero-sexuality was the best way to make this point. While we have a long way to go, the idea of equal and complimentary relationships is something we strive for and embrace as the right idea. It is difficult for us to appreciate the power and beauty of this story if we limit ourselves to sound-bite theology. Think about this in a reverse fashion.

In ancient times men and women do not live in equal or complimentary relationships. In the time of Jesus and ancient Israel it was very much a patriarchal and male dominated society. The writing of this story, the telling of this story, was a challenge to their culture trying to explain how far out of line we have come and how we can strive to fulfill God's plan for us; no one should be alone. Everyone is a helpmate and can be a helpmate for someone else. The cultural bias compels us to read the story in terms of sexuality and procreation. When we do so we may use the passage to affirm prejudices and say stupid and hurtful things like "God created us Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve". This

narrow and incorrect emphasis on the cultural bias misses the greater spiritual truth and the real message of the scripture, that is, we are created for each other, and our relationships should not be defined by sexuality, but characterized by intimacy and equality.

The emphasis on sexuality and male dominated relationships is a characterization related to our “fall” from God’s intention. Our redemption is leaving these characterizations behind through the power of the spirit and love of Jesus.

I want to make a political point now. Proposition 102 encourages people to vote yes and frames it as a vote for marriage and family. This proposition is based on an errant and narrow interpretation of scripture and it feeds a fear and prejudice about losing moral ground regarding marriage and family. In Ohio a few years ago this issue and a similar proposition was used to motivate conservative voters to turn out to the polls. Currently, here in Arizona, extreme right religious groups are pouring money into signs, TV and radio ads, and slick mailings with DVDs encouraging people to vote yes for the anti-relationship proposition. This viewpoint is touted as THE Judeo-Christian perspective. ***Whether it is religious groups or politicians pushing this anti-relationship agenda, .at the heart of their agenda is a hateful worldview and they justify their views by appealing to the authority of religious text. They are like the toddler who uses a toy truck as a weapon against the other kids and the way to handle this is to take the toy out of their hands.*** My comments are not an endorsement for any political candidate. My comments are for the purpose of exposing political fear tactics for what they are. People of faith are being played like a fiddle and this is being done for political gain, not spiritual truth. The only way politicians can manipulate us is if we stay ignorant about our faith and the scriptures which inform us of the truth. Conservative evangelicals make no apology for bringing their errant biblical interpretation to persuade people to vote a certain way and so neither should we back away from offering our interpretation. I see churches with political signs on the sides of their buildings and on their roof telling people how to vote. Teachers and preachers with more learned, informed, and progressive interpretations have a message and a worldview as well, and we should promote it and invite people to live in it.

So, people who want to use this scripture to manipulate us politically are wrong in their application and motive. The point of this scripture is companionship, not sexuality. It is a call for equality and unity, not a reason for division and separation. Let us snatch the toy from their immature hands and stop them from hurting people who live in the same household.

Please take the hand of the person next to you. It may be your spouse, companion, child, significant other, fellow church member, or even a stranger but take each others’ hand and repeat after me.

“You are bone of my bone.
You are flesh of my flesh.
You are spirit of my spirit.
You are a gift of God to me.
I will honor and cherish you.”

This is the sacramental quality of relationships and this is the domain of the church and the state should get out and stay out of marriage. As long as relationships contain the sacramental qualities of love, grace, respect, and a commitment to build one life that reflects the Household of God they are to be blessed by the Church. The state is required to treat people fairly and equally under the law and therefore cannot discriminate. The state can allow people to sue each other if it doesn't work out but only the Church can act as an instrument of blessing for the relationship.

The nature of the complementary relationship is not sexual compatibility but spiritual and emotional connection which best exhibits itself in mutual respect, caring, self-sacrificing love, and a unified vision of life. When this kind of home life is built together then we see a reflection and representation of the household of God.

The characteristics of helpmate, teammate, classmate, and first-mate are the qualities of companionship and intimacy. Any relationship that is characterized by these qualities is a relationship that should be protected by the state, blessed by the church, and is honored by God.

INVOCATION

O Breathing Life, your Name shines everywhere!
Release a space to plant your Presence here.
Envision your "I Can" now.
Embody your desire in every light and form.
Grow through us this moment's bread and wisdom.
Untie the knots of failure binding us,
as we release the strands we hold of others' faults.
Help us not forget our Source,
Yet free us from not being in the Present.
From you arises every Vision, Power and Song
from gathering to gathering.
Amen -
May our future actions grow from here!

PASTORAL PRAYER

Something new is upon us,
and yet nothing is ever new.

We are alive in a fearsome time,
and we have been given new things to fear.

We've been delivered huge blows but also
huge opportunities to reinforce or reinvent our will,
depending on where we look for honor and how we name our enemies.

The easiest thing is to think of returning the blows.
But there are other things we must think about as well, other dangers we face.

A careless way of sauntering across the earth and breaking open its treasures,
a terrible dependency on sucking out the world's best juices
for ourselves—these may also be our enemies.

The changes we dread most may contain our salvation.

small wonder - barbara kingsolver – 2002