

Sunday, October 3, 2021
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Reflections by Juel Pierce

First Reading

Genesis 2:18-24

Genesis 2 stresses that people are not meant to live in isolation but in relationship. Out of love for humanity, God creates them male and female, to provide companionship for each other and to become with each other “one flesh.” The Hebrew words used here are ish (man) and ishshah (woman).

¹⁸The LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” ¹⁹So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he 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. ²³Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.”

²⁴Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Text Questions

What does God say about how people are meant to live? (verse 18) Another translation describes the creature God intended for the human as “a fitting companion” rather than a helper. Who were the fitting companions God first made? (verse 19) What was the human’s contribution to creation? (verse 20) Did any of these make a fitting companion? What did God do then? (verse 21) Another translation says that God took one side of the human and out of that side made another human, essentially dividing the one into two. (That’s sort of how cells work to create a human being out of an egg fertilized by a sperm.) (verse 22) What was the human’s response to this? Now the human can be called Man, and the other human Woman. (verse 23) What new form do these two human beings make? (verse 24) What do you think it means when the text says that they were naked and not ashamed? (verse 25)

Psalm 8

You crown us with glory and honor. (Ps. 8:5)

- ¹O LORD our Lord,
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!—
²you whose glory is chanted above the heavens out of the
mouths of infants and children;
 you have set up a fortress against your enemies, to silence
the foe and avenger.
³When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,
⁴what are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them,
 human beings that you should care for them?
⁵Yet you have made them little less than divine;
 with glory and honor you crown them.

⁶You have made them rule over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet:
⁷all flocks and cattle,
even the wild beasts of the field,
⁸the birds of the air, the fish of the sea,
and whatever passes along the paths of the sea.
⁹O LORD our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Text Question

What does the psalmist say about God's name? (verse 1) Who praises God's glory? (verse 2) What does God do with this praise? What does the psalmist think of first of all when considering God's creation? (verse 3) With what does the psalmist compare this part of creation? (verse 4) What does the psalmist think of humans in this comparison? How does God's consideration of humans compare with that of the psalmist? (verse 5) What is the purpose of human beings? (verses 6-8) This is a reminder of our first text, when God gave the creatures to the human to name. The last verse of this psalm is a reminder of how the psalmist started this contemplation of God's creation. (verse 9)

Second Reading

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Quoting from the psalms, this passage from Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus, the one through whom God created everything and who sits at God's right hand, is also the one who experienced human suffering and death in order to blaze the path of salvation for us.

¹Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to

us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

^{2:5}Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. ⁶But someone has testified somewhere,

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them?

⁷You have made them for a little while lower than the angels;

you have crowned them with glory and honor,

⁸subjecting all things under their feet.”

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them,⁹but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁰It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹²saying,

“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”

Text Questions

To whom does the writer of Hebrews first compare Jesus, God's Son? (verse 1) How does the writer say that Jesus is different from the prophets? (verse 2) What is the role of Jesus in God's creation of the world? (verse 3) This is a reminder of Psalm 8—Jesus, who appears first to be a poor child, but now we know who Jesus really is. To whom does the writer compare Jesus to in verse 4? Does that surprise you? If Jesus is superior to the angels, and we are the creatures God made that are most like Jesus, what does that say about us? (2:5-7) What is the role of human beings in God's creation? (verse 8) How are we compared to Jesus? (verse 9) How does Jesus bring us into that relationship with God? How does God make Jesus, who is "the pioneer of [our] salvation" perfect? (verse 10) How are we, as those who are sanctified (made holy) by Jesus, related to God and to Jesus? (verse 11) What do you think it means that we are the brothers and sisters of Jesus? What does it mean to you that you are among the sisters and brothers of Jesus, and that Jesus claims us as such? (verse 12)

Gospel

Mark 10:2-16

Jesus announced and enacted in history the new reality of God's surprising activity. These two stories demonstrate this new reality: Women and children are accepted and valued, not dismissed as inferior to adult men.

²Some Pharisees came, and to test [Jesus] they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" ³He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her."
⁵But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. ⁶But from the beginning of

creation, 'God made them male and female.' ⁷For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

¹⁰Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹²and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

¹³People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Text Questions

What question did the Pharisees have for Jesus? (verse 2) Note that they were not asking to find out what he thought and that maybe he could guide them, but "to test him." Notes in the Lutheran Bible state that they wanted to get him involved in an ongoing dispute among Jews: what are the proper grounds for divorce. Some said that husbands could divorce wives for any reason, and others said adultery (by a wife) was the only reason husbands could divorce wives. How did Jesus respond? (verse 3) How did the Pharisees answer? (verse 4) They evidently were of the opinion that husbands could divorce wives for any reason. Jesus does not get into a legal argument with them. What instead does he point them to? (verses 5-9) Why do people get married?

Or, for that matter, enter into any kind of long-term relationship? What happens when that relationship is broken, for any reason? I can not claim any superior standing on marriage over anyone else. What has kept Jim and me married for 50 years is God's grace, and my good fortune in marrying such a man! Nevertheless, I have known what it means to live in brokenness from time to time. What do the disciples (all men, I assume from their question) want to know about what Jesus said? (verse 10) What do you think of Jesus' answer to them? (verses 11-12) Next Mark moves on to others who might be hurt by broken relationships. Who did the people bring to Jesus? (verse 13) Why were they bringing them? What was the reaction of the disciples to this? How did Jesus answer the disciples when he saw what was happening? (verse 14) Children, in many cultures, are seen as those who have no power and no expectation of attention. How does Jesus see children? What does it mean to "receive the kingdom of God as a little child"? (verse 15) How does Jesus receive these children? (verse 16) Although this text is not about baptism, as such, perhaps it is a reason that we baptize infants, for babies (whether they know it or not) are completely dependent on the love and grace of God through their families and others around them. What do you think?