**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.

**Psalm 8**

1 O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! 2 you 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: 7 all flocks and cattle, even the wild beasts of the field, 8 the 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!

**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, 2 but 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, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. 2:5Now 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, 8 subjecting 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,9 but 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.”

**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.*

2 Some 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.’ 7 ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 8 and 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.

**Sermon**

 There sure is a lot of good stuff to work with in the Scriptures today! And there sure are a lot of different ways I could go wrong in what I say about this stuff! We start out with a passage from Genesis 2, which has been inappropriately used to justify the subordination of women to men. And then our gospel passage touches on the hot topic of divorce. Wherever shall I start?

 The passage from Genesis 2 is all about relationship. This is one of those origin stories…a story that explains something about the human experience. This is the story of why one *ha-adam*…best translated as human or dust creature…is not enough. It appears that, even though there is God and there is human, God is not the appropriate companion or helper for the human. God is creator; dust creature is creation. They are not on the same level. So, God creates all these animals and birds, but not one of these living creatures will work as human’s partner. But God had already determined that the human should not be alone.

 Let’s stop on that for a moment. One thing this story tells us is that we were not created to be alone. Now that isn’t saying we all need to be married. This is about our natural need to be in relationship with other human beings. In 2023, the US Surgeon General released an advisory saying that we are facing a public health crisis of loneliness, isolation and lack of connection. This was a problem even before the pandemic. Dr. Murthy, the Surgeon General, found that the lack of social connection not only affects our mental, physical and emotional health but it can increase the risk for premature death to levels comparable to smoking daily.

 That doesn’t mean we have to be with people all the time. It is okay to spend time alone. Being lonely is a feeling we don’t like to feel, it means we feel disconnected when we

want to feel connected. But there is a reason that we don’t like to be lonely. There is a reason that we feel life is more difficult when we are disconnected. There is a reason that we try so hard to fit in with certain groups of people, whether we are in high school or whether we are adults. Humans were not created to be alone.

 So, what does God finally decide to do? God makes 2 humans! Now, they are not the same, one is man, one is woman. They are, however, of the same stuff…flesh and bone. But it won’t always be just this one man and one woman. The end of the passage names a few relationships that human beings will experience…father, mother, wife…and also suggests how the communal experience will continue as a man and wife join their lives and bodies to become co-creators of the human community.

This is the solution to what God announced as a problem…human beings should not be alone. In other words, God created us to be in relationship. We are created to be in relationship with bone-of-our-bone, flesh-of-our-flesh human beings. That means, we are created equal to one another, all made of the same stuff. When we are in relationship with one another, it is helpful for us to remember that we are equal to those with whom we are in relationship, we are made of the same stuff. Your flesh-and-bone is my flesh-and-bone. How might that change our relationship with one another?

We have lots of different ways to be in relationship with one another today. We are in relationship with the families into which we were born, or with the families we choose for ourselves. We are in relationships with the partners with whom we share our lives, the families we build together. We are in relationship with the friends and neighbors we have met. We are in relationship with coworkers and bosses, classmates and teachers, pastors, coaches, medical professionals, people who provide goods and services for us. Relationships with others are such an important part of our lives. But sometimes, they can be a real pain in the butt!

With that in mind, let’s look to the gospel passage today. And let me clearly say that, if you have been divorced, Jesus loves you eternally. It is sad that, in so many cases, people who have gone through divorce have been hurt or made to feel shunned by the church’s teaching on it. Relationships of every kind have their challenges, and marriage is not exempt. Human sin and brokenness can mar every aspect of human life, including marriage. But our human sin

and brokenness has been taken on by Christ on the cross, who offers us mercy and reconciliation and healing no matter what.

In this conversation between the religious leaders and Jesus, the religious leaders aren’t looking to gain understanding. They are testing Jesus with their question about divorce. It also seems that they believe that what is lawful, what the law allows, means it is good with God as well. But Jesus has a reminder for them. Where Jesus goes with this is to say that, while Moses allowed for the certificate of divorce to be written, God’s ways are not to break off relationships.

The religious leaders ask this question at a time when women were completely dependent upon the men in their lives…their father or their brother or their husband. When a husband divorced his wife, even if the reason was frivolous, SHE was the one looked at with shame and left without support. Jesus begins his response by reminding them, from Genesis 1, “from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female’.” This resonates with what we talked about from Genesis 2, male and female are made of the same flesh, the same bone. One is not subordinate to the other…they are equal. And then Jesus reinforces God’s intention that the 2 become as 1 flesh, not 2 that can go separate ways but one.

Our marriage relationships should not be taken lightly. There are times when getting out of a marriage is absolutely necessary for the safety of a partner and/or the children…I need to state that outright. But marriage is a promise made by each partner to the other partner, to love and support one another and, when that gets to be a pain in the butt, to look to God’s love to guide us in our love and support.

Today God reminds us that, in our marriages and in all our relationships, we are in relationship with bone-of-our-bone and flesh-of-our-flesh. We are all made of the same stuff. We are all the same glorious human creation made in God’s image and we are all the same dust creature that is frail and selfish and sinful. God knows that which is why God came to us through Jesus to reconcile our relationship with God. We remember, we rely on that great forgiveness and mercy as we live in relationship with one another. We will hurt one another at some point, multiple times. The gift God gives us through Christ is the process of repentance and reconciliation to practice with one another. It is this practice that will hold us together in relationship…because “in relationship” is where we belong. Amen.