

## OCTOBER 7<sup>TH</sup>, 2018: TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

Genesis 2:18-24    Hebrews 2:9-11    Mark 10:2-16

Most readers of Scripture have no idea that Genesis' first two chapters contain two contradictory creation stories. Instead of appreciating their differences, we usually treat them as we treat Matthew and Mark's two contradictory birth of Jesus narratives: combine them and create a third, more acceptable narrative. We're accustomed to approaching our faith from a catechism mindset, not a biblical perspective; always searching for the either/or answer to every issue. We "Greek-thinking" westerners are understandably uncomfortable with the multiple answers that are an essential part of Scripture's both/and outlook on life.

As the late Fr. Frank Cleary often reminded us, "If you find an internal contradiction in a biblical passage, that's the sacred author's way of telling you not to take the passage literally." This certainly applies to Genesis' first two chapters.

Though we're more familiar with the Genesis 1 creation myth – the "six day" one – the Genesis 2 narrative is almost 500 years older. Unlike the God of Genesis 1, this God makes mistakes, e.g., creating man without a helpmate, then thinking one of the animals could take over that role. Yet one of the things prompting the "Yahwistic" author to write seems to be the generally accepted belief that women were created inferior to men. That seems to be why she states that, because the first woman came from the man's rib, she's made of the same "stuff" as man. Contrary to popular opinion, she wasn't created from some throwaway batch of raw material.

In a parallel way, the author's "etiological" explanation of intercourse challenges the "smutty" accounts circulating in her day and age. Her explanation revolves around a myth that since the man and woman were one in the beginning, their intimate moments are simply attempts to become one again. The gospel Jesus will later employ this story as one of the reasons he prohibits divorce.

Though Judaism, based on Deuteronomy, permitted divorce, Jesus is convinced Moses did so only because of people's "hardness of heart." Had Moses dared teach Yahweh's actual will on the subject, no one would have followed it. So . . . why waste your breath? Yet, in Jesus' reform of Judaism, we should return to God's original plan for married couples, not base our lives on the exception.

Obviously this idealistic interpretation of God's mind created as many problems back then as it does now. It's certainly more difficult working through marriage problems than it is to quickly end the problems by divorce. Without doubt, some couples should not be together. But it's important to note Jesus' no-divorce regulation is, like the law to love our neighbor, more a goal we're expected to work toward than something we're obligated to accomplish . . . or else. Being another Christ can at times get complicated. Perhaps that's why Mark joins his no-divorce narrative to his annoying children story.

Toward the end of my high school teaching career, it became evident more and more of my marriage course students were determined not to have children. When I asked, "Why not?" most replied, "They're a drag!"

A perceptive response!

But from my experience, they've always been a drag. We now simply have more reliable ways of preventing their intrusion into our peaceful existence. Yet when Jesus blesses them, he's thanking God for even pesky children being a part of our lives. They're a joy along with being a pain.

The Hebrews author rejoiced over Jesus being one of us. As a human being he gave himself over to suffering through the frustrating evils inherent in relationships in order to eventually experience the unique joys inherent in relationships.

Reminds me of a poster that stated: Grandkids are your reward for not having killed your teenage children. Very theological!

## OCTOBER 14<sup>TH</sup>, 2018: TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

Wisdom 7:7-11    Hebrews 4:12-13    Mark 10:17-30

Perhaps no passage of the Christian Scriptures is more misunderstood than today's gospel pericope.

It certainly fits the category of what the author of Hebrews refers to as a "two-edged sword," cutting no matter which side you grab. It separates boys from men, girls from women, exposing those who are actually in this "faith-thing" for real, and those who are using it just to get into heaven. As the Wisdom writer promises, those who make it part of their lives will discover "all good things come together" because of it.

The man asks Jesus a question all of us has asked: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" In other words, "What do I have to do to get into heaven?"

The gospel Jesus answers as a good Pharisee. "Obey Yahweh's commandments." When the man assures him he's already done this, we presume Jesus says, "Great, you're on the road to heaven." But he then adds, "There's more to life than just getting into heaven. How would you like to experience God's kingdom right here and now? To pull that off you've got to sell what you have, give to the poor . . . then come follow me." Contrary to popular belief, Jesus didn't begin his public ministry to help people get into heaven. Good Jews were already doing this. He closed his carpentry business and began preaching to help people experience God effectively working in their lives right now, long before they pass through the pearly gates.

Unfortunately, the price to experience God's kingdom is too high for the man. "His face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions." As long as he can get into heaven without it, he's not going to go for the extra credit.

Jesus' disciples are also befuddled. That's not the kind of "salvation" for which they bargained. They don't think anyone is capable of successfully pulling off such a lifestyle, no matter the rewards. Jesus agrees, even employing an idiom for impossibility: a camel going through a needle's eye. "If you're determined to make lots of money in life, you've got the chance of a snowball in hell of surfacing God's kingdom. You can only rely on God's power, not your own, to pull this off."

But, on the other hand, if you actually give yourself over to God and ". . . give up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel . . .," look at the rewards you'll receive both right here and now and in the future.

No biblical scholar believes these verses are the proof text for the "evangelical virtues," dividing Christianity between laity (who just follow the commandments) and clergy/religious who also accept the responsibility of poverty, chastity and obedience. Our sacred authors make no such division. The faith of Jesus is offered to all.

As I've mentioned before, spiritual writer Jack Shea once observed that the historical Jesus was concerned with answering just three questions: What do you want from life? Where do you get it? How much does it cost? The inquisitive man who interrupted Jesus' journey didn't like the answer he gave for the third question. Yet because most of us have studied our faith from a catechism instead of Scripture, we might not even know what first question to ask. The gospel Jesus shows us we can actually ask for more than we were taught to ask. What a waste just to be limited to the afterlife. Look at what we're missing between then and now. Jesus not only provides the answers to Shea's questions, he also provides the questions, whether we want them or not.

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