In Nomine Iesu

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany 2026
Marriage in the sight of God – Genesis 29:13-30

"As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, and Laban said to him, 'Surely you are my bone and my flesh!' And he stayed with him a month. Then Laban said to Jacob, 'Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?' Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, 'I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.' Laban said, 'It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.' So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.' So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant. And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?' Laban said, 'It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.' Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years."

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who desires all to come to the heavenly wedding feast. Dear fellow redeemed:

When President Bill Clinton signed the "Defense of Marriage Act" on September 2, 1996, the new federal law was intended to uphold the definition of marriage as being that of **one** man and **one** woman. The bill came to his desk with the support of 342 members of U.S. House of Representatives and 85 senators, nearly 80% of our elected representatives and 85% of our senators. What seemed in 1996 like a triumph for centuries-old morality was really an omen of what was to come. The fact that it was thought necessary to enact a law stating the obvious should have been warning enough to all of what was coming. It is no surprise that we are here 30 years later, a nation debating what a woman is.

But we are not here this morning to talk about national policy. That is because no president will ever solve the problem of sin nor will any government ever change the meaning of the moral law recorded in the Bible and engraved on the heart of every person. The law of God stands forever. It can only be accepted or ignored.

I

As fundamental to the survival of civilization as marriage is, it is even more important for understanding the Bible's message of salvation. This was as true in the Old Testament as it is in the New. Psalm 45 portrays the Messiah as a Bridegroom who will one day appear to claim His bride, the Church, and lead her into the King's palace to dwell forever. Just days before His death Jesus told His disciples in His last parable about a king who invited all to the wedding of his son: "Come, for all things are now ready," is God's gracious invitation into His eternal kingdom. Jesus told it to prepare His people for the fulfillment of Psalm 45. In Ephesians 5 the Apostle Paul explains the enduring union of one man and one

woman as a reflection of something far greater, the everlasting relationship between Christ and His bride, the holy Christian Church. In Revelation 19 the marriage supper of the Lamb is pictured as taking place in heaven following judgment day as the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, and His bride, the Church, are forever united in love and peace.

But how are we to understand the early Old Testament, the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Abraham had two wives if we count Hagar. Jacob, as we see in our text, had two, Leah and Rachel, and if we continue reading in Genesis, two more counting their maids, Bilhah and Zilpah. How does this behavior of the patriarchs fit in with the theme of this Sunday? Even more, how does it fit in with the passages we have heard from the Psalms, Ephesians, and Revelation? Were the patriarchs exempt from God's will in regard to marriage? Does not Genesis 2:24 say long before them, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"?

Today's advocates of polygamy, the union of gays and lesbians, so-called open marriage, and no fault sexual relations between whomever, are at war with their Creator God. So were the pagan, polytheistic civilizations of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's day, for all of those sins were widely practiced then. But no government, no society, no religion has the right to redefine marriage into something it is not, whether long ago or now. Marriage is the institution of God. The Holy Scriptures define it clearly and plainly.

What of Abraham and Jacob? How do you, pastor, explain that? Well, they were sinners, children of their time who needed a Savior, just as we do. That's the reason why God dealt with them as He did. It is the reason He deals with us as He does. For in His eternal grace and wisdom, He does not lose sight of the promised marriage that is to come in heaven, as His invitation to all clearly shows, even when we are unfaithful, when we sin.

The attacks against marriage in the public realm, politics, government, and our culture, are strong in our day. And the battleground is no less frightening the closer we get to home. It does little good to work to protect marriage at the state and national levels if we do not make every effort to protect marriage in our own homes, our own families. This starts by learning how God protects husband and wife. It is protected by the Sixth commandment: "You shall not commit adultery. What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed, and that husband and wife each love and honor the other."

II

But, as we all know, it doesn't take long for husband and wife to discover how easily they can irritate each other. Where there should be love, either's dislike of this or that can turn into resentment. Where there should be honor the seed of mutual resentment can spring up, grow, and bear bitter fruit. Why is this? Because husband and wife are each as sinful as their spiritual fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Can you imagine the strife in Jacob's family with four different mothers of his many children and he the father of all. Well, you don't have to. God's word has recorded the facts for you to learn from.

Living together in close quarters, weighed down with frustrations and unrealized hopes can be difficult for any marriage, any family. Husband and wife are 24/7 neighbors who cannot simply walk away from each other. Nor can they walk away from their children without doing great damage. That is not the way of escape God has laid out for us.

No, the way of escape God has provided for us is forgiveness. There is a great need for us to repent and to forgive, to repent toward whomever we have hurt and to forgive the one who has hurt us. In marriage this is even more true and necessary. Husband and wife, even though they reflect Christ, the faithful Bridegroom and Savior, and the Church, the trusting

Bride of Christ, are not Christ and the Church. They are not perfectly faithful, trusting, and steadfast. They are sinful. And living closely together as they do, they have a greater need than any other neighborly relationship to forgive, again and again and again, to forgive seventy times seven times … and then forgive some more. They began as singles each in need of repentance and forgiveness before they were married, and they remain in need after. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" remains the touchstone of real happiness in their marriage. But forgiveness can seem far away when husband and wife each maneuver to have the upper hand, instead of living in sacrificial and submissive love, husband to wife, and wife to husband.

When a husband berates his wife as if she were a child and not His bride, is that honor? When a wife despises her husband as she sees his weakness, and exploits it, instead of covering it, is that honor? The sad truth is that husbands by nature do not by nature put wives first, sacrificing for them. We are, dear brothers, selfish by nature. Wives do not like submitting in love to their husbands because they are stubborn and proud. But Christ gave Himself into death for His Bride, and exalted her to heaven. He is the model for husbands. The Church submits to the loving authority of the One who gave Himself into death for her. She is the model for wives. Yet our sinful nature rebels, defiantly saying that that is not love, and then goes vainly seeking some other version of love in a fallen, rebellious, and sinful culture where many promote other versions, none of which will ever satisfy.

The Christian home is the foundation of a stable society. The Christian family, parents and children, is critical to the church. That is why the enemies of God always seek to bring strife and misery into a marriage. The devil hates harmony between husband and wife. The world works to undermine anything God says is good. And our own sinful flesh wants no part of sacrificing for someone else, or submitting to someone else.

We must learn in the preaching of the law to see that we deserve no good thing from God, no mercy. But then in the preaching of the gospel, we find a forgiveness so deep, so out-of-this-world complete that it takes our breath away. Our sins have been taken away from us, as far as the east is from the west, never to be found again. This is the real "Defense of Marriage Act.' It was enacted when the Bridegroom was crucified for the sins of His Bride and then rose from death to set her free. His blood cleanses us of sin. Christians do not ignore sin nor do we call sin good. No, we forgive sin, even when we don't think our husband or wife deserves it; forgiving even when it is not fair, because that is how God forgave us. He was not fair. He is good. He is merciful. Through baptism, through the absolving word, through the body and blood of Christ in the Supper, the Holy Spirit comes to us, bandages our wounds, calms us with the patience and comfort only He can give.

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Jesus Christ, our Savior, showed up at the wedding of a bride and groom at Cana. There He worked the first miracle of His ministry, a miracle concerning things so common and unremarkable, in order to manifest His glory so that we might believe that He truly is our life, our love, our hope, who vowed His love and faithfulness to us forever and ever. By transforming water to wine, by leading us from our baptism to the sacrament of His body and blood, He nourishes and cherishes us. There we are united with Him. There by faith we are made flesh of His flesh and blood of His blood. This is a truly great mystery, as the Apostle Paul said to the Ephesians. Is marriage truly that important? Yes, here stands the cross, testifying to the real defense of marriage. There are the font and the altar, through which He pours into our hearts all the blessings that flow from His act of love. Here is the comfort He gives to all the fallen children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria