

It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness. And in a dark, confused world, we can proudly proclaim: **CHRIST AND HIS BRIDE, THE CHURCH, ARE FOR HEALTHY FAMILIES.**

First, I. Christ and His Bride, the Church, are for healthy marriages. **“But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”** In these words of Jesus, we hear what a beautiful thing marriage is!

The one flesh union of marriage is a one-of-a-kind thing. You have a complete respiratory system, a complete digestive system, and so on, but you only have half a reproductive system. The other half is occupied in a different body, namely, that of your spouse’s or your spouse to be. And from this union flows life. There is a bonding that happens that ties couples together emotionally. From this union flows life; we know of no other way to create humans besides male and female coming together, even if it is in a petri dish.

Marriage is God’s gift to mankind, and He joins us together in marriage. Many of us would trade nothing in the world for the experiences and joys of sharing life with our husband or wife. In marriage God joins man and woman together for companionship, pleasure, and the procreation of children.

“And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” Given all that we know about the blessings of marriage, Jesus should have just told the Pharisee to take a long walk off a short pier. The Pharisees are asking the wrong question.

Christ and His Bride, the Church, are for healthy marriages, so we are against divorce. Being against divorce means you want to avoid it if at all possible. Yet the point is not to pull out the rulebook and find a loophole that makes divorce okay. That’s what the Pharisees were trying to do with Jesus.

And so to be pro-marriage means to fight against things that harm the God-given gift of marriage. Marriage between anyone besides one man and one woman is a nonentity, an oxymoron, an absurdity, a two-wheeled unicycle or a thousand eyed cyclops.

And so to be pro-marriage means to understand your body is a temple, not an amusement park. The one flesh union is for men and women who God has joined together in marriage. Sociological studies show that premarital cohabitation is a test run for divorce, not marriage.

But pastor? What if my marriage is unhealthy? What if I am divorced? What if I’m living with my boyfriend or girlfriend? What if I already engaged in that one flesh union? John the Baptist’s words fit well here, **“Repent and believe in the gospel.”**

God has a wonderful plan for your life. Repentance looks different in each of these scenarios. Married couples, seek help if you're having difficulties. If you've remarried, love the spouse you have. If you're cohabitating, move out or get married. If you're single resist sexual temptation.

But most importantly, believe in the Gospel. You are not your sexual sins. You are not your sexual orientation. You are not the sum of the abuses you've faced. You are not those nasty words you call yourself. **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”**

The Pharisees came to Jesus looking for a loophole, but Jesus is the one who welcomes in the woman of the city, a sinner, and says to her, **“Your sins are forgiven.”** In Christ you are beloved, forgiven, and accepted; You are pure, holy, and spotless. **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”** In Christ alone are our marriages made healthy and holy.

Secondly, II. Christ and His Bride, the Church, are for healthy parents. The Church is the champion of moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas. It is a place for us to celebrate the joys and challenges of raising children. Even adult children still need parenting sometimes. One speaker shared a story of her 90-year-old mother correcting her on the right way to hold a knife when cutting a watermelon. The Psalmist writes, **“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.”** Being a mom or dad is a wonderful blessing from the Lord Himself which flows from the marital union.

One of the things that the Reformation accomplished is the recovery of the importance of the role of parents. It used to be that being a mom or dad was a second-class role to being a monk, nun, or priest. Perhaps we find the same pressures in today's world where being a mom or dad is of secondary importance to being an employee or employer.

But even the lowly task of changing a diaper or driving a child to soccer practice is a glorious task in the eyes of the Lord. It is a task as holy and righteous as a monk saying prayers in a monastery. And so it's worth it for a father to sometimes say no to overtime or a promotion if it means more time with his children. It's laudable for a mother to stay home with her children instead of joining the workforce. We as the church can celebrate when parents make those sacrifices for their children.

And what a beautiful thing it is when the parents raise the children and teach them the faith. Luther is at pains to say that this is the chief role of parents. He said that God Himself can provide children with riches and property, but the solemn task of raising a child in the faith belongs to parents.

But we live in a broken world. Sometimes dad is out of the picture. Other times, mom also may be. Broken marriages lead to broken parents and broken

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Christ is there for broken sinners, and there is forgiveness for moms and dads who have failed their jobs of raising children, or at least feel guilty over things they could have done better. Christ is the redeemer of divorced dads, single moms, and grandmas and grandpas who are forced to raise their grandchildren.

Christ died on the cross to forgive us of our domestic sins, and to free us from a past with parents who may have not always loved us as they should. He rose again on the third day, and from His resurrection is born the Church, which is the family of God wherein we're given surrogate mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, grandmas and grandpas who can help fill up what is lacking in our families. Only Christ, through His forgiveness and redemption can make straight what is crooked and restore what is broken.

Finally, III. Christ and His Bride, the Church, are for children. In the second half of our text, the disciples rebuked the crowds for bringing children to Jesus. Yet we read, **“But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.””**

We take Jesus' words to heart, and we celebrate children in church. We teach them through Sunday school and other such programs. We welcome children in worship, even the noisy ones. We welcome them because worship is receiving God's grace, it is proclaiming God's Word, it is giving thanks to God. All God's people, including children, are nurtured by worship. Worship is the place to take the whole family.

We baptize children. We pray with children. We teach children the faith. In fact, Jesus turns the tables on us. He tells us that children are the models of faith that we should follow, not the other way around. The unwavering faith of an infant for his mother is the faith that Jesus calls us to have in our Heavenly Father.

“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” It doesn't matter the circumstances of the child's birth. Even if the mother is pregnant out of wedlock, even if the dad is out of the picture. The Church cherishes and loves each and every child as a blessing from God Himself. Why?

Because God has made us a member of His healthy family. His Son has married His bride, the Church. As Christians, God is our Father, and He is the perfect parent. In baptism, we are made children of God who have been redeemed and been welcomed. We are God's children, and **“to such belongs the kingdom of God.”** CHRIST AND HIS BRIDE, THE CHURCH, ARE FOR HEALTHY FAMILIES. Thanks be to God there's a place for us in this family. Amen.