

**“Holy Matrimony”**

Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-12  
Sermon on the Mount Series

*“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight”*  
*Jeremiah 15:16*

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November 5, 2017

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## Introduction

Christians use the word 'Holy' to signify the presence of God.

And in some cases, 'Holy' is used to signify an intensified presence.

For example: Holy Spirit; Holy Communion; and Holy Matrimony.

Now, this past week, if you are married, you very possibly had a 'spat' with your spouse. This a normal occurrence. So, when I mention Holy Matrimony alongside Holy Communion you may not immediately identify with such a statement!

However, this has always been the understanding of the people of God.

When Jesus is challenged on this, he says: **at the beginning the Creator made them male and female . . . therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.**

Obviously, holy matrimony.

Among Orthodox Jews holy matrimony is initiated through two stages:

During the *kiddushin* stage the couple is married, with one minor caveat -- they cannot physically express their union. So in the absence of any practical tangible connection, what binds the two? Their soulful connection. Only after the connection of the souls has manifested itself during the *kiddushin* period, laying the foundation for a soulful marriage, can the couple proceed with the *nisu'in*, the physical aspect of their relationship. **If matrimony started with *nisu'in*, the physical relationship could permanently overshadow the spiritual connection**, resulting in a marriage whose priorities and ideals are skewed.

Obviously, holy matrimony.

In 202AD the early Church Father, Tertullian wrote this:

How beautiful, then, the marriage of two Christians, . . . They are, in very truth, two in one flesh; and where there is but one flesh there is also but one spirit. They pray together, they worship together . . . encouraging one another, strengthening one another. Side by side they visit God's church and partake of God's Banquet; side by side they face difficulties and persecution, share their consolations. They have no secrets from one another; they never shun each other's company; they never bring sorrow to each other's hearts. Unembarrassed they visit the sick and assist the needy. They give alms without anxiety; they attend the Sacrifice without difficulty; . . . Psalms and hymns they sing to one another, striving to see which one of them will chant more beautifully the praises of their Lord. Hearing and seeing this, Christ rejoices. To such as these He gives His peace. Where there are two together, there also He is present; and where He is, there evil is not.

Obviously, from the beginning of the Christian Church, holy matrimony.

On June 18, 1918 my grandmother, Emily Boyd, was married to my grandfather, Thomas Anderson. Previously, in 1903, Emily had received the gift of *The Book of Common Prayer* . . .

*according to the use of The Church of Ireland, for 'Punctuality', Good Conduct & Lessons from the St Mary Magdalene Church Sunday Schools, Belfast, Ireland.*

I like to think prior to her marriage ceremony in June 1918 she perused and contemplated what her Prayer Book said about marriage:

(Read passage from page 247 on the Form of Solemnization of Matrimony.)

Obviously, holy matrimony.

For over a 1,000 years in Western culture 'marriage' was a rite of the Church, holy matrimony.

Now, in our day, in Western Society that has come to an end. The Marriage Laws have been re-legislated. Before the State marriage is no longer Holy Matrimony in the Christian way.

So, a great challenge is before us, the congregation and particularly for all our children, to learn, practice, defend and most importantly to display the beauty of Christian marriage, holy matrimony.

### Text

What does Jesus say?

Two preliminary comments:

As I have said previously, the Sermon on the Mount, is not so much law, but principle – the way things are; the way Jesus Christ is; the way he acts.

Furthermore, when Jesus roots the meaning of marriage in the Creation account Jesus affirms, as Davies comments: . . . the created order is a guide for the moral order. As I have repeatedly said, the righteousness of God is part of the structure of Creation. Stronger than the realities of physics, chemistry, biology, is the righteousness of God, the moral order of God.

Okay, Jesus takes us to the Christian understanding of the "beginning".

Now, as seen throughout the history of Biblical interpretation, belief in a literal Adam and Eve as the progenitors of modern humans does not have to entail a rejection of Evolutionary Theory or modern scientific understandings of the world around us (irrespective of Governor General Julie Payette's limited understanding).

The Church Father, Augustine, 1700 years ago, recognized many aspects of Genesis 1 to 3 were beyond the scope of our time and space but nevertheless he held firmly to the conviction of a literal Adam and Eve and the central themes of Creation as basic truth.

What does Genesis 1 and 2 tell us about marriage?

That man exists in the image of God as male and female.

They are different, they have different callings, but they are unequivocally equal. In this, Jesus confronts the Jewish Scribes who recognized the husband as a person before the law, who could therefore initiate a divorce; but not likewise the wife; in Jesus' time the female was not equal to the male; Jesus' teaching eventually works to correct this.

The man and woman together are to be fruitful and to multiply; to till the garden of this planet and nurture it; to be yoked together and face all of life with companionship, friendship, trust, communication, love; to have each other upon leaving father and mother; to be one flesh; to be naked together and unashamed.

Jesus goes on to tell us this principle of Christian marriage is an act of God and that his teaching is a gift to all to whom it is given, obviously, all who make it their business to follow him.

Once again, I emphasize; Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and his teaching about Marriage and Divorce in Matthew 19 is the way Jesus is (even though he never married); it is part of the substance of the righteousness of God; it is a principle, like the principle of gravity, that holds together our universe.

So important, therefore, to understand Jesus' response to his disciples – **If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.** Jesus says: a gift is given to those who follow me. As William Barclay points out: The teaching of Christ demands the presence of Christ. The way of Jesus can only be followed as the power of the Holy Spirit keeps us in step with Jesus Christ as he continues his mission in our world today.

### Application

All this being said, the ideal of Jesus is not always attainable in our broken world and in our broken lives. We experience all kinds of variations when it comes to marriage and life together. But whatever our circumstances, the Spirit of Jesus always leads in his way; the Gospel way, the good news way. Even in the terrible, terrible pain of divorce.

As Christians, we are called to guard our marriages with all our hearts.

The failing of those Jesus was talking to was hard heartedness.

Hard heartedness is a refusal to own our part of brokenness

A refusal to repent

A refusal to reconcile

A refusal to receive and give forgiveness

A refusal to repair and restore

There are some circumstances in which refusal is unfortunately the only course of action – Jesus mentions one. I believe the best teachers in the Church have always recognised Jesus is giving us principle here, not law which we so often, in the manner of the New Testament Scribes, then attempt to formulate dozens of sub-laws around what Jesus says.

Rather, in marital breakdown, the overarching way of Jesus' Gospel speak to us. (I have placed in the Bulletin today a description of Marriage and Divorce that I find reflects the Gospel.)

As Holy Communion witnesses to us today: our profound need of forgiveness and restoration and God's gracious and loving mercy through the sacrifice of his only begotten Son to reconcile us to Himself and set us into new life. Amen.