

Men's Night – February 2023
Genesis 3:1-21

Adam and Eve enjoyed each other perfectly before the fall. Wouldn't that be nice? I'm not being snarky or letting my 35 years of marriage slip out of the corner of my mouth but, honestly, wouldn't it be paradisiacal to enjoy a woman, a wife, your wife without any conflict or bruised feelings? It would, absolutely, be heavenly. Adam and Eve's bond – it was reciprocal, it was 100% natural – their union was extraordinarily high on the ladder of their blessings.

When they fell into sin, God said some important things to them, important for us to keep in mind in our circumstance. All of us here will have common experiences. All of us are men who interact rather intimately with women and we have a shared calling – to lead, to serve, to love, to defend, to sacrifice, and to bless. Let's start with what God said to Eve: "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:16). It's the second sentence that interests me. How we understand it is critical. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. It could be a commentary on Eve's pain in childbirth. Sort of like this: bearing children will be a bummer for you young lass, and despite this pain you will still be interested in marital relations with that man of yours. And, oh yeah, he's going to want you in the biblical sense too.

That line of interpretation makes a great deal of sense. "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." There's another way to look at this. I don't normally care for translations that don't stick faithfully to the Hebrew or Greek grammar, living translations they're called, but listen to the New Living Translation. "You will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you." Whoa; now that's an entirely different kettle of fish. That translation has God speaking about a power struggle, an unholy impulse in a woman to control her man. Do women have that impulse? Women, like men, are guilty of every sin in the book so I guess that means that that impulse is in there somewhere, in all people. Men have power struggles with other men. Women have power struggles with other women. Husbands have power struggles with their wives and vice-versa.

No two of us are alike – we occupy different points on the spectrum on different character traits. Our women, similarly, are not a monolithic entity but they have different virtues and vices. But every single one of us has had conflict with our womenfolk. Our ancestors, our menfolk ancestors, have been given a collective black eye by our contemporary society. Perhaps they earned it. What are they accused of? Lording it over their women, treating them with casual disregard. Archie Bunker was a male-chauvinist pig. He was written to be that way so that the culture could paint men with a broad brushstroke. Some men throughout history have been bad husbands, ugly toward the weaker sex, who took aggressive advantage of those whom they could oppress. It is true. But the Bible is pretty clear this point: "The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father" (Ezekiel 18:20). The residual judgment against men of the past, the contemporary despising of masculine qualities as being "toxic," and the impulse in a woman to desire to rule over her husband – if you blend all that together it makes for a pretty bitter cocktail. Add to that the fact that men have a sinful nature that wants to strike back at whoever strikes us.

There are rules for Christian households in the Scripture. One such section can be found in Colossians. The first phrase is this: “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18). I’ve discovered that reading that passage to my wife does little to soften her heart to me. Are you familiar with the dictum: “The beatings will continue until morale improves”? It is a reminder to a preacher not to use the law as a cudgel to try to change people’s behavior. Continually telling someone how they are to behave and implicitly telling them that they are falling short is not exactly a morale booster. There is a better way.

At the end of that reading from Genesis it says that the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. Garments of skin; hmmm; where did God get those? Remember, Adam and Eve were ashamed because they were naked and so they sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness. Thoroughly inadequate; man is incapable of covering his own sin. Man is incapable of correcting the consequences of the fall. But God clothed them. God killed an innocent animal, shed its innocent blood, so that Adam and Eve might have their shame covered. The Lord is proactive, engaged and determined to rectify what sin has besmirched. You are baptized. Christ’s righteousness is your garment, the robe of righteousness with which you are clothed (Galatians 3:27). Has His bride, the church, always been stellar? Oh, but He loves her, treasures her, gives Himself to her in the most superlative and unreserved way.

All of our good deeds are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). The prophet Isaiah wrote that. None of us are ever going to be in the husband hall-of-fame. We have improper motives, we are manipulative and grandstanders and we think more highly of ourselves than we ought. When we confess our sins during the Divine Service we ought to confess how we fail to honor and serve our women first. But we have a job to do. Christ calls us to a mighty work. He is at work in you to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:13). The Lord God Almighty works through a man differently than He works through a woman. The converse is equally true, but y’all are men. Robed in Christ’s righteousness you are called to lead. How do you lead? You lead by seeing others’ needs as more important than your own (Philippians 2:3-4). How do you lead? You lead by making your own will submissive to Christ (James 4:7). How do you lead? You lead by placing yourself at Christ’s feet and drinking deeply from the cistern of His Word, His teaching (Luke 10:41-42). You lead by praying regularly: “Whatever is of Christ within me, may that become greater. Whatever is of my sinful nature in me, may that become smaller.

Look for Christ in your women for He is there. For you, He is there. To bless you and keep you; to serve you with His love and His counsel, He is there. Our women are branches connected to the vine. Devotion and humility and spiritual courage are just some of the fruit on the branches of our women. They love you when you aren’t so lovable. God is at work in them to will and to act according to His good purpose. God was at work in Eve, the mother of all the living. God was at work in Mary, the mother of the Messiah. Mary had pain in childbirth. But the Seed of the Woman, the Lord Christ, bore the pain of our sin and His blood has washed you and made you holy. The church is your mother. The church’s womb is the baptismal font. The church is the mother of all the living. Spirit gives birth to Spirit (John 3:6), and each of you is alive with Christ’s life. That is most certainly true. To Him be glory forever and ever.