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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Second Sunday after the Epiphany (One-Year Series)

January 14, 2018

Text: John 2:1–11

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We live in a very egalitarian society; at least, a society that thinks in egalitarian ways. What I mean is that we think all people are equal and should have equal access to all the benefits, opportunities, and vocations possibilities of our world. There is certainly a grain a truth in this idea. Every human being shares in equal dignity as human beings. That's a very Christian idea. All of us are created in the image of God and possess intrinsic, equal dignity regardless of our abilities or inabilities, sex, education, or ethnicity. As creations of God, we share equally in human dignity and value.

But our society's egalitarianism is corrupted and, dare I say, dangerous. It questions all distinctions and claims of uniqueness, calling such things oppressive, hierarchical, patriarchal, even undemocratic. I can give you two examples that will demonstrate our cultural mindset regarding its suspicion of distinctions and hierarchy. One, the belief that one religion is exclusively right and all others are wrong. Two, that marriage and family are, by definition, a relationship based upon distinction, hierarchy, and authority. Watch people's reactions if you make such claims. The very noticeable trend nowadays is to intimidate or berate people, particularly over social media, if anyone makes the claim that Christianity is exclusively the only way to eternal life. Or that a husband should exercise authority over his wife. Or for that matter, that fathers and mothers should exercise authority over their children in all areas of life.

This is a sermon, not a social commentary. True. But I want you to notice that the idea of egalitarianism is absolutely opposed to the teaching of Holy Scripture and harmful to the Church in particular, and human society, in general. Grant me a little leeway to show you how hierarchical the Bible is, that is, how the Bible assumes there are levels of authority and distinctions at all areas of life.

We begin with the OT reading from Exodus 13:16. Moses asks the Lord a question, "For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people?" Answer. "Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth." God's people, both Old and New

Testaments, are different from all of the nations and peoples of the earth. We are distinct; we are different because God is among us with His Word, grace, and promise of eternal redemption. Christians are living temples of the Holy Spirit. That also means that God is not with other people who do not believe and trust in Him through the grace of His Son, Jesus.

The Biblical witness is abundantly clear that God loves this world and all the peoples of this world; He desires that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the saving truth found only in Christ Jesus. What makes us different, as Christians, is that the Lord Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. God the Holy Trinity cannot be found in the teachings and practices of Buddhism, modern Judaism, Islam, or any other religion. Jesus Himself said He is the way, the truth, and the life. No can come to God the Father except through Him. The name of God given to us in our baptism makes us distinct, different from all other religions.

This is not a reason for boasting on our part. Holy Scripture is very clear in teaching us that our boasting is in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for He has called us to be His children by His love and grace. We do merit or earn His favor because of anything in us. Be that as it may, because He has given us His name and filled us with His Spirit, we are distinct “from every other people on the face of the earth.” This is the Christian answer to why we believe faith in Jesus, crucified and resurrected for the salvation of sinners, is true while all other religions are false. The salvation of precious souls is at stake!

Let’s look at the epistle reading from Ephesians 5. There are distinctions and differences in marriage. Man and woman are obviously different from each other physically, mentally, and emotionally. And we Biblical Christians believe such differences are good and beautiful and ought to be celebrated and cherished. Even though man and woman enter into marriage in the equality of being created in the image of God, they are different and each has distinctive roles and responsibilities. Wives are to submit to their own husbands, as to the Lord (vs. 22). Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed Himself for her (vs. 25). In Ephesians 5, the clearest and most beautiful passage of Scripture regarding the nature of marriage, husbands are not called to submit to their wives. And here is the big shocker. Wives are not called to love their husbands.

To be sure, in Christianity there is a general, mutual submission. Ephesians 5:21 calls us all to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. And yes, we are

commanded in both OT and NT, that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. But within the marriage relationship, there are distinctions and hierarchy; different roles and responsibilities. You husbands, love your wife and serve her sacrificially as Christ loves the Church and gives of Himself sacrificially for her. You wives, submit, that is place yourself under the sacrificially love and self-giving authority of your husband in everything even as the Church submits in everything to her Lord Jesus. This is the Christian answer as to why marriage and family are the foundational units of society upon which all order and prosperity are established. This orderly, structured arrangement in marriage is for the good of all, for husband and wife, their children, their extended family, and all human society. But such distinctions in marriage are rejected in today's cultural thinking as medieval, patriarchal abuses best left behind in a dark past.

Let's briefly consider John 2, the wedding at Cana in Galilee. Over the past 2,000 years, much has been made over the simple fact that 1) Jesus honors marriage with His presence and gives it His blessing, and 2) that Jesus performed His first sign and manifested His glory within the context of marriage and family. According to John's Gospel, our Lord manifested His glory by giving a distinctive wedding gift to an unnamed newly married couple. Through that glorious manifestation, His disciples believed in Him as Lord, Messiah, and Savior of the world.

When our Lord gives His gifts of grace and mercy, He enriches and elevates human life with a new dignity and status otherwise unknown. Whatever our Lord touches with His grace and love is sanctified, dare I say, made better. The wine He made and gave to the wedding feast was better than what the feast had before. The Word of grace and salvation He gives is better and more glorious than the message of Moses and the OT prophets, even though, Moses and the prophets witness to the glory of Christ's eternal kingdom. Christian marriage not only has the blessing of God's institution from Genesis 2, but the promise of Christ's grace from John 2 and Ephesians 5!

Mary, the mother of our Lord, saw something lacking in the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee. She knew that Jesus could and would do something about it. And her words, the last words we hear from Jesus' mother in Holy Scripture, are words we do well to heed attentively, "Do whatever he (i.e., Jesus) tells you" (vs. 5). Later in John's gospel, we hear the disciples make this bold confession, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

The Lord Jesus Christ has made things different for us Christians. He is God with us, Immanuel. He has claimed our hearts, our souls, our minds, our bodies, our emotions and all our thoughts and intentions. He claims our marriages and families. All of you are baptized into God's holy name. His name and Spirit sanctify you. That means, He has set you apart and made you distinct from all the people of the world.

Dear saints of God, it's time for us to live and think and feel and believe like Christians. What I mean is that Holy Scripture calls us:

to live under the Lordship of Jesus, to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:5),

to reject the friendship of the this fallen world for friendship with the world makes one an enemy of God (James 4:4),

to refuse to be conformed to this fallen world but rather be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2),

to be slaves of God, producing the fruit of a sanctified life leading to eternal life (Rom. 6:22), and lastly,

to believe and live firmly according "to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in Christ" (Eph. 1:6).

The distinctions and hierarchies that God's Word makes about faith, family, and life in this world and the world to come are good, and true, and beautiful. Let us embrace them with boldness and confidence. Christ Jesus is with us and He has made us "distinct...from every other people on the face of the earth." According to Christ's good purposes, let us show forth the goodness of His love, the truth of His Word and will, the beauty of His grace, and the joy of His salvation offered to all people. God's distinctions are good. May we live according to them.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.