

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
October 11, 2015**

**Building Up the Family of Believers:  
In our Homes**

- 1. God's blessings in Christian marriage**
- 2. God's blessing of children**
- 3. Our church's vision and focus**

**Hymns: 255 – 735 – 505 – Closing: 330**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

**Mark 10:2-16 –**

*Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" "What did Moses command you?" he replied. They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."*

*"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."*

*When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."*

*People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.*

It's genius, really... Isn't it?

In God's creative work, he had one last item to create: People. He had created all the aspects of his universe and created world. Now was the time to create the crown of his creation, the ones who would care for and rule over his newly made world. How would he design this final part of his creation?

- He could have made humans "androgynous," that is, not clearly male or female, but all very similar to each other in physical and emotional makeup. That would have worked, right?
- God could have just designed all the human creatures on the face of the earth to be "friends" in the deepest type of relationship they would have.
- God could have created Adam to live alone, rather than saying, "It is not good for the man to be alone."

But he didn't.

Also, what about the way new humans would come into existence? How would the new generation come into being?

- God could have designed new humans to grow on plants.
- He could have created a cave that would pop new individuals out, perhaps one a day!
- He could have designed things so that the new generation appeared all grown up – No need for growing and developing.

But he didn't.

Even though he would make it necessary for new humans to grow and develop, he could have created a different design for children's upbringing:

- He could have made a special group of humans that raised all the children as their special task in life. Child after child, raised by a select few that nurtured them in big buildings designed just for that purpose.
- Or he could have given the task of raising all the little ones to the government. They could do this work in camps and buildings around the world in various countries.

But he didn't.

Instead, God made two genders. He made them with some similar characteristics and some different in a “genius” sort of way. And he also made a special unit that the two could form, a unique bond and also a unique way to raise new young ones in a loving and stable way, called the family. It’s interesting that even in our sinful world, the family unit is an institution of God’s that most people – many of you included – would never want to give up.

Today, we begin a sermon series on the church’s new Vision Statement that our congregation has adopted: **“Building Up the Family of Believers.”** This morning, we will explore the first part of this three-fold vision, the family unit. What will this Vision Statement mean for our families?

As we do this today, a couple disclaimers are in order. First of all, God has not commanded that all people marry. In our focus today, we certainly would not want to speak down to people who have found fine satisfaction in the single life. God can be glorified in them as well. Also, as we speak about children, we have to recognize that God in his wisdom does not grant the blessing of children to all married couples. This sermon is not intended to open wounds or look for reasons that God has chosen to do this. And third, in our sinful world there have been times when fathers, mothers, and families have sinned grievously against other family members, even tearing apart their family unit. If you have such bad memories, let’s note today that this is not how God intended or ordained things to be, and pray that he would lead us to rejoice today in what the ideal design of the family is supposed to be.

## **1. God’s blessings in marriage (vv. 2-9)**

With that said, we read in Mark 10: *“Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’ ‘What did Moses command you?’ he replied. They said, ‘Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.’ ‘It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,’ Jesus replied. ‘But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and*

*female.’ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”*

The question the Pharisees asked Jesus did not come as an eager request to learn, but from deceitful hearts trying to trap and trick Jesus. This group opposed Jesus when he was carrying out his earthly ministry. They themselves were divided on the question. One prominent teacher in their ranks led a movement that claimed that divorce could be sought if the wife had done anything to displease her husband, even some daily thing around the house. Another prominent teacher of the Pharisees taught that divorce should only be sought if she were guilty of indecency. What would Jesus say? Would he take a side?

Jesus goes back to the beginning, and reviews the original intent of this God given institution. The basics of marriage are:

1. Two people are involved. Not three, four, or five.
2. Male and female are the two parties in the design. Nowadays, you have to say it. Scripture, of course, has clear things to say about forbidding two people of the same gender to be intimate with each other or marry each other. But we can also say that even if none of those passages existed, the description of what God instituted, as clearly laid out in Genesis and reiterated by Jesus, would tell us what the design is and what it is not.
3. Marriage is a leaving of a former household, and a cleaving to a new one. Loyalties and priorities lie with the new home that is made.
4. Breaking the marriage union is not in the design. The vow and bond is lifelong. Jesus knew very well that Moses had made divorce exceptions in the Old Testament, but it was because hearts were hard, and good order needed to be kept. The New Testament speaks of only two exceptions to this

permanency, when a divorce can be sought: Adultery and desertion.

Why would God institute this unique unit? A few reasons. **The first blessing that God intended to give to people in marriage is COMPANIONSHIP.** When Jesus said that a man will be “united” to his wife, he used the word “yoked.” Do you know what a yoke is?



Have you ever put on a yoke? For those of you here who are married, you have. You have been yoked with one other person, who is the opposite gender as you. And you have entered into this willingly by your free choice. The yoke is a great picture of what happens in marriage. You must pull together. You are working together. And conversing and sharing? It can't help but take place as you are joined pretty closely to work together.

Those of you here today who have entered into this blessed partnership have:

- Someone to work together with
- Someone to converse with
- A friend different from all others
- A Fan Club president!
- A trusted word when needed
- Kindness and support
- A common home
- A light on when they get there
- Help in lifting those heavy items
- A person to enjoy the journey with
- A partner to fend off enemies with
- Someone to help them decide the budget with
- A person to hug when they are ditched or fired
- A person to grow old with.

And the bond goes further. **A second blessing of marriage comes from the Lord as the two companions share close intimacy together. Down through time, this has also been called “chastity.”** God gave intimacy as a special gift in how a couple can show love to each other. In their enjoyment of this special gift in marriage, it is something only shared with

one other person in the world, your exclusive mate. It is a special blessing.

However, the beautiful design for marriage has been infiltrated by sin. People lose sight of these blessings.

- Husbands can get distracted and married to their jobs, their vehicles, their video games, or worse
- Wives can become bitter
- Spouses can “play games”
- Those who were so much “in love” drift apart
- Forgiveness can be withheld
- Bad habits don't change
- Communication breaks down
- And marriage enrichment and retreats? What good would they do?

The sad fact is, many people don't nurture their marriages. Have you ever seen a property that looks like the one in the picture up front? What happened? No one cared for it. No one tended to it. In marriage, the same concept holds true. It needs to be nurtured and tended to. It needs time. It needs attention. It takes effort, cooperation, and commitment to do this. And if you aren't willing to put that into it, it will soon look like this property, no matter how much “in love” you were. There are sayings about the “grass being greener” that you may have heard. In marriage, the proper saying is, “If the grass on the other side seems greener, it's because they take care of their grass!”

## 2. God's blessings in Christian marriage

Hold your thoughts with all of that, because we have to look at the end of this account from Mark 10. We see a commentary on the third blessing that God gives in marriage: *“People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.”* These little,

growing ones were brought to Jesus for his blessing. When his own disciples attempted to keep them from him, he clearly showed the importance of children and their spiritual development. He viewed time spent with the little children as vitally important!

**Let's consider God's design in the third blessing of marriage, CHILDREN.** God's design for the next generation is that countless hours and effort need to be invested by parents, the primary caregivers, to raise them to responsible adulthood.

God has created the family unit so that children might grow and develop both physically and spiritually in a stable, loving environment. As children are growing they have special needs that must be met:

- Above all, they need love. They need love and attention, patiently shown every day.
- They need instruction in little things, in big decisions, and in the Scriptures
- They need encouragement
- They need loving correction
- They need discipline
- They need strong spiritual examples of living their faith, just as their parents live it

And yet, what unfortunate attitudes toward children exist today?

- Frustration because "my lifestyle is being cramped" by the consuming time spent raising the children
- Frustration because children are expensive
- Limiting the number of children in the family for less than sanctified reasons
- Neglecting the spiritual training of children
- Thinking that the church is supposed to do all of the spiritual training of your children
- Being a bad example in your speech and life to your children

When we see the shortcomings in our lives when it comes to marriage and our parenting, we can thank God that the story does not end there. We can thank Jesus that he has "let the

children come," including you and me. Thank God for forgiveness from these sins and shortcomings. Thank Jesus that he served as our Savior and gave the ultimate example of love, love that surpasses any husbands and wives or fathers and mothers today. He loved us enough to die on the cross for those sins and to rise again victoriously to assure us of our forgiveness.

**As you leave church today, if thoughts of your own shortcomings in your marriage and parenting haunt you, leave them here! Leave them at the altar, where Jesus made the sacrifice you needed because of your sins!**

### **3. Our church's vision and focus**

Now, what about this church's Vision Statement? What is it? And what is it all about?

As we learned last week at our special church planning day, our MISSION will never change. This is the Great Commission that our Savior has given us to go and make disciples of all nations. The vision of how we focus on accomplishing our mission can certainly take different angles and emphases, as time passes and circumstances change. For example, for years our church's Vision Statement was **"Let the Children Come."** Much of that had to do with the building project to expand our facility and experience those blessings.

Our new Vision Statement is **"Building Up the Family of Believers: In our homes, in our church, in our community."** What does this mean for our homes?

From your church, you can expect certain ministries that will instruct and support you in the issues surrounding the Christian family:

- Worship services and sermons such as the one today
- Bible classes and discussion groups on marriage and parenting
- Resources that you can use in your homes with your spouse and children
- Counseling that is available through your pastors, or if issues are ongoing and profound, through our synod's counseling service
- Children's ministries

However, our church's vision must include you, for it takes two to tango. Fathers and husbands, as the leaders in your homes this is especially important for you to consider:

- Your family – all of them – need to be in the pew with you to benefit from this.
- Your attendance at the Bible classes and family enrichment discussions will be necessary for your family to be built up in the faith.
- You should make an effort for all of your family members to know their pastors and have a great relationship with them.
- Think hard about what you are doing in your home to build up your family unit in the faith. Is prayer life together regular? Is devotional life strong?
- What needs to change in the way you nurture your marriage?
- What changes do you need to make to your parenting to make it more spiritual?

**Let's build up our family units as we rejoice in the unique blessings God has blessed us and our world with!**

After all, the Lord could have made things very different and much simpler. Androgyny? Just friends? No children, as we know them? But he hasn't. May God bless us as we consider how all of us at Holy Trinity can build up our individual families, and may he bless us as we consider the rest of our new Vision Statement in the next two weeks! Amen.