**Placed for a Purpose – Sermon 4**

**“Living as God’s Child in the Family”**

**Gen. 2:18-25; Matt. 19:1-6**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus:

 The biggest surprise of the creation account in Genesis is not what you might think. It *is* astonishing that God created the heavens and the earth in a span of but six days. And it *is* a bit unexpected that God took a breather and rested for a while on the seventh day. And it *does* make you stop and scratch your head when you realize that God created light days before He got around to creating the sun, moon, and stars.

 But the most shocking surprise of the creation account is that as the dust was settling on God’s good creation and as God surveyed everything He had made—as He went over His list and checked it twice—there was something *not good* in His *very good* creation: *“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”*

 A cast of creatures was then paraded into the man’s presence. A kind of animal audition was held. But it quickly became apparent that the Lord had a little more creating to do. *“… for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.”* Finally, Adam had a bride—bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Adam had his Eve and, at long last, everything was, indeed, very, very good.

 Marriage—the lifelong union of one man and one woman—is the crowning achievement of God’s very good creation. Marriage is the glue that holds the world together. God’s focus is always on the family: *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”* And from that “one flesh” relationship, husbands and wives have the distinct pleasure of heeding God’s gracious call to “be fruitful and multiply.”

 Now, this doesn’t mean that being single is bad, but it does mean that even those who are single should honor and support marriage whenever and however possible. Even if you yourself are a confirmed bachelor or bachelorette, the odds are pretty good that you came into this world through the marriage of your parents. Through them, God gave you life. Through them, God protected you, nurtured you, and taught you. Everything hinges on God’s gift of marriage and family.

 In recent weeks you’ve heard about how to live as God’s child in the church, and how to live as God’s child in submission to the government. Today’s topic is family. And in the family the importance of your role is magnified. Whether you’re a parent or child, a husband or wife, a brother or sister—God is using you in your family in a profound and mysterious way.

 Consider your role in your family in comparison with your role in the church and in the state. In the church, if you don’t step up to serve with a particular task, it’s likely someone else will step up and serve. If you don’t do it, someone will. Likewise with respect to the state, if you choose to live as an outlaw, and refuse to serve the government as a good citizen, you’ll face dire consequences. But your bad behavior alone won’t grind the gears of government to a screeching halt.

 But your God-given role in your family can only be carried out by you! Husbands and fathers are crucial. Wives and mothers are essential. Brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, are all gifts from God. In your family, you are irreplaceable. The love and honor shown between husbands and wives is precious in God’s sight. The obedience and honor shown from children to their parents is a priceless good work. Parents who teach the faith to their children can engage in no more critical work.

 God doesn’t leave us guessing when it comes to the roles and responsibilities of both parents and children. We learn in the Fourth Commandment that children should honor their parents. Martin Luther, in his Large Catechism, writes that “God has exalted the estate of parents above all others,” and that, “He has appointed [parents] to be his representatives on earth” (LC 126). This means that parents deserve to be respected and obeyed, despite their shortcomings and failings. Aged parents, too, should be honored and cared for by their adult children. The honor and love children owe their parents has no expiration date.

 As God’s representatives, parents are the most important teachers their children will ever have. To parents—and especially to fathers—God gives the responsibility to raise children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). God gives children not to please or amuse parents, but so that parents can guide, govern, and teach their children according to God’s will. This holy work begins by making sure that the entire family is regularly receiving God’s gifts in the Divine Service. And this holy work continues at home, where parents talk about God’s Word, teach prayers and hymns, and model Christ-like forgiveness and love. And make no mistake, this holy work is precious and pleasing to the Lord.

 Children can’t choose their parents, and parents can’t choose their children. God gives us to one another as He knows to be best. He has created your family as surely as He created the first family from our first parents. Family is the crucial and critical foundation for life in this world.

 Those of you who are currently married: Do you realize that your marriage is not entirely *your own doing*? In this respect, your marriage is a lot like the marriage of our first parents. It was God who joined Adam and Eve. And it was God who joined you to your spouse—for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death parts you. In, with, and under the courtship and dating, the engagement and the wedding, God Himself was at work, drawing you and your spouse together—to love and be loved, to serve and be served. Yours is (so to speak) a match made in heaven. God’s divine fingerprints are all over your marriage and your family. And don’t just take my word for it. After all, it’s Jesus who describes marriage as “what God has joined together.”

 Jesus made that astounding claim about marriage in response to some Pharisees who wanted to give Him the third degree about divorce. Then, as now, divorce is a difficult and divisive topic. Someone is sure to get offended, and that’s just what the Pharisees were counting on when they raised the topic with Jesus. But Jesus took them back to the beginning, back to Genesis chapter two. He reminded them that marriage is God’s gift—given for our good and for the good of the whole world. And then Jesus added, “What God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19:3-6).

 But ever since the fall into sin, human beings have been busy seeking to separate what God has joined, rejecting what God has given, and radically revising and redefining God’s gift of this holy estate to suit our own sinful, selfish desires. And nowhere have human being sought to change things up more than when it comes to the phrase, “one flesh.”

 “[Husbands and wives] are no longer two but one flesh,” said Jesus. That phrase “one flesh” is more than just a figure of speech. It describes how marriage is the closest communion that can possibly exist between two people. It is the union of a man and woman in heart, body, and mind.

 And any sexual relationship between people who are not married is destructive, harmful, and sinful. It separates sex from marriage—separates what God has joined together for our good. Couples who live together without the benefits and blessings of marriage are dishonoring marriage and dishonoring the God who gives marriage (not to mention setting themselves up for all sorts of marital problems in the future). And by the way, God’s truth about living together and sex and adultery—it’s all just as true for the AARP crowd as it is for twenty-somethings. No one gets a pass. God gives us His truth about marriage because He loves us and wants the best for us. And His truth about marriage contains no loopholes, no exceptions or exclusions.

 In fact, God’s truth about marriage condemns us all. For we’ve all dishonored marriage in our thoughts, words or deeds. And in marriages, every day, husbands and wives sin against one another and against the God who joined them together. We can go on excusing our sin or hiding our sin, or blaming someone else for our sin, or claiming that everybody else is doing it. Or, we can confess our sin to God, receive His full and free forgiveness, and then make the changes we need to make, all with the help of God. God’s forgiveness is always total and complete. But God’s forgiveness is never the permission to go on living in our sins.

 In the Scriptures, God gives us a perfect picture of marriage. In this picture, Jesus is the groom, and the church is His bride. We are the bride of Christ. But it could have been otherwise. For Jesus could have divorced us. God could have put us all away for our countless spiritual adulteries and infidelities. He could have sent us away for good, and with just cause. Instead, Jesus Christ bore our infidelities and sins on the cross. Our sin was joined to His body. His body was joined to the cross. All of our sin was laid with Him in His tomb—see that shameful load buried forever in the tomb of Jesus. See it all washed away in the cleansing splash of your baptism. There are no “scarlet letters” worn by those redeemed by Christ the crucified.

 Husbands and wives, God has joined you to your marriage partner, and God doesn’t make mistakes. That doesn’t mean that your spouse will always be your best friend, or that your spouse will always make you happy. No one can be that spouse. But as we confess our sins to God and one another, we have an ever-present help. For the God who joins husbands and wives together is surely willing, ready and able to provide every marriage with help and healing and hope and joy. Are you willing to look for that help, and ask for that help, and receive that help?

 Beloved in the Lord, it’s not just a matter of “marriage is good” and “divorce is bad.” It’s a matter of “marriage is holy, and we must all keep it holy with the help of God.” Apart from His help, there’s not much we can do. “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” (Ps. 127:1). But with the Lord—with His mercy, help, and forgiveness—all things are possible. Through the family, God gives and protects life. Through the family—through *your* family—God is doing some of His very best work. Amen.