

Weave

Gen 2²⁰⁻²⁴/ John 17⁶⁻²⁴

This is the last is a series of three sermons on what are some basic dynamics of the Christian life. I am taking these from the Genesis 2²⁴ passage and while it is clearly a passage which refers in the first place to marriage it can also be understood as a primary metaphor of the whole of the Christian life. So the Christian life **is like marriage** and it is so because in the first place it requires that we **make space for God** and we do this by **leaving other options behind**. Another way of saying this is that we cannot have it all, we cannot serve God and mammon, we cannot have all options open to us. The moral way will always require choice. The option of no choice is essentially immoral because it will always have consequences down the line which are immoral. Remember the old saying by Edmund Burke...

“The only thing **necessary** for the **triumph** of **evil** is for good men to do nothing.”

Doing nothing is not an option when it comes to progressing in the spiritual life and neither is it an option in the natural life. Creatures that ‘do nothing’ are doomed to extinction. A spiritual life of no decisions is dead before it knows it. **We must leave something to make room for God.**

The second major principle of the spiritual life is found in the notion of **cleaving**. Cleaving points to a **unilateral** commitment to love the other. What does 'unilateral' mean? It means the agreement is one way and unconditional. **I will do this, no matter what!** It represents the fundamentally covenantal nature of both marriage and our relationship with God because in a covenant, unlike a contract, the parties are bound by their commitment to do something and not by the promise of the other person. A covenant is essentially unconditional. What's more, for we Christians it represents the covenantal nature of our life – that all of our relationships should take this covenantal form. And what is that form?

It is that we choose to act in godly and gracious ways no matter what is happening around us. It is that we choose to serve no matter who else isn't serving; it means that we give without expecting to receive in return and it means that we wait, as did the father of the prodigal son, in hopeful expectation of the World's return to Christ – not cynical, not critical, not condemning, not condoning – we wait for God to move in the hearts of those around us.

But who can do this? Who can act in this way? Who can be so Christ-like? The heart of this notion of cleaving is found not in what we can do but in the promise of Christ to cleave to us. The power of this cleaving comes from Christ's promise to cleave to us! **We can cleave because of Christ in us.** As in the old marriage vows we finish with a prayer for God to give us the strength to cleave; for God's work within us that we might

cleave as He cleaves to us; that we might reflect the love God shows towards us – to others. It is God’s cleaving to us which will give us the strength to cleave to those around us and to love as God loves.

So to sum up we have two fundamental movements in the Christian life. The first is to **make space** for God. The second is that God would have us be a covenantal people who relate both to God and to one another out of God’s commitment to us. Our lives are to be icons of the same grace which has saved us and this is only possible when we live in a covenantal way – committing ourselves to live graciously.

Finally this morning we come to the last section of this verse...

²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, **and they shall become one flesh.** (Gen 2)

In Hebrew the last part of this passage reads like this... w^e·hā·yū (they become) l^e-ba-sar (towards or into flesh) e-had (one) and the force of this expression is that **over time these two who have married are united in an ever more complex and mysterious such that they become a new person – a new being – one flesh!**

In other words, the relationship does not leave them as they are. It is not the meeting of two separate entities who happen to bang into each other for the next 40 or 50 years. Rather they continuously intermingle to the point that they each become something new – something complex and yet profoundly still

them. Out of two individual strands and new things is created. Out of threads, a cloth is woven.

Weaving is the binding together of two basic strands – one which runs up and down and one which runs sideways – the warp and the weft. That cloth, created from basically two different kinds of strand, becomes far more useful than were the original strands that made it up. They become something quite different as they begin to relate in this way. What was once this... becomes this.

God looks now to grow us into a community, into a oneness, as we read in John this morning – a unity which is the essence of this new creation. And this unity is absolutely key to our influence on the world. Jesus makes this quite clear when He says...

²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, **so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**

Why is this so important? It is so because it is the key to the world knowing that Jesus is who He says he is... it is the key to faith!

Yes it's important that we relate individually to Jesus but how much greater impact we can have on the world when we learn to work together, to pull together, to lean on each other and to know the joy of working through community to reach the world.

The Church is God's weaving work but we cannot be passive in this work. We must give ourselves to it. This is not something that just happens.

Let us make just a few observations about this process.

Firstly, the words in Genesis, 'and they shall become one flesh. and they shall become one flesh' indicate a process or a series of processes which stretch into the future with the goal of becoming one flesh. There is a sense here of never being completely finished but of 'staying in the game' for the whole of life. There are many reasons why people both join churches and leave them. Some of them are understandable but not really legitimate and some are legitimate but not really understandable. Leith is a church which is deeply committed to creating healthy community and it always has been but as we've travelled down that path we've realised that a.) it's a lot lot harder than we thought and b.) it's something that requires significant skill and wisdom. And yet if we don't stay in the game, if we bow out at the first failure or sign of rejection we will never progress.

The second thing to note is that this has the potential of being at least as hard as marriage if not much harder. You see marriage deals with the combining of two people who are usually pretty keen to be together, usually know each other reasonably well and usually have a limited set of cultural expectations of and for one another. A Church, on the other hand must deal with multiple cultures and expectation and multiple miscommunications and multiple ideas of what and

where we're headed. Furthermore, it must also learn to communicate well with a variety of age groups and stage groups and even with a number of different ethnicities. This is incredibly complex and difficult and despite us having an idea of what we want to achieve, it makes these particular tasks really very difficult. **And this is why Jesus in the passage from John we read today is so concerned about unity.**

The whole of this passage has really only one goal – a goal that is kingdom oriented and yet concerns precisely this dynamic of 'becoming one flesh.' Three times Jesus comes back to this goal, this plea to God. At the end of verse 11... 'Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, **so that they may be one, as we are one.**' Then at the end of verse 22... ²²'The glory that you have given me I have given them, **so that they may be one, as we are one,**' and finally in the next verse he makes a real point of it... ²³'I in them and you in me, **that they may become completely one,**'

And why? Why is it so important that we work at becoming one? Why is it so important that Jesus should emphasise this three times in this great prayer? We have the answer for us in verses 20 and 21...

²⁰"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

And again in verse 23...

²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, **so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**

Notice the two issues at heart here. Firstly, verse 21 – **belief** – specifically that the world may believe. Belief lies at the heart of faith. To become a ‘believer’ is to come to faith – is to be a Christian. Secondly. Verse 23, **that God loves both the son and those who believe.**

The issue of a loving God is, I believe, the great point of difference between the Christian understanding of God and the rest. What we know and have in Christ is a God who cares and when we can get that message across we will find that **the world cares about our God.**

This becoming one flesh is so vital because it is the engine, the driving force behind the convicting of the world that God is both real and that God loves them. **Our unity is the essence of our evangelical effectiveness.**

When we come to faith God calls us into these three dynamics. We must make space for god and this will mean **leaving something else \behind.** This will always be a challenge for us throughout our Christian life – to make space for God. Secondly God will call us to cleave to Him that our relationships may take the form of a grace filled covenant which will, in itself, transform who we are with other people. Finally, God calls us to

weave ourselves into a body, the body of Christ, where we will become 'One flesh.' This 'becoming one' is so important because it lies at the heart of how we can show others both that God exists and that He loves us.

I expect Leith to continue to work towards these things over the next two years. I will pray for you all that you may do wonderfully well in that time and see this particular church thrive as it has never done before. I wonder if you've ever realise that God in Christ is cleaving to you? I sometimes think that faith feels a little bit like this picture... it's a little scary isn't it. And drawing close to God can feel like this sometimes. But Jesus said unless we received the kingdom of God like a child we can't enter into it. Can I encourage you to do this – to draw close to God like a child – without fear – without doubt – without hesitation. You will find a wonderful friend if you can do so. Let's pray...