

## Strengthening Intimate Relationships 24 Pentecost C

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.” 1 Thess. 2:16,17

Today’s message is about intimate relationships – marriage in particular. Whether you are married, separated or divorced, or by choice single, intimate relationships affect all of us. “Breaking up is hard to do,” written and recorded by Neil Sedaka, shares some of this emotion:

Don't take your love away from me  
Don't you leave my heart in misery  
If you go then I'll be blue  
'Cause breaking up his hard to do

Remember when you held me tight  
And you kissed me all through the night  
Think of all that we've been through  
Breaking up is hard to do

They say that breaking up is hard to do  
Now I know, I know that it's true  
Don't say that this is the end  
Instead of breaking up I wish that we were making up again.

The view expressed in the gospel reading today was from that of the Sadducees. They did not believe or teach the resurrection. But the focus of this message is rather on another view they held: their objection to the customary view of marriage in which two people are made one flesh.

The Sadducees were the descendants of Zadok, David’s high priest. The Zadokite priesthood, termed Sadducees in the Greek language were responsible for codifying most of the OT legal material. This included their teaching called “the levirate marriage” that provided security for a woman whose husband died.

The customary view of marriage handed down to us today unites two people into one kin, one flesh. The Sadducees believed that although a man might marry more than one woman, a woman can only enter into this special bond with one man. So, how can a resurrected woman be "one flesh" after death with seven men, all of whom she was "one flesh" with on earth? This law only makes sense to the Sadducees if the **dead cease to exist after death.**

If the first husband still exists, all the other marriages are adulterous, and why would God ordain a law that produces multiple adulterous marriages in the afterlife? Seeing as there is no clear statement about afterlife in the Torah, but there is a clear statement about levirate marriage, the Sadducees reason that there must not be an afterlife.

Of course their view of this "special bond" and of the after-life was distorted. Jesus reply did not address their legal reasoning but the nature of intimate relationships with God. Jesus taught them that in the after-life marriage as they knew it would not exist. The hypothetical widow would have no need for the security promised by levirate marriage once she became a child of the resurrection. Furthermore, marriage is to be a "special bond" for men as it is for women.

Here is an important principle taught by Jesus that crosses the boundaries of human relationships. **In eternity there is no more earthly marriage.** Relationships in heaven are different. Some might say "Hallelujah!" Based on the current state of marriage that may be our only hope for security.

The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI) has existed for approximately five years and, in that time, become a national program model. The Initiative was developed and gained momentum under former Republican Governor Frank Keating and continues to grow and prosper, with new plans and visions on the horizon for the coming years.

The reason for such an initiative is money. Divorce ruins the economy. In 1998, University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University economists produced a joint study on what Oklahoma needed to do to become a more prosperous state. The economic

researchers found some social indicators that were hurting Oklahoma's economy. They mentioned the high divorce rate, high rates of child deaths due to child abuse and equally high rates of out-of-wedlock births. One OSU economist wrote in an editorial, "Oklahoma's high divorce rate and low per-capita income are interrelated. They hold hands. They push and pull each other. There's no faster way for a married woman with children to become poor than to suddenly become a single mom."

In 2006, Wisconsin had a divorce rate of 50 %. It is ranked 8 of the fifty states. Oklahoma is now ranked 15 just behind Wisconsin. (See Divorce reform: <http://www.divorcereform.org/compare.html>). The ongoing Oklahoma Marriage Initiative has had an impact on its rate of divorce (3.4 per 1000) is lower than the national average (4.0 per 1000).

What factors affect the divorce rate? The younger one is when getting married the most likely divorce will occur. Oklahomans marry an average of 2.5 years younger. Younger ages and poverty go hand in hand. Studies have also shown that when longer wait times are imposed in states on those filing divorce rates go down significantly. Premarital education and counseling during marital conflict also has an impact. A program known as PREP is based on research and has been taught at military installations, colleges and clergy. It is designed to teach:

- Communication - How to talk safely without fighting
- Preserving fun and friendship
- Maintaining commitment
- Learning and identifying danger signs and avoiding common pitfalls

There is also a free ten week marriage course online and we will be posting that site and information on PREP on Trinity's website to do our part in preventing divorce.

<http://marriage.about.com/od/onlinecourses/qt/betmarriage.htm>.

<http://www.prepinc.com/>.

In whatever state of relationship we find ourselves, we have a duty to work at making those healthy and helping those who are living within relationships that are at risk for violence . We can think about it in terms of which our Lord spoke when he pointed to the eternal relationships waiting for us. Will we be ready for them? As St. Paul has written he “who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.” Amen