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October 4, 2009 • Pentecost 18B  
Genesis 2:18-24 • Mark 10:2-16

These days, many of our communities have different shapes than they did in the past. Once there may have been close relationships between neighbors. Now, everyone keeps to themselves more. Less hanging out on the front porch. Or fewer spontaneous visits. Everyone is busy with work and kids' activities. Everyone keeps to themselves a bit more. The other day, one of our members said, "I'd call the neighbors... but they have their own lives and families." Whether you're young and single. A widow or widower. A family who moved recently. Empty nesters with a new pattern of life. It takes a long time to develop new relationships in our compartmented society. It can be very lonely.

Our lesson from Genesis makes it clear that we humans are not meant to be alone. We have a long litany of the things that God created, which were then proclaimed "good". Light and darkness, earth and sea, creatures of many kinds. God names only one thing as "not good" in creation: that the human is alone. Of course, we know the story well. God created many different kinds of creatures, trying to find the human's match. But nothing new would do. Adam's match had to be the same kind as him – material from his very side.

We humans were not meant to bear life by ourselves. Intrinsic to our beings is a need for being in relationship with others. Adam and Eve were created to be complementary creatures for one another. They were two sides of the same person. When they became one once again, they were each completed.

The story of Adam and Eve grounds the Christian understanding of marriage. This soul completion is something deeply important to our lives. The marriage vows which some take with this in mind are intended to be lifetime vows.

But Adam and Eve are not just about male-female relationships. The Bible makes it clear that not all people are called to marriage. St. Paul wrote that the preferred way of life was as a single person. He thought that marriage was the best solution for those who are weak. Paul may have overstated his beliefs. There are other true ways of life that do not involve marriage.

Yet it is not good for any humans to be alone. God created each of us, male or female, as interdependent beings. We all desperately need to be a part of relationships with others. That is the only way that we can be whole again. Whether we are single or married, or anything in between, our souls need to be in a web of relationships. Being in community – in communion – with others is an essential part of our identities.

In our gospel lesson, Jesus underlines the importance of vows we take in our relationships. He tells the Pharisees and his disciples that marriage is meant to be for a lifetime. When we have joined together in couples and families, there is goodness and completion. It stretches back to our original creation – and there is something wonderfully eternal and cosmic about it. “[W]hat God has joined together, let no one separate.” (*Mk 10:9*)

We all know that marriages aren’t always this beautiful. I expect that everyone here has been touched by divorce in some way. When these relationships become broken, we feel it. Some times divorce is necessary for everyone’s health and safety. But whenever it happens, we all mourn the loss and the pain.

Just as Adam and Eve are not only about marriage – Jesus’ teachings about divorce speak to more than just married couples. Throughout the gospels, Jesus calls his followers to take their relationships with others seriously. That includes people that they have never met before – and people with whom they may share little. They were to welcome children any time they encountered them. They were to: Exorcise the demons that controlled people’s lives. Bring healing to those who were sick. Wash the grossest body parts of folks (their feet) as a welcome. Feed the hungry. Share forgiveness with those who were unforgivable, and shunned by all.

Jesus' followers were to treat total strangers with grace and generosity. It is as if they treated each person as a cherished family member. A beloved one, whose relationship they would not want to lose.

We are also called to bring the same degree of care to our relationships. We're not to act in these ways because we're "good people". We are to express true care for others because we need them. Like Adam, we are incomplete alone. Christ has answered our needs, knitting us into his body on earth. Our baptisms have joined us to countless numbers of Christians, spread across all the ages. Most important, we are connected to everyone here. Adam and Eve were two parts of a complete human. And we are each members of Christ's body. You might be a hand; I an eye. Taken all together, we are important parts of Christ's presence here on earth.

## **Relationships at Emanuel's**

The relationships that we have in Christ are just as serious as being married. Each of us were created as incomplete humans. Regardless of our family relationships, we are all being completed by being a part of the Christian community. We are made whole by our relationships here at Emanuel's. I'm sure that each of us can think of people whose friendships delight us – and yes, they are a part of our completion. It's great to get that warm fuzzy feeling.

Yet we are made into whole humans by ALL of our relationships here at Emanuel's. Including the folks whom we would avoid if we could. Even the people who we would rather not know at all. They are essential to us being complete human beings. We might like to be rid of them entirely. We imagine breaking those relationships the moment that there is a good reason.

Yet these folks offer gifts that we do not have. They expand our imaginations. They speak words – of comfort or challenge – when we need to hear them. They invite us into real ministry. They make us better followers of Jesus, precisely because we have to work hard at the relationships. No one ever promised the being Jesus' disciple would be easy.

Like with marriage, our bonds of spiritual friendship here have eternal, cosmic weight in Jesus' eyes. We experience the presence of Christ when our body is all together. “[W]hat God has joined together, let no one separate.” (*Mk 10:9*)