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“Safe in Jesus”

Text: Mark 10:2-16; Genesis 2:18-25; Hebrews 2:1-18

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

For a little while this week, there was a flurry of concern over Hurricane Joaquin - whether it would hit the United States mainland, and where. Including potentially here. Warnings started going out so that people could make preparations and be safe. Safe from the flooding, safe from the winds, safe from the potential power outages.

Also this week we heard of another shooting on a college campus, this one in a small, quiet town in Oregon. What was supposed to be a safe place, and a safe place for learning, turned out not to be so safe. But we've seen it before - evil bursting into a place we thought was safe.

We want to be safe. So we lock our doors at night. We teach our children not to trust strangers. We buy cars with the latest and greatest safety features. We put our money in the bank or what we think are safe investments. We build a strong national defense. And we make laws - laws to protect us; laws so that we can protect ourselves. And we keep making laws and changing laws, strengthening some, weakening others, all so that we can be safe. Safe from evil.

But it hasn't worked. Evil still comes upon us, and it doesn't care who you are. The evil one simply wants to devour, consume, and destroy you and everything and everyone you have and hold dear. Last week we considered how much worse it would be if the angels were not protecting us. And yet while they defend us from evil, they cannot deliver us from evil. There is only one who can: our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The readings today continue that theme, applying it to the most intimate relationship God has established: marriage. The one flesh union of a man and a woman. Every person is a self-contained living being, eating, digesting, breathing, and moving on your own, capable by yourself of everything . . . except for one thing: procreation. You cannot do that by yourself. Men and women were each given half of what is needed, and marriage then given to bring them together as one flesh, to produce and raise children. To *be fruitful and multiply*, is how the Scriptures put it.

And so we heard of the first marriage in the world 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. And what joy there was for them that day as God gave them to one another. A joy we see on wedding days still today.

And God desired to protect that union and the families it produces, that it be a safe place. Safe from division, safe from evil. ***What God has joined together, let not man separate.***

But separate is exactly what has happened. This first gift of God after the creation of all that exists, 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 helper. Their joy and unity was 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, and 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, even marriages and families were not safe places anymore.

And we see it today. 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 wide-spread acceptance of sexual activity outside of marriage has made marriage, to many, 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, one flesh, union. Children are affected as many are raised without their biological moms and dads, if they are lucky enough not to have 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, cheating websites, fights, harsh words, cold shoulders, blame, lack of affection, and families divided even while living under the same roof. Marriages, families, relationships, can be a mess. Even Christian ones. Even maybe yours.

As it was in the beginning, is now . . . and also was at the time of Jesus. They, too, turned to the law just as we often turn to the law to fix the problems of sin. 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 bring His giant foot down from heaven and bellow: NO! An allowance was made. For the truth is, it's not the Law that is unyielding and hopelessly rigid, *it is man's heart that is*. Man's heart that won't yield. Man's heart that won't forgive. Man's heart hardened to pursue its own, selfish path at the expense of any that would get in its way. And so God, in mercy, made an allowance. Because God knew what we so often forget: that the Law is not the answer. The Law cannot make us better. **The Law cannot create that safe place we desire and need.** The Law is good, but sometimes the Law can be an idol, too, if we look to it instead of to Jesus for the good, for the refuge, we need.

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 then He protects the children too, taking them in His arms and blessing them. Because 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 when we turned against our brother, and He suffered the division of our world and 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.

For how can we expect any place to be safe if our own hearts aren't even 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 not outwardly but inwardly, through water and the Word.

And then from within that love and forgiveness and safety, we begin to live a new life - not because of the Law, but because of the Gospel. Because Jesus has restored the life that we lost and given us a place of safety and refuge. So that we be no longer afraid to love and forgive, but be free to. For His answer to our sin is not to divorce us, but to forgive us. Forgiveness which will never run out, and for which you can never be too sinful. 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 it, for it is His love for you. That you know that no matter what you have done, how sinful you have been, how hard, how shameful, here, in Him, 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 is here, we are here, for the world. To benefit others; to help them. For Jesus is not against them, but for them, too. For all need a safe place from the sin without 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 Him, 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 strings you up like it crucified Him. Even then and there, in death, you are safe. For He is the one who has conquered death and the grave.

So the 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 Him, the *Shattered Bliss of Eden* (LSB #572) is healed and recreated, our shame covered, and our safe place restored.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.