

Rev. James Jennings' Sermon

[What God Has Joined Together](#) - Mark 10:2-9

The Statistics are sobering. According to Christian researcher George Barna, 35 percent of what he calls "born-again" Christian – those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord – have experienced a divorce. In retrospect, when I thin back, I could have been among those statistics if I could have had my own way! The old say, "God looks out for babies and fools" avails for me! If truth be told, I probably would have been in the divorced more than once category! Hence, I can sing "Amazing Grace, How Sweet The Sound That Saved A Wretch Like Me."

Bear with me in using my own marital experience as an object lesson in dealing with today's text. I answered the call to the ministry at the age of sixteen and was awarded the license to preach at Mt. Olive A.M.E. Church of the eastside of Jacksonville. Most of my preaching was done on youth Sundays in my church and in churches throughout the city. My visibility in High School increased when as a sophomore I defeated a senior in the run for president of the Student Council! Wow! What a thrill, well then I must admit I had a very good campaign manager. Anyway, being president of the Student Council kept me before the student body and it was in that position I met the homecoming queen who became my High School sweetheart. We were inseparable and dated through High School and our first year of college.

It was during my turbulent first year of college that I became very confused and unsure about my call to ministry and it led to my dropping out of college and taking refuge in the Air Force to get my head on right. At the same time that I entered the Air Force my relationship with my girlfriend began to skid. Of course we had been through stormy weather before and stayed the course until it was over; surely this was just another bump in the road. But of course we were going to get married! Isn't that what people do who have been dating almost four year?

Well, not so fast! After eighteen months of active duty I received order to go to France serving on a Supply Inspection Team with TDY to North Africa and England and in between. The straw that broke the back of the relationship with my girl came shortly after I arrived in England. It was by way of a letter from a friend back home that read, "Dear James, I hate to be the bearer of bad news but our girl got married! "Your girl got married!" Those words are still ringing in my ears! What? Here I am trying to make sense of my life, the call to ministry – here comes detour #2! The bottom just fell out.

Buy the time I got to France I was ready for Paris, the Moulin Rouge and whatever! I volunteered for every TDY to see different parts of the world and just drifted around Europe. I finally met a lovely young lady in Liverpool, England who was half Burmese and half English, we dated got engaged, had an engagement party and within two months I was begging out because my heart was not in it. I even let her keep the ring; of course I'm sure she sold it.

Little did I know that through out my prodigal and wilderness experiences in the Air Force God's love and grace was at work in my life.

While I was looking for Ms. Right, God was shaping my character! Helping me to become Mr. Right. God was helping me get ready for a lifelong love. God wanted me to put Him first in my life to focus on the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. God wanted me to stop focusing on doing things "My Way" as Frank Sinatra so affectionately sang about and come to know the undying love He has for you and me. That my relationship with others will only be as strong as my relationship with God. Further, if you and I don't know the love of God, we will not know what to look for in a spouse. It is only in His presence that we can experience true joy.

All during my character building days overseas God was helping Geri to become the right person for me. I didn't even know she existed, but I began to pray and to seek God's direction for my life and by God's grace, grace that is greater than all our sins ran ahead of my returning home from overseas. It was less than a month after I returned that the telephone rang on that October night, I picked up the phone. It was for my sister who died last year and I thank God to this day that she was not at home because on the other end of the line was the voice I have been listening to for the past 43 years. Unlike Jacob I didn't have to wait 7 years for Geri, I only had to wait four years and the rest of the story is history!

It is not until a person learns to put God first in his or her life and to know what God wants one to do with one's life together with cleaning one's stuff that one can ask for the right mate. To me, this is what it means to marry following God's will. Yet it is beyond belief that all who marry are following God's will. Some marriages are not made in heaven. Christians should pray earnestly when seeking a husband or wife that the potential spouse is the one God intends. Despite all that has been said about the oneness of marriage, some relationships are so destructive that divorce is the lesser of evils. Some relationships fail because God never joined them together.

If I were to ask you why people marry, some of your answers would be companionship, sex, to provide a home for children, social acceptance, economic advantage and security would be some of the answers. Marriage is not a contract to make sexual relationships acceptable; it is not merely a social institution to provide for the care of children. It is more than a psychological clinic where we can get the emotional support we need. It is more that a means for gaining social status or economic security. Marriage is God's answer for our deepest human need.

Now let me rewind, although marriage is ordained by God for people in general, it is not a command from God applying to all individuals. Rather it is a state of life one may choose, seeking to be faithful to God's will for them. God's will is always for a particular situation. God calls each person to a specific vocation. Some are called to celibacy. United Methodists believe that celibacy is not a higher calling than marriage or parenthood. Choosing either one of these may be for the fulfillment of God's purpose for oneself.

Marriage is very close to God's heart. It is so dear to Him that He uses marriage to describe Christ's love for the church. He created marriage, he instituted marriage, and he wants to bless your marriage and be part of it, to ensure its joy and success. Remember the words from your ceremony, "Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate." Robert Frost memorialized for all times our sense of responsibility when he looked deeply into the New England woods as the snow gently fell on a December morning, "We have promises to keep and miles to go before we sleep."