

## JOINED BY GOD

Mark 10:7-9

It's the big day! The girls are at the motel where they've arranged a hairdresser to come and do their hair. The guys are dragging themselves out of bed, still a little groggy from celebrating last night as they try to get rid of a hangover with an early round of golf. The moms are busy putting up bows on the pews and a trellis of flowers at the entrance, while Aunt Jane does finishing touches on the floral bouquets she's making along with the arrangements in the front of the church. The dads do as they are told, though her dad wants to spare no expense for his little girl.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”

The guys are late as usual for the pictures, but at least their tuxes fit. The photographer climbs up his ladder as three strobe lights shine on the girls. His assistant gently moves everyone into their right places. The photographers takes pictures at every angle and combination of people—the bride with her flowers girls, the bride with the flower girls and ring bearers, the bride with her maid of honor. The bride with her attendants, the bride with her parents, the bride with her personal attendant, and so forth and so on. Oh, did I mention the bride with the groom? That can't happen yet because he can't see her before the wedding. So most of the pictures have to be taken after the wedding. Fortunately there is a break while everyone gets a bite of sandwiches, some crackers and cheese, grapes, chips, and bottled water that the mom's have been sure to bring. But one of the groomsmen's wives is sure to check a pop machine because her husband won't drink anything but Diet Coke.

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The guests begin to arrive even as pictures are still being taken. The girls duck into a little room to hide before it all begins. The people in the back of the church mingle. Uncle Harry hasn't seen his cousin Jerry in 15 years. Only with reminders from the ushers do they begin to go into the church. Now comes the tricky part, the part that had been so

carefully rehearsed last night. The groom takes in his grandmother—no problem as the strings play Mozart. Then he has to get his step-father's parents. Then his mother's dad. Then her dad's parents. Then her mom's mother. Then his dad and his new wife. Meanwhile her present step-dad has to go up the side aisle. Then her mom goes up. The couple had to be careful to offend no one in deciding who sat where.

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The procession begins. It's “Trumpet Voluntary.” The seven couples go up after the two junior bridesmaids march quickly up the aisle. By the time they all get up front, you wonder where there is going to be room for the couple. Then the two flower girls and the ring bearer in his oversized tux go up. But the boy stalls. There was no great crowd staring at him last night at the rehearsal. He begins to cry until his mom, one of the bridesmaids, comes down nervously to pick him up and take him to his grandmother. Meanwhile one of the flower girls has pulled up her dress. It is fun to twirl in it. Everyone smiles. The kids are so cute. Then the music shifts to “Here Comes the Bride” as everyone stands. They crane their necks to check out the bride's dress. Uncle Bill stands on a chair to get it all in on video. Others hold up cell phones to capture the moment. Flashes appear everywhere. The groom gasps at how beautiful she looks.

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The wedding goes on with the solos, the sermon no one listens to, the lighting of the unity candle that doesn't want to be lit, and a recessional that all go by so quickly compared to the 15 minutes it took to get everyone up front at the beginning of the service. Then there is the wait for the pictures to be taken after the wedding, signing the license, cutting the cake, a lavish meal, the toasts and tinkling on the glasses, the throwing of the bouquet and the garter, and the dances. Then it is over. Then it is just a marriage.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” And Jesus adds to that—“What God has joined together, let no one separate.”

With all the talk about same sex marriages what is just taken for granted is that still half of all marriages end in divorce. Most couples live together before marriage. That statement may have used to cause great controversy. But after all, isn't it just marriage?

Yet we have Jesus tell us, “What God has joined together, let no one separate.” We don't get around that by not getting a divorce, making it to our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and never having sexual relations with anyone but our spouse. All of us have taken not only our sexuality, but all of our lives and separated them from God. We have pretended that by keeping them some part of our lives—some actions, some words, some thoughts—out of the context of God, that He won't see our evil. But all we have done is commit adultery against God.

“What God has joined together,” let no one separate.” We have separated ourselves from God. We call that sin. That is the cause of all the unfaithfulness in this world. But “what God has joined together” is not only what God intends for us, it is what He brings about. He isn't just thinking wishfully. In Christ Jesus, God does what He desires.

When God chose Abraham and his descendants to be His people in the Old Testament, the description He used was that of marriage. God joined Himself to those people. The rescue of the people from slavery from Egypt was God holding on to His wife. The Ark of the Covenant was like the wedding ring He gave her. But the people of Israel worshiped other gods, like a person committing adultery. But God refused to let that separate Him from His “bride.” In the book of Hosea, God tells Hosea to take a woman of ill reputation as his wife. When Hosea's wife is unfaithful, God has him buy her back. This shows that even though the people of Israel continued to worship other gods, God would not give up.

We see that in Jesus. Jesus came to restore the marriage between God and His people. He came to be the husband of the Church—you and me. When Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you,”

he was using engagement language. A man would build a house on to His father's. That was where he and his future wife would live. To prepare a room for a woman was the same as giving her a ring. So what we have separated by our sin, Jesus has put back together.

That says so much about the words, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” If God sees our relationship to him as a marriage, then what does it say about marriage? St. Paul says about this, “This is a great mystery. I am talking about Christ and His bride, the Church.” Marriage is not just a way to have a companion. It is a reflection of the very relationship between Jesus and us. Of all the things you want to impart to your children, nothing is as important as having a good marriage, because then you show them how God is to us. It is also the same witness to the world. In our marriages we can witness to the love that God has for us in Jesus. It is so much more than flowers, dresses, tuxes, chinking glasses, and photographs. It is God giving us through our daily lives a wonderful opportunity to see God through our marriages.

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Sermon delivered by Pastor Mark T. Heilman  
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