

Why Are Adam and Eve So Funny?

Genesis 2:18-25

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On the occasion of the wedding of Jenifer and Pablo Duarte

OK, let the jokes begin! What did God say after creating Adam? “I must be able to do better than that!”

What did God say after creating Eve? “Practice make perfect.”

Remember what Adam said to Eve: “I’ll wear the plants in this family!”

It has been said that Adam and Eve had the perfect marriage. That was because he didn't have to hear about all the men she could have married; and she didn't have to hear about the way his mother cooked!"

At Sunday School they were teaching how God created everything, including human beings. Little Johnny, a child in the kindergarten class, seemed especially intent when they told him how Eve was created out of one of Adam’s ribs. Later in the week his mother noticed him lying down as though he were ill, and said, “Johnny what is the matter?” Little Johnny responded, “I have a pain in my side. I think I'm going to have a wife.”

And last, but not least, we know that Adam bit the apple and, feeling great shame, covered himself with a fig leaf. Eve, too, felt shame and covered herself with a fig leaf. Then she went behind the bush to try on a maple leaf, a sycamore, and an oak.

Well, you get the idea. If there is a part of the Bible that has been fodder for more jokes than Adam and Eve, I'm not sure what it is. Whether it is the eternally mystifying struggle for men and women to understand one another, or something else even more primordial, if that's possible, the world's first couple provokes something in us that comedians feel they can easily connect with. But that doesn't mean that marriage is a laughing matter. On the contrary, marriage is too often devoid of laughter, and filled with stress. You know the statistics: that in the US, something like fifty percent of marriages end in divorce, so marriage clearly isn't the fun and games it should be, or at least as it is described in this part of the second chapter of Genesis. It is not like divorce is a new thing. In tonight's Gospel lesson from Matthew, the Pharisees are inquiring about it, and they point back even further to Moses, so even in Jesus' own community, marriages have been challenged to stay together, despite their presence since the beginning.

Imagine for a moment that you are hearing the story of Genesis for the very first time. You hear about the creation of the earth, the resting of God on the seventh day, the breathing of life into Adam and his naming of all the creatures. It is sounding pretty good so far, but then it gets even better: Eve is created and Adam says with all the joy we expect from a groom's wedding toast, "This, at last, is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." And the man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed. How much better does it get than that? All is right with universe, order reigns, Adam is no longer lonely, but has found

fulfillment, the perfect match. Now stop right there – you don't yet know the rest of the story. Stop and savor that moment of pure bliss. It all sounds too good to be true! And it was...too good to be true. In the very next verses of Genesis, it all comes crashing down, the serpent, the forbidden fruit from the prohibited tree, the blaming, the chastisement and punishment by God, and the expulsion from all that paradise. The honeymoon is over, in more ways than one. And fifty percent of marriages in the US end up in divorce.

There is a good reason that pastors do pre-marital counseling with couples. What we would like to do is pre-engagement counseling, since no one is in the condition to hear anything once the question has been popped and the date has been set, but so be it. But the reason we do pre-marital counseling is that it is easy for the couple to get so wrapped up in preparing for the wedding, that they don't plan for the marriage, for the long term, for the daily challenges that are the ones that stretch us thin and sometimes make us snap. Can I get an Amen? How many of you who are married were really prepared for all that marriage dropped in your lap? Some of us here have made it through the hard times and some of us have not, but all of us can acknowledge just how hard are the challenges.

There are a lot of theories about why marriage is so tough, why that divorce rate is so high, from family and cultural pressures to the North American virtue of freedom at all costs, but the most compelling one for me is this, that marriage, even as described before the fall in Genesis, was never intended to carry the emotional

freight that it has assumed in the way it is practiced in the US. Let me say that again: marriage was never intended to carry the emotional freight that it has assumed in the way it is practiced in the US. The way we do marriage today differs quite a bit from Biblical times. First of all, there really wasn't much in the way of dating; in fact, men and women barely spent any time together if they weren't already married. Marriages were quite often arranged by the extended families, as still happens in some places in the world today. There wasn't the expectation that the person they married would be their soul mate, their one and only true love for all time, but rather their helpmate, as we find the word used in Genesis, the one who made life more survivable, and provided children, or the support of children. They didn't expect their husband or wife to be their only, or even primary, means of emotional support, or even to be romantic and loving. They expected someone to be there for them in the hard times when the droughts came and the camels got lost, and in the good times when the crops were plentiful, and their children got married. For better or for worse, there is little love and romance to be found in Scripture, and certainly less than we expect in our lives and our marriages today.

And so we are in something of a trap these days, thinking that our spouse is responsible for far more than they were ever designed to be able to provide, and so naturally, they frequently disappoint us. And because we are convicted, rightly, that marriage is forever, we soldier on, and often the best we can do is grin and bear it, or tell jokes at the expense of Adam and Eve. But we remain in the same

trap, and we don't know how to get out. Is that all there is to be said about marriage? Is that all Pablo and Jenifer have to look forward to as they share their vows with one another tonight? Well, of course not! But it will take some strength and humility on their parts to get out of that trap, and with God's help they will do it, and Adam's rib will be their guide.

The creation of Eve, from Adam's rib, has not only provided us with relationship humor, but also gives us yet another image to help us on our way, and out of that trap. It is significant that God created Eve not out of the dust of the earth, as Adam had been created, but from the same substance as Adam. They are, quite literally, of the same flesh, a quality Adam celebrates, and Jesus affirms. They are not foreign to one another, but recognizable; they differ, but to be complementary to one another, and not adversarial. Adam and Eve are human beings, sharing the same essence, as well as the same substance, the wonder that is what we call today deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA.

In 1953, perhaps the greatest understatement in scientific history was made when James Watson and Francis Crick wrote these words: "This structure has novel features which are of considerable biological interest." That statement appeared in the scientific paper in which Watson and Crick presented the structure of the DNA-helix, the molecule that carries genetic information from one generation to the other. Nine years later, in 1962, they shared the Nobel Prize in Medicine with Maurice Wilkins, for solving one of the most important of all

biological riddles, or at least discovering scientifically what we already knew from Genesis, that human beings are made from the same substance. You have probably seen images of the double helix, the shape, so to speak, of DNA. The double helix, so scientists think, represents the primordial “shape” of the universe, intertwined spirals seen through a microscope in something as small as human DNA, and through a telescope in something as large as a galaxy. If you have watched enough forensic science dramas on television, you know that DNA can be extracted from bone, even a rib bone, and that although each person’s DNA is distinct, the differences are minute compared to the common elements shared by all human beings.

It doesn’t matter where you come down on creation or evolution to understand the point of Adam’s rib, that we human beings are connected to one another, not only primordially and biologically, but more importantly, spiritually and communally. We are inseparably bound up with one another; our spirals cannot be separated from one another without tragic consequences. What is the subject of countless science fiction novels and books? Dealing with the aftereffects of the extreme manipulation of DNA that causes mutations that lead to chaos. What God has joined together, let no one put asunder, marriage or otherwise.

Those scientists, Watson and Crick, offered their scientific understatement of the century in biological terms. It would also be an understatement of dramatic proportions to declare about marriage that “This structure has novel features which

are of considerable *spiritual* interest.” In the wedding ceremony, we will hear about some of those specific features, but for the moment, it is important to recognize that marriage is not simply a social convention, or a legal arrangement, or even the spiritual bonding together of two human beings, even though it is all of those too, but it is also a living witness of the shape of all the relationships to which God calls us. For all its challenges, it remains one of the most visible and primary of human relationships, and in that role, its health has everything to do with the health of our families, our communities, and the community of our nations, for when we get our own house in order, it is much easier to join our homes together in community. And isn't that the shalom found in the garden of Eden, and promised for the new Jerusalem?

The double helix is indeed an image that is useful for marriage, but only if we are careful not to limit it to the marriage partners alone. The mistake most couples make is believing that the two spirals of the double helix are the two of them. There they are, intertwined for all eternity in a dance of love, untouchable, because they have love and they have one another. The mistake is not seeing that they are but one strand of the double helix and that God is the other. Or that they together are one strand, and all the other people God has given us in our lives, are the other strand. You see, important as is the spiral formed with the strands of husband and wife, still more important is the spiral of God and God's creation, of which we, and every relationship, and every marriage, are a part. God is

inseparably bound up with us, not because God *has* to be, but because God has chosen to be. It's what we celebrate in this Christmas season, Emmanuel, God with us, God's choice of us through Jesus Christ, even when we weren't capable of choosing God. No couple can make it on their own. They need all the relationships that have been given to us, and most especially the relationship with Jesus Christ.

My final comments tonight are directed to the bride and groom; the rest of you may eavesdrop if you like. Pablo and Jenifer, as you know, most newlyweds receive gifts for the occasion. You may even have given gifts to one another. Enjoy those gifts, write thank you notes early and often, but in the midst of opening your gifts, and as you savor the gift you are to one another, take a moment or two to remember that the greatest gift is Jesus Christ, *in whom* God's love for us is spectacularly revealed, *with whom* you are connected in ways you never dreamed possible, and *from whom* flows the strength to seek God and to have your lives transformed each and every day. May God continue to bless you in all that you do, and especially as you go forward loving each other, even as Jesus Christ loves you. Amen.