

26 November 2005
Marriage of Susan Roark
and James Cassell

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
. . . on location in Great Falls, VA

Jesu Juva

“A New Creation”

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; John 3:16-21

Dear Friends, and especially this day, Jim and Susan:

In your lives thus far, you have both been hurt. The ravages and devastation of divorce have left their marks on you and your families. Your new family will be a blended family, and that will bring its own future problems and challenges, heartaches and joys. Today, a new chapter in your lives is about to begin, but it is a new chapter affected and influenced by the previous chapters, which is why I bring it up. Some would say we should ignore the past, especially on a day like today! But no. It's important to bring it up, to (as we heard) bring what we are doing into the light (John 3:19-21); to recognize it, and see things today not from *our* perspective, but from God's perspective.

Now, from the viewpoint of the world, this is all no big deal. To borrow from a popular phrase these days, “*Marriages are made to be broken.*” Marriages these days seem to be simply arrangements of convenience, the thing to do, and when we get tired of each other, we'll simply go our own ways and find someone else. And hardly anyone bats an eye anymore. From the viewpoint of the world, the divinity of marriage was jettisoned long ago, and it is now something simply man-made, which one may choose to do or not to do, and with whomever one chooses, and as many times as one likes.

Now the Church, in responding to such secularization of marriage, and trying to protect the divinity and sanctity of marriage, reacted so far in the other direction as to almost make divorce into the unforgivable sin! For a while, divorced people in churches were seen at best as second-hand citizens; not as *worthy*, somehow, as the rest of us. Perhaps some of you here have experienced that rejection and hurt. Yet even as we hypocrites were looking down our own long, sinful noses, the Church too, began to change, and for many in the church, divorce is now no longer seen as a big deal at all.

Well, so much for what *others* think of you! But that's not why we're here today. We're here to answer a much bigger, and a much more important question: what does **God** think of you, and what you are doing here today?

To be sure, marriage is serious business to God. He is the One who *invented* it and *instituted* it in the Garden of Eden, uniting Adam and Eve together as one flesh. And as we will hear in just a few moments, *what God has joined together, let no one put asunder*. Divorce is never in God's plan, it is never acceptable to Him, it is sinful. It is evidence that we live in a sinful world. Evidence that we, each of us, are sinful, and unable to do or fulfill God's perfect will for us. In fact, knowing how filled with sin we each are, the wonder is not why there are so many divorces, but how so many marriages stay together! It can be only the good and gracious will of God, keeping the world together; keeping us together.

But having said that, while divorce is serious to God, it is not unforgivable! For to forgive is what God wants to do most of all! To forgive us *all* our sins, *all* our mistakes, *all* our selfishness, *all* our hurt and division. Big and small. He knows the pain and heartache in this world, and He didn't just tell us to shape up! No, He came to do something about it. He came to take it away from us, so that we can live – not burdened by our pasts, but freed from our past! So that we do not have to look back in regret, but can look forward in hope and confidence. ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”***

And so you've made mistakes, yes. You've hurt and been hurt. You *have* put asunder what God had joined together. **But the good news is that God does not hold these things against you!** Why? Because your sins and mistakes He instead held against His Son. Because His Son, Jesus Christ, came and took your sins away from you, and put them on Himself. And so covered with our sin was Jesus, that we heard in the Epistle, ***He became our sin!*** And then from the depths of that sin said, ***“Father, forgive them.”*** Forgive them and hold it all against me. Condemn not them but me. I will pay for them. I will die for them. Set them free. . . . And that's exactly what happened. When Jesus died on the cross He was condemned, and you were set free. All your sins paid for; not one excepted. ***And whoever believes in Him does not perish, but has eternal life.***

And the thing about eternal life – it doesn't just start in eternity, it starts now! When you are forgiven in Jesus, you are, as we heard, ***a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*** *As God considered Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, so now He considers you.* Perfect, blameless, holy, as everything was in the beginning. For that is what Jesus' resurrection did. For He who took our sin to the cross and was condemned for us, was then buried in the grave with all our sin – but when He rose from that grave on Easter morning, He left 'em all there! He was alive, but *our sins* stayed dead and buried. And so they're gone! And they're not going to come back to haunt

you! You are a new creation, and God is doing new things in you. Gospel things. Life things. And alive in Him, He wants you to live. Set free from your past, and looking to the good and wonderful things that He has planned for you in the future. For that's what forgiveness is. The word literally means *release*. And you have been released – like a prisoner set free from jail, to now live a free and holy and thankful life in your Saviour, Christ Jesus.

But that's not the only *new creation* that's happening here today! No, for while each of you, by grace through faith in your Saviour Jesus Christ and His forgiveness, are a new creation, He is also about to work a miracle of creation by uniting you and making you one. ***And the two will become one flesh.*** Whereas before you were two, from now on you will be one. One heart, one will, one mind, one flesh. And as the first creation of the world was a miracle, so too is this. *And no less a miracle.* And if divorce is evidence of the sin that lives in us and in our world, then even more here we have a picture of the Gospel – for God tells us that marriage is a picture of Jesus and His bride, the Church. And you can be sure, as you stand here today, that your Heavenly Father is well pleased to join you together – not as “damaged goods” – but as children that are holy and perfect in His sight. For His forgiveness has made you holy and perfect, His wedding gift to His Son, and to you. And He will bless your marriage richly. With His presence, and with the love and forgiveness you will need to give one another constantly. That too, His gift to you, and to us all.

So now, let's get on with it! But with what? Your wedding? Yes. But even more, with the Gospel! Rejoicing in our Saviour, and all that He has done, and is doing, for you.

Rejoicing in His **love** that brought you together,
in His **forgiveness** that made you spotless and pure,
and in His **life** that He gives you now and forever.

All this that He gives to us always as His children. All this that He gives to you today, as husband and wife. May God so richly bless your union, from this day forth and even forevermore.

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