

SERMON OCTOBER 6 2024 “Safe in the Arms of Jesus”

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ, one of the things we value you most and thus seek is safety. We lock our doors at night. We teach our children not to trust strangers.

We buy cars with the latest safety features. We put our money in what we think are safe investments.

And we make laws to protect us; from others and even from ourselves, to keep us safe from evil.

But it doesn't work. Evil still comes upon us, and it doesn't care who you are. The evil one wants to destroy you, and everyone and everything you hold dear.

While, as we saw last week, guardian angels do defend us from evil, they cannot deliver us from evil.

There is only one who can: our Savior Jesus Christ.

Today's lessons continue that theme of God saving us from evil, applying it to the most intimate relationship God has established: marriage. The union of a man and a woman as one flesh.

Every person is a self-contained living being, eating, digesting, breathing, and moving independently.

People can do everything by themselves except for one thing: procreation. They cannot do that alone.

Men and women were each given half of what was needed to be fruitful and multiply, and marriage was then given as a safe place to raise children.

We heard of the world's first marriage today: how God formed a woman from the flesh and bone of Adam's side and then brought her to him in the first marriage ceremony.

What joy there was for them that day as God gave them to one another, a joy we still see on wedding days.

God desired to protect that union and the families it produces as a safe place. Safe from division, safe from evil.

What God has joined together, let not man separate.

But separation is exactly what has happened. Marriage, the first gift of God after the creation, is and has been under attack.

It didn't take long for Satan to divide what God had joined together, as Adam blamed his wife for all the trouble they had gotten into and even blamed God for giving him such a helpmate. Their wedding day joy and unity were gone in a puff of satan-breathed smoke.

It didn't take long after that for their children to follow in the footsteps of their parents, for brother to turn against brother as Cain murdered his brother Abel.

Then, also, in those first chapters of Genesis, we read of rape, incest, multiple wives, and divorce.

In a world infected and affected by evil, marriages, and families are no longer safe places. And it didn't take a Supreme Court ruling to do it. As I just outlined, the erosion of marriage and family has been going on for a very long time.

You know the litany: the widespread acceptance of sexual activity outside of marriage has made marriage, to many folks, an unnecessary option - except to get desired tax breaks and rights afforded by the government.

No fault, easy-to-get divorce has made marriage more like a temporary partnership than a lifelong union.

The marriage of men to other men and women to other women is both legal and generally accepted.

Children are affected as many are raised without their biological parents; if they haven't been ripped from their mother's wombs - the place that should be the safest place of all.

And that doesn't even mention spousal and child abuse, fights, cold shoulders, lack of affection, families divided even while living under the same roof.

Even Christian marriages, families, and relationships can be messy. As it was in the beginning, is now . . . and so also was at the time of Jesus.

The people of Jesus' day too, turned to the law to solve their sin produced problems.

The Pharisees came up to Jesus and asked Him: **Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?** Well, Moses allowed it, Jesus replies, **but that was not part of God's plan.**

Take note of that answer. Usually we think of the Law, and especially the Old Testament laws, as harsh, unyielding, and hopelessly rigid. But here the Law was *relaxed* a bit, softened.

God did not just look down from heaven and bellow: NO! An allowance was made. For you see, the truth is, it's not the Law that is unyielding and hopelessly rigid; ***it is mankind's heart.***

Man's heart that won't yield. Woman's heart that won't forgive. Our hearts hardened to pursue our own, selfish path at the expense of any that would get in its way.

And so, God, in mercy, made an allowance for God knew what we so often forget: that the Law is not the answer.

The Law cannot make us better. **The Law cannot create the safe place we desire, seek, and need.**

The Law is good, but if we look to it instead of to Jesus, for the refuge, we need, it can become a false idol.

And so when asked about marriage and divorce, Jesus doesn't go back to Moses, back to the Law, He goes back to the beginning, to the Gospel, to marriage as the joyful, one flesh gift God created and gave.

And in our text, God protects the children too, taking them in His arms and blessing them.

The bottom line is: if there is going to be a safe place for our marriages, our families, and our friendships, it is in Jesus.

In Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels.

In Jesus, who came to be our brother and shared our flesh and blood.

In Jesus, who suffered the consequences of the divisions caused by the hardness of our hearts by being hung on the cross and forsaken by His Father for our sins that He bore.

In Jesus, who became like us and was tempted like us in every way.

In Jesus, who came to provide the forgiveness of our sins.

How can we expect any place to be safe if our own hearts are hard, still spewing evil, still pursuing our own selfish paths?

So Jesus came and took us as His Bride - as hard, sinful, and unclean as we are - that we first have a safe place in Him and His love and forgiveness.

He came to give us **new and clean hearts** (Psalm 51), to give us **hearts of flesh instead of hearts of stone** (Ezekiel 36). He does that in Baptism, washing us inwardly through water and the Word.

And then from within that love, forgiveness, and safety, we begin to live a new life - not because the Law demands it, but because the Gospel enables it.

Jesus has restored the life that we lost and given us a place of safety and refuge so that we are no longer afraid to love and forgive but are free to.

For God's answer to our sin is not to divorce us, but to forgive us. He puts His forgiveness into your ears in the Absolution; He puts it into your mouths in the Supper.

He wants to fill you with forgiveness, so that you know that no matter what you have done, how sinful you have been, how hard, how shameful, here, in Christ, is a safe place for you.

And thus filled, thus safe and secure, you now take that love and forgiveness into a world of sin; a world perhaps hostile to us and the life that we proclaim.

That's okay. Don't be afraid to be counter-cultural. For it's not us *against* them, it's us *for* them.

The Church, we, are here for the world. To benefit others; to help them. For Jesus is not against them, but for them, too.

For all people need a safe place from the sin others commit and from the sin within. A place where we can again live in joy, not fear, in the relationships that God has so graciously given to us - be they marriage, family, or friendship.

Without Jesus, no place is safe. Without Him, silence does not make us safe; going along does not make us safe; separation does not make us safe. Evil will find you wherever you go.

But with Him, you are safe wherever you are, wherever you go, even if a hard and hateful world would like to kill you like it crucified Him. Even then, in death, you are safe. For Your Savior is the one who has conquered death and the grave. **PAUSE**

Laws today may allow a lot of things, from divorce to same-sex marriage to who knows what else in the next few years.

Don't despair, don't hide, and don't remain silent. We have a better way to show the world and give to the world.

Not the way of the Law, but the way of the Gospel, the way of Jesus.

The answer is not to divorce ourselves from the world, but to live in this world *with* the truth and forgiveness we have been given.

To risk it all, for really, we have nothing to lose. We are safe in Jesus. Children safe in His arms. For in Christ, the *Shattered Bliss of Eden* is healed and recreated, our shame covered, and our safe place restored. AMEN