

## Dearly Beloved...

13<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 08/22/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Ephesians 5:22-33 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 32, [Paul directs us to the main point of his illustration and he says,] **“This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”**

### **Introduction**

✘ The traditional wedding ceremony begins with these words, “Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God and before His Church to witness the union of this man and this woman in holy matrimony” (LSB, pg. 275).

→ As we consider what Paul has revealed to us this day in our Epistle Reading, I can accurately begin this message by saying, “Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today in the presence of God to consider His Word regarding the union of His Son with His Church in His sacrificial and selfless love.”

✘ Yes, Paul speaks to us today about marriage. But before any of you are tempted to tune out and say, “this message does not apply to me because I’m not married, or I’m just a kid or I’ve already been down the marriage road before”, I am here to tell you that this text is still all about you!

→ Because if you want to consider yourself a Christian – that is one whom Christ has given His life for and one whom Christ loves sacrificially, then this text describes and teaches you about your “marriage”; your love-relationship with your beloved bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

✘ You see, that’s the starting point – Jesus’ love for us all. And from that love God teaches us about our love for each other – yes, as husbands and wives, but also as fellow members of Christ’s Church here on earth.

→ So whether you are in a husband and wife relationship, or hope to be married someday, or have been married in the past, or are unclear as to what the future may hold for you regarding marriage, this text is still important and informative for you. Because God’s design of marriage is the bedrock of His design of the family unit, both the biological family and His spiritual family of Christian brothers and sisters in His Church.

→ Now, I know that these verses before us here on the topic of marriage are dismissed and ridiculed by a growing majority in our world – labeled as being countercultural and “out of date”. In fact a phrase from last Sunday’s Gospel Reading in John, chapter six, comes to mind where many of Jesus’ followers struggled because He declared Himself to be the “Bread of Life”. They said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” “But Jesus, knowing in Himself that His disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, ‘Do you take offense at this?’” (Jn. 6:60–61).

→ The fact is, what God has put in place here in Scripture regarding His design and intention for marriage and family is offensive as well to our world today; even to many who still want to claim themselves to be Christian, but in reality are closing their ears and hearts to Him and following the god of this world by redefining love and marriage and family according to their own sinful design.

✘ So it is my prayer dear Christians, that you and I right now, with open ears and open hearts, will hear clearly and hold firmly to what God the Holy Spirit teaches us in His perfect Word about a very special, God-designed union of love.

### **I. Marriage as it has been instituted by God**

- ⊗ In verse 31 Paul takes us to God’s design and conception of marriage when he quotes a portion of the original blueprint in Genesis 2:24. It was on the sixth day; the final day of Creation that God created the first woman from one side of the man and then said this: “So Yahweh God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his sides and closed up its place with flesh. And the side that Yahweh God had taken from the man He made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:21-24).
  - ➔ The facts are right there before us all. God is the one who created and defined marriage. And from that foundational union of husband and wife He also created the family.
  - ➔ That means that God is the one that defines both marriage and family, regardless of what the human courts and cultural constructs may decide or concoct today.
- ⊗ So God says that marriage is the one-flesh, God-blessed union between one biological man and one biological woman.
  - ➔ It is not simply the functional arrangement of convenience between two persons who may or may not love each other. And it is not in any way replaced or set up by a “trial period” of two people living together first to “see if we are compatible” or “because we can’t financially afford to live apart” or “because we made a mistake and now have to raise a child”.
  - ➔ No, this is where both God and you have called me to proclaim God’s truth as He has revealed it in His Word. And the truth is, those statements I just quoted are all examples – only some of the countless examples, of excuses that couples make to try and ease the guilt of their sin. They are lies that deny and pervert God’s love for us all and His design that we live in a reflection of His love here on earth.
- ⊗ We are God’s creation; the fruit of His loving relationship with His Son and the Holy Spirit, and as such we do not have the authority to refashion marriage into any other shape or form of our own making.
  - ➔ We heard Jesus’ judgement in our Gospel Reading upon those who knowingly and blatantly disregard what God intends for us. In Mark 7:9 He said, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!”
  - ➔ So for the Church to teach and condone otherwise would be for us to reject “the commandment of God” and to remove ourselves from the bond of love in which He has placed us with Himself through Jesus His Son.

## II. Christ and His Bride, the Church

- ⊗ You see, that is really the foundation of this text from the Apostle Paul today. Even as Paul was himself never married, he uses here the topic of marriage to lead us and teach us about the most intimate love relationship of all.
  - ➔ He follows the Spirit’s inspiration to teach us about Christ’s marriage to His Bride, the Church. For only when we understand our relationship with Him are we then able to grasp God’s design and intention for how wives and husbands can love each other.
- ⊗ I suspect most of us are familiar with the classic fairy tale *Beauty and the Beast*. You’ll remember that it’s the story of a belle named Beauty whose life and family circumstances bring her to cross paths with a beastly figure who lived in a distant castle.

- By his own fault, he had been cursed with a hideous appearance. As the story goes Beauty comes to live in the castle of the Beast. And as she does she grows to know him and even come to love him.
- In the Beast's most desperate dying hour, depending upon the version you follow, with the Beauty's kiss of true love (or when her tear falls upon him), he is suddenly and gloriously transformed. The curse is lifted, and the Beast appears in a restored, beautiful, and noble nature.
- ✘ While it doesn't all relate, there is a bit of truth in this fairy tale when we think of our relationship with Jesus. But we have to reverse the roles! Jesus is the beauty – the one who is noble, glorious and compassionate to the core; while you and I are the beast – stained by sin, blemished by defect and blame, wrinkled, and not at all lovely.
  - All you and I need to do is take an honest look in the mirror of God's Ten Commandments, and we see how selfish we are; how we refuse to address each other in love and humility; how we adulterate our relationship with Jesus by putting our physical desires for others and other things above our desire to follow and live for Jesus first. Yes, the mirror shows there is nothing to be attracted to, and yet Jesus still loved us! He called us His beloved bride.
  - This is how Paul describes His love for us who are in His Church in verses 25-27. He "gave Himself up for" us...to suffer our shame; to endure the punishment of death for our sin; to save our souls!
  - And the result of His selfless and sacrificial love? Paul says in verse 26 that Jesus did none of it for Himself, but did it all with our deepest needs as His sole motivation. He did it so that "He might sanctify" us; that is to set His Church – us – apart as special; as His beloved bride. And how did He do that, "having cleansed [us] by the washing of water with the word"! Yes, your one flesh union with Jesus began at your baptism.
  - From that day on, verse 27 says Jesus, could present her – us – to Himself "in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing...without blemish" as His glorious Church. That's how Jesus sees you and me now – wrapped in His righteousness!
- ✘ Just picture it folks! Jesus stands beside you proudly saying, "I am not ashamed to call her mine, My most cherished bride!"
  - Though you and I are the essence of unlovable because of our sin, Jesus loves us still – so much that He gave His all to make us "lovely" forevermore. To know such love; to see it and receive it and embrace it in faith does not leave us unchanged – it's not possible. No, it creates in us a desire to respond in love; to humble ourselves under His plan for us; to love Him and love one another according to the order and the design that He created from the very beginning.

### III. The Gospel: Christ for you! It's why . . . !

- ✘ That's the foundation; the reason why you and I then receive Paul's teaching on marriage and family today with open hearts.
  - It's why Christian husbands then seek to love their wives with a sacrificial and selfless love – thinking of their wives' needs and desires before their own; because that's how Christ has first loved them.
  - So as Christ nourishes and cherishes us, so husbands seek to nourish and cherish their wives, as Paul says in verse 25, even to the point of death.
  - And yes, it's why Christian wives are not seeking for their own advancement or place of honor, but instead are quick to surrender themselves in all things to their husbands – thinking of

his needs and desires before their own – as Paul says in verse 21 just before our text, “out of reverence for Christ”.

✘ Just as our salvation comes to us from Jesus, not because we deserve it, but because of Jesus’ sacrificial love, so it is in our marriage relationships, in our families and everywhere that we interact with others.

→ You don’t do it because your husband deserves it; he deserves it no more than you deserve his self-sacrifice. You do it, just as he does it, because it is living out the love that Christ has given to us all first.

→ And the same goes for parents and children, for brothers and sisters and in-laws and fellow members in Christ’s Church. 1 John 4:19 says, “We love because He first loved us”. And we submit to each other because Jesus in love submitted to His Father in going to the cross for our salvation! (1 Cor. 15:28)

## **Conclusion**

✘ Dearly beloved, married or not, this text is all about you. It tells you of your Beloved, Jesus Christ, and how He loved – and still loves – you!

→ Now we love Him back in response; we honor His institution of marriage, as wives and husbands in our love toward one another; as young and old; as single and divorced and widowed alike, in humility and reverence to Christ – honoring and defending and upholding marriage in what we say and think and do.

→ We live together here in His Church as the bride of Christ, encouraging and supporting each other in love; that is the love with which He has made us His beloved bride! Amen.