

## Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Genesis 2:18-24 and Mark 10:2-16

At first blush, these readings may sound outdated. They portray the basic family unit as a heterosexual couple committed for life. Yet, we all know and love and maybe are LGBTQ persons, who also seek and create committed relationships and families. We all know and love and maybe are people who are divorced and remarried. Or we may find these readings irrelevant because we are not called to marriage, are too young or are widowed. Families come in all shapes and sizes. Many families do not fit the traditional pattern and nevertheless flourish. What in these readings warrants our attention?

First, consider how essential human relationships are. In Gn 2, God has created a human being out of the soil. Although the Hebrew *adam* is often translated as the proper name Adam, here it is a general name for a human being. The Lord God looks at this solitary person and says, "It is not good for the human being to be alone." How true! "Loneliness is more dangerous than obesity and as dangerous to health as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day."<sup>1</sup> Loneliness is also a spiritual issue. We all need an *ezer kenegeḏō*, translated here as "a suitable partner." *Ezer* actually means a helper and usually refers to God. The human helper is thus like God and supports us not in a subservient way but as a divine, dignified resource. Without a human helper to call us to be our best selves, we get lost in self-centered behaviors, like social media echo chambers where we spout out cruel and uncompromising judgements without regard for those they hurt. Without a suitable helper, we make choices that only consider our own self-interests. We need other human beings to stave off loneliness and keep us focused on love.

Consider this as well: when Gn 2 was written about 900 BCE, men dominated women, who were their possessions. Gn 2 proclaims that men and women are made of the same stuff. The woman is a godly helper, not a possession. (We may wish for the story to go further, but we must appreciate the huge leap it was in its day.) The man can now declare, "This one is flesh of my flesh;" women are not "other" nor "less than" men. Unfortunately, we still need this message today, because women continue to be in danger in our communities as well as in places like Afghanistan.

Third, the gospel invites us to think about how hard committed relationships are. Mark's community struggled with how to handle marriages that were in trouble, just as we do. We hear tough statements by Jesus: Moses allowed divorce because you are hard hearted, i.e. unwilling to change and grow in love, and "What God has joined together, no human being must separate." Jesus reminds us that God is the source of our committed relationships, particularly in marriage. He quotes Gn 1:26-27 – men and women together are the image of God – and Gn 2:24, which indicates the depth of the bond. Jesus says, "God [joins] together;" humans do not join themselves. The endlessly faithful love in the Trinity and the endlessly faithful love in God's commitment to us is the same love God calls us all to have for each other. We need to acknowledge this source as we live married lives. Let's face it, when we fall in love and when we fall out of it, we are often not willing to listen to anyone. If we were willing to listen, we might not make the same choices. True disciples take seriously God's role in committed relationships.

It is no accident that this conversation about divorce is followed by Jesus welcoming the children. We must open ourselves to God, as children trust their parents. Will we rebuke those who try to bring God into the marriage discussion, as the disciples rebuked the parents? Will we believe in God's endlessly faithful love so that we can stay committed to one another? If we can say "yes," God is sure to give it.

- ❖ Who has been your godly helper? Give thanks for their companionship and support.
- ❖ How can you lean into God's endlessly faithful love to strengthen your committed relationships?

©09-29-21 Bernadette Rudolph

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hrsa.gov/enews/past-issues/2019/january-17/loneliness-epidemic>