

“Be Content”

**Pastor Dave Carlson
First Presbyterian Church
October 9, 2016**

Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 3:1-7

New Testament Lesson: Hebrews 13:4-6

In his paper titled “A Response to Marriage and the Family,” Michael D. Warner reminds us of the true nature of marriage. Doing this, Warner looks back to a rather unusual example – Adam and Eve.

“...God’s original intent in establishing marriage and ... the family,” says Warner, “was that he intended Adam and Eve to reflect his image dynamically in their marital union.”¹

In other words, marriage is not a static, one-note relationship. God is always creating, always reimagining, always redeeming, restoring and renewing. Adam and Eve had that type of divine relationship, prior to the fall, prior to eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Prior to the fall of humankind, when we lived in the fullness of how God created us, our relationships with one another and with God were a perfect reflection of the boundless, flowing love of God, in all its shapes and forms.

As such, the marriage of Adam and Eve mirrored “the oneness between themselves as a couple on the one hand and with (their oneness) God on the other hand.” After the fall, marriage continued to reflect the relationship between humanity and God, but that relationship had changed. After the fall, our relationships became subject to brokenness and selfishness and sin, and not just our marital relationships, but all of our relationships – your relationships with people, things and ideas became subject to self-centeredness.

Thankfully, God chose to remain in relationship with sinful, stubborn humanity, even after our willful disobedience and discontent, even after we destroyed the perfect union between Creator and creature.

Our relationships are not perfect. There is only one who is perfect, Jesus Christ, God’s only son, whom God sent into the world to cover all our sins and lead us to a more perfect union, with God, with one another, and with all of creation.

The place that we turn to in seeking a more perfect union is the Bible. In the Bible we read, “Let marriage be held in honor Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have....”

¹ Michael D. Warner, "A Response to Marriage and the Family," in Kenneth S. Kantzer, ed., *Applying the Scriptures, Papers From ICBI Summit III* [Grand Rapids: Academia Books, 1987], 211.

Be content with what you have. That's the lesson from today's scripture reading. Whether it's marriage – which provides for and symbolizes our social and familial needs – or money – symbolizing our physical needs – we are to be content with what we have, socially and physically.

Are we? I don't think so. I don't think anyone on this side of the cross is free from discontent. We all have things that pull at us, tempt us and lead us astray, as the following jokes illustrate:

"I never knew what happiness was until I got married, but then it was too late."

"Marriage is a great institution, but who wants to spend the rest of one's life in an institution."

And finally, "The husband and wife divorced over religious differences – he thought he was God and she didn't."² We all have things that pull at us, tempt us, and lead us astray – for people like me, it's corny jokes. But seriously, God knows how hard life is. And God is not content leaving us victims of our fallen state. God desires that we set aside that which leads us astray, and instead, draw nearer to God.

That is why, after we drew away from God in the Garden of Eden, God sent God's very self to us, in Jesus the Christ, who is always there for us, to show us the way. "... Be content with what you have," says Hebrews, "for (God) has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'"

God is always near to us and God will never abandon us. God would rather climb up on that cross for us than leave us to suffer in our fallen state. has. And that is why, says Hebrews, "we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?'"

How can anyone – or anything – truly hurt us if God is for us? And He is. And yet, we all go through periods of discontent, periods of brokenness or weakness, periods when we are down and out, times when we are lost and lonely. That's only human. And that's OK. But what is not OK is getting stuck there!

As Christians, we have a way out – a way of putting things back together, strengthening our relationships, climbing to new heights, finding our way back into the loving, healing, compassionate arms of Jesus, of God.

Think of the Prodigal Son. He goes off with all his father's money and squanders it on women, food and fine things. Then, when things get rough and he's broke and near death, he goes running back to that very same father whose money he took. And the father welcomes him home.

² Gerri Marmer, "The best T-shirts of summer 2001," The Washington Post, August 2, 2001, C9.

There is nowhere we can go where the Lord is not waiting to point us back home to God. There is nothing we can lose that God cannot and does not restore for us, in the fullness of time.

Ah, but there's the catch – the fullness of time. God lives and work in the fullness of time and we live and work in the here and now. In the here and now, things don't always look so great. But that's no reason to turn away from God, to lose hope, to chase after pretty things, to drown our sorrows with unhealthy consumption or distract our discontent with misguided behaviors.

No, when we feel discontent, busted flat, or lost and lonely that's when we need to reach out – reach out to God, which often means reaching out to another human being, through whom God may speak to you, help lead you back home to God.

God did not put us here to use and abuse one another, but to lift each other up. God did not give us dominion over all creation so we could stockpile as much as we can. No, we are given the good gifts of this earth to share with one another, plenty enough for everyone.

So much of the suffering in this world is manmade. Adam and Eve grabbed that first apple from that Tree and we've been grabbing at things ever since. It's time we stopped grabbing and started sharing!

Be content! The only thing that gets in the way of you and me being content is fear – fear we won't have enough, we're not good enough, it's not safe enough, life is not long enough. But ask yourself, what good is life apart from God. No good at all.

God wants us to have a long and blessed life, free from worry and discontent. Now that's not easy, but with faith, it is more than possible; it is certain. We can set aside our worries and move beyond our discontent, anytime. We need only turn to God, in those moments of temptation. God will never leave us or forsake us. So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?'

Experiencing fear or want or need is natural. Overcoming them is divine. In Christ, we are blessed to move ever closer to the Divine, to God, and the freedom that brings.

Let us all carry with us the certainty of God's care and provision, and turn to it in our time of need or worry or discontent. Will you do that, join me in looking for the blessings God has for us and for those we are blessed to help along the way? Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Source of all love, we thank you for your plan that draws together your children in their love for each other.

Today we commend to your care those who have become one in marriage.

Enable them to faithfully live out their covenant and to seek to do your will in all things.

In all our relationships with each other, O God, fill us with your overflowing grace that we might be quick to forgive, as well as accepting of another's forgiveness.

As we love each other in Jesus' name, may we serve each other as he served us, putting aside all self-centeredness, that our love will reveal your love to others.

Strengthen us in our commitments to each other, that as we live together through the good and bad, we find a joy greater than we ever imagined.

We pray all this in the presence and promise of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we
forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**