

Genesis 2:18-25; Mark 10:9

I forget where I heard this, but apparently a little boy who had been in Sunday School, and was taught the story of God creating Eve from the rib of Adam, later that day came up to his mother and complained of a side ache. In a concerned tone, he said, "I think I'm having a wife." Now it may be the case that today wives can be a pain in the side of their husbands...and vice-versa. But when God made Eve, there was no pain for Adam at all. The world's first surgery was completely pain-free. Before there was sin, there was no pain, no nagging wives, no abusive husbands, no divorce...nothing except heaven on earth. But what a difference sin makes! Now, though God designed marriage to be a blessing to husbands and wives, because of our hardness of heart--as Jesus puts it--for many, rather than a slice of heaven, marriage resembles a slice of hell.

But even before marriage was affected by sin, God was already planning to redeem it, and all who enter into it, and are born through it. When God had Adam fall into a deep sleep, He was already then pointing to the cross of Jesus. As Adam went into the deep sleep in the Garden, so Jesus slept in death on the cross. As God opened the side of Adam, so the Roman soldiers opened Jesus' side with a spear. As God took a rib out of Adam's side, so from Jesus' side there came blood and water. And as God created woman from Adam's rib, so God created the church--the bride of Christ--from the blood and water which are the Holy Sacraments...the water of Baptism and the blood of Communion. And then as God brought the woman to Adam, so God has brought you to the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, and made you one with Him. And Jesus says most clearly, "*What God has joined together, let man not separate.*"

These words are read during every wedding done in a Lutheran church. And fittingly so. For God is the One who joins husbands and wives together. There was no pain when God joined Eve to Adam in the Garden. But pain and suffering always come whenever man separates what God has joined. Whether you are married, single, widowed, or too young to marry, there isn't one of us who has not been affected by the separation of a husband and a wife. And some of us have suffered deeply from such pain.

When God joins something together, He intends for it to stay together. He has joined together your fingers and toes, and it's painful when one of them is separated from your body. Even losing a fingernail brings suffering. God has joined your soul to your body giving you life. When a person dies; when the body and soul are separated, loved ones deal with grief as a result. God has joined to you your good name, your reputation, and He protects it with the Eighth Commandment. It hurts, terribly so, when man separates what God has joined by spreading lies and gossip about you and me to separate us from our good reputation. And friend, God has joined you to Jesus in Holy Baptism. When man separates this union, cutting themselves off from Jesus, or another from Him, the pain and suffering will never come to an end, not even after this world is over.

Even though God forbids us to separate what He has joined together; even though doing so causes us great pain, we do it anyway. In the days of Moses, because of the hardness of their hearts, the people of God demanded that Moses allow them to divorce. We make the same kinds of demands today because our hearts are just as hard. And Satan is there through it all working just as hard as he can to separate what God has joined. He rises up within our hearts and minds and would have us hold on to our anger rather than forgive our spouse, so he causes separation. He rises up in us after we baptize our children and would have us separate them from Christ by keeping them away from Church and Sunday School. Satan rises up in us, and to separate church members from themselves, and from their pastor, he removes the cross away from our eyes and puts our selfishness and our hurt feelings there

in its place. Satan's business is to separate and divide; to cut people off from each other; to cut Christians away from our loving God.

But God's business is to show mercy. And so, my friends, God did something for you, and it is reason for you to rejoice. God joined together your sins--all of them--with Jesus. It was why He came. He was condemned in your place. He stood before Pilate as the One, and the only One, who had to die. And as Jesus was thrust onto a cross, God put every sin--the sins of your youth, the sins against your spouse, your sins against Him, your sins against your neighbor, your sins of thought, and word, and deed--all your sins God joined to Jesus. He was so covered with sin, so united to your sins that St. Paul says of Him, "*He became sin for us.*" And then He died. And your sins were buried with Christ in His tomb. And when Jesus rose on the third day, He left your sins behind. They can haunt you no more. They can terrify your conscience no more. "*It is finished!*" He cried. The deed is done. In baptism your sinful flesh dies with Christ, but you dear Christian, rise with Christ free and forgiven.

"What God has joined together, let man not separate." And so that sin that is bothering you; that hurtful word you said; that thing you did which was so wrong--look at the waters of your baptism. They washed that sin off of you. That sin was joined to Jesus on the cross. You are forgiven.

Now friend, if your sins are joined to Jesus...and they are, then this is clear--you cannot have them anymore. You cannot continue to live in them. God does not permit you to separate what He has joined together. And since He joined your sins to Jesus, this means you cannot live as a gossip anymore. You cannot live with pornography anymore. You cannot keep cursing with your mouth and walking away from the preaching of God's Word with your feet. You cannot keep living sexually apart from marriage. You cannot keep dishonoring father and mother. You cannot live with anger against your spouse. All these sins were joined to Jesus. They are not yours anymore. And so put them away from your heart and life. Do not separate your sins from Jesus. He took them from you because He loves you. He took them and was punished for them, for you. He took them and you are forgiven. Now go forth and live, not in sin, but in God's forgiveness rejoicing that what God has joined together, as His people in Christ, we never, ever want to separate. Amen.