

# Sermon for Sunday, October 3, 2021 - "It Is Good!"

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Before we look at Jesus' response to a trick question about divorce practices in the ancient world, I want to consider the story from Genesis 2 that we heard earlier. It's such a beautiful story that has so often been misinterpreted. Exploring this story can help us to rejoice in all healthy relationships and to support those experiencing pain from relationships.

The story begins with God saying, "It is not good." That's a striking phrase, especially after Genesis 1. All throughout Genesis 1, in beautiful poetry, God speaks creation into being, looks at it all, and repeatedly declares, "It is good." And after God has created human beings in the image of God, God looks at everything and says, "It is very good."

Yet right after that, the creation story in Genesis 2 begins with God saying, "It is not good." God says, "It is not good for this human I've created to be alone." Often, we hear this phrase translated as, "It is not good for *man* to be alone." That's led to all sorts of gender stereotypes of men as bumbling idiots, incapable of dealing with life without good women by their sides. But the Hebrew word used here isn't the gender specific word for man. Instead, it is the word 'Adam' which comes from the Hebrew word 'Adamah', for ground or earth. This word has the sense not of a man but of the being formed from the earth. A better translation is earthling or human.

God isn't saying, wow if I don't help this guy out by giving him a little wife, things are going to go downhill fast. No, God is saying it isn't good for *humans* to be alone. We are *all* created for relationships. So, God creates a second human to be a helper and partner to the 'Adam'. Once this other human is created, then the two humans are named - in the Hebrew as man *ish* and the other as woman *ishah*. The names show the interconnectedness of these beings; they are cut from the same cloth, one and the same. That is, men are not from Mars and women from Venus. Our genders shouldn't define us or separate us. We are all earthlings, formed from the earth and interconnected. We are all made in the image of God. And it is good for us to be in relationships as helpers and partners to one another.

The story continues with a beautiful example of one kind of relationship: a man and a woman marrying, holding on to each other, and forming a new family. Yet this is not the only way of being in relationship that is celebrated in scripture. We see examples of friends, parents, children, in-laws, congregation members being helpers and partners. Also, the type of martial relationship described in Genesis 2 isn't good in and of itself. Any relationship that does not honor the image of God in the other, any relationship that abuses, diminishes, or excludes others is not good. The witness of scripture is that God rejoices to see health, well-being, and dignity in any human relation-

ship. When God sees these qualities, I believe God still smiles at what God has made and says, "It is good."

When I picture relationships of health, well-being, and dignity, I picture my friends Johanna and Joanne and their group of five LGBTQ couples. I got to witness Johanna and Joanne's love from an early age because they moved next door to my family when I was three. They welcomed us into their lives and into their group of friends. We shared meals, birthdays, and holidays together. This group of people had a beautiful community. They honored each other's partnerships and supported each other like family. If anyone needed help, there was always someone available. The partnerships among these couples have withstood the test of time. It is good to behold this love.

It is also good to behold a father helping his child in worship here at Good Shepherd; to behold friends working on Altar Guild or putting together school kits; to see people of different generations connecting at coffee hour. It is good. God rejoices in all these kinds of healthy relationships.

The witness of scripture is also that when God sees pain, loneliness, abuse, and oppression, God still says, "it is not good." I think this is what Jesus is naming when he answers the question about the legality of divorce. Jesus chooses not to get into a debate about the law. Instead, he points to the underlying reason the law is given - to protect vulnerable women and children. In Jesus' day, men could move from one wife to the next with no consequence to the man and extreme consequences for the woman. These are the kinds of things that God sees and says, "This is not good." Later in talking with his disciples, Jesus also names the painful reality that divorce does have negative effects for both spouses. The pain of divorce impacts the partners, their children, their families, and future marriages. God sees this pain and knows that it is not good for people to experience and cause this pain to one another.

But God doesn't just see the pain and brokenness. God also works to make things better. The witness of scripture is that when God sees that things are not good, God works to do something about them. In Genesis 2, when he sees that it is not good for the human to be alone, God creates another human as a helper partner. When our relationships are not good, God sees the pain and does something to make things better.

Sometimes this looks like divorce and a new marriage. In this congregation, there are so many examples of people who have been able to leave unhealthy relationships and have remarried into healthy, happy, relationships of well-being and dignity. These are beautiful to behold. They are the kinds of relationships God smiles upon and rejoices in. It is good.

God also works to make things better through a wide range of relationships, not just remarriage. God works to bring us into relationships of health and dignity in congregations, in families, in community. God has created us for relationships. When our relationships are healthy, God rejoices. When they are broken, painful, or ended, God knows this is not good for us. And God works to make things better.

Most of all, God comes to us in Christ Jesus who is present today in his body and blood and the body of Christ. Jesus comes to be in relationship with us, to draw us into a life-giving relationship with God. In this relationship, we experience God's loving gaze. We hear God's desire for us to be in healthy relationships. We are given the healing, mercy, love, and forgiveness so that we can extend all that to one another.

And it is good.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.