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

This morning we have before us two texts on marriage. Our Old Testament lesson is God’s establishing of marriage, his creation of marriage. And in our Gospel lesson, we heard Jesus’ affirmation of this beginning.

Marriage is a sensitive thing to speak about. Speaking about marriage gets right to the heart of our understanding of what it means to be human. It can touch on our deepest joys and delights, but can also touch on our deepest desires or our greatest disappointments or unfulfilled longings. This might be because you desired to be married, but in God’s providence he hasn’t yet granted that desire. Or it could be because your parents’ marriage ended in divorce, and left you and your siblings in the lurch. It could be because your own marriage tore apart at the seams, and for long years you have felt as if your very flesh has been torn from your bones. It could also be because you are in a marriage that hasn’t had the happiness and joy that you thought it would bring. Whatever our situation might be, Jesus Christ holds out true and trustworthy hope for us.

I will say this at the beginning, to set all of our easily troubled hearts at rest. Jesus is speaking about divorce in our Gospel lesson. Our Old Testament lesson tells of the marriage of our first parents. But this will not be a sermon primarily about divorce, but neither will it be a sermon primarily about marriage. For every sermon is to be about Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ and him crucified. A sermon only about divorce would not give true and trustworthy hope, neither would a sermon that was primarily about marriage. Christ alone gives true and trustworthy hope. He does that by giving us himself. As Paul says, Christ Jesus is our hope (1 Timothy 1:1). He gives us hope, by giving us himself. With Christ Jesus taking us by the hand, we can, without fear, look to what Holy Scripture, Christ’s own Word, has to say about both marriage and divorce.

For this Christ was crucified because of his great compassion and love for all of us, whether we are married or divorced, whether we are called to celibacy or whether celibacy has been forced upon us by no desire or decision of our own. Jesus might have some hard or difficult words for us to understand, but if we hold on to him we will not be disappointed, we will find that he is for us, that he loves us and desires nothing for us but good things. He desires to give us life, life in abundance.

In our Gospel lesson, some Pharisees come up to Jesus and ask him whether it is permissible or not for a man to divorce his wife. These Pharisees were trying to test him, to catch him. They did not come in a spirit of humility and lowliness, desiring to learn from the very one who had created them and all of humankind. The question of the Pharisees hinged upon a passage from
Deuteronomy. But Jesus shows that the Pharisees misunderstood Deuteronomy, because they had left behind the beginning of humankind, they had lost sight of God’s original purposes in creating Adam and Eve for one another, to have and to hold, in the riches of the Garden or east of Eden, as they bore all of the consequences of eating the forbidden fruit.

And only after bringing the Pharisees back to the beginning does Jesus add his own command. “Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not put asunder.” The whole point of this passage is that Jesus’ command here is not actually a new command at all. This was the command that stood from the beginning quite simply because it was God who had created Adam and Eve for one another and who joined the two together. In marriage, these two are no longer two at all, but one, one flesh. They are one because God has done something, he has joined them together, they are from now on to be considered as if they were utterly inseparable and could hardly even be thought of apart from one another. And we should note the very physical, carnal word that is used: “one flesh.” This is no sentimental notion, this is not just a cute romantic ideal. Their lives are so intertwined that before God the two are truly one. “What God has joined together, let man not put asunder.”

Jesus pulls the Pharisees and us back to look at the love and fellowship and intimacy that God desires between humankind. This is the only proper context for understanding Jesus’ command and purposes for marriage. But we know that this love, and fellowship and intimacy did not remain unstained for Adam and Eve, nor has it remained unstained for any that have come after Adam and Eve. That is, with one glorious exception.

Adam and Eve fell into sin. The havoc of sin has played out in every relationship since that day, perhaps most especially seen in the closest of relationships: that between friends, between parents and children, and between spouses. But on the ruins of these broken relationships, on the ruins of Adam and Eve’s sin, God has accomplished something far more glorious than even the glories and joys of Adam and Eve’s sinless marriage. Whatever glories marriage was blessed with in the Garden, whatever beauty the beginning of marriage had, God has created a far more beautiful and glorious fulfillment and end to marriage.

At the beginning of the Bible we see the beginning of marriage, but at the end of Holy Scripture we see the final culmination, God’s final and full purpose for marriage. We see the one exception to sin’s effects on marriage.

In the second to last chapter of Revelation, human history is coming to a close. Jesus is returning to set all things to rights. Jesus’ kingdom is finally being established fully on earth. But the image that we are given of what this will look like hearkens back to Genesis 2. Here we have another marriage ceremony. As Revelation chapter 21 has it, out of heaven, from God, descends the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, adorned as a bride prepared for her husband. This New Jerusalem is described there as “the bride,” the “wife of the Lamb,” the Lamb of course being the same Lamb that we already know, the One who takes away the sins of the world.

From the beginning of human history in Genesis 1 and 2, to the end of human history in Revelation, it is the story of how we move from Adam and Eve to the Lamb and the Bride, to
Christ and his Church. Everything between, all of Scripture between and each of our lives in between, is the story of how we get from the first to the last, how God is bringing all of us from the brokenness that Adam and Eve fell in to, to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Jesus Christ lived out the truth of marriage perfectly and fully. Jesus Christ loved humankind, he refused to abandon humankind in its estrangement from his Father. And so he came in the likeness of those whom he loved, taking the very flesh of the ones that he loved to himself. From his birth in Bethlehem to the walk up the hill of the Skull, he lived for his Bride, the Church. He even endured the cross for the sake of the ones that he loved, for long before he was nailed to the tree he was nailed to his church in love. Even in the midst of being mocked and tortured and killed, Jesus lived out the full and final truth of his command that he gives in our Gospel lesson—Christ Jesus let nothing put asunder the love that he had for us.

And so we have gathered here today as Christ’s own dearly beloved, to anticipate the marriage supper of the Lamb. As our offertory hymn has it, whenever we gather we are being given “a foretaste of the feast to come.” This table is a foretaste of the eternal wedding feast that we await. This marriage between Christ and his Bride has already begun. As Thomas Aquinas put it, “the marriage was begun in the womb of the Virgin, when God the Father united a human nature to his Son in a Unity of [one] person.”¹ In the womb of the Virgin, Christ Jesus was glad to take human nature to himself, and in every Baptism Jesus again takes the one baptized to himself and says, this one shall be my very flesh. And every time we gather around this table, Jesus Christ looks upon us as Adam looked upon Eve, he rejoices in calling us bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, he rejoices in giving us his Body for food and his blood for drink. As Eve was created from the side of the sleeping Adam, the Church has been created from the pierced side of Christ, when he was put to the sleep of death on the cross, when the water of Baptism and the blood of the Eucharist flowed from the fountain of Life. As Adam and Eve, and every husband and wife, are joined together by God himself so that they are no longer two, but one flesh, so we have been made to be one flesh with Christ Jesus. As Saint Paul writes throughout his letters, we are Christ’s own Body. This too is no sentimental notion, this is not just a cute romantic phrase. In the Church, our lives are so intertwined with Christ’s life, that before God we are simply one body with him, we are truly one.

This Church, Christ’s Bride, is glorious enough to hold within it all of the promise that was given to Adam and Eve. There is room in Christ’s body for all people. For what Christ has done has brought about a new thing in this world.

For as we gather together at this table, Jesus Christ is doing away with the reason for the permission that Moses gave in the first place, he is doing away with all of our hard hearts, and he is giving us each a new heart, his own heart. Whether we are married or divorced or celibate, this is the work that he is doing. For there shall surely be a day when divorce has come to an end, and so shall marriage and celibacy come to an end, not because they have all

been destroyed but because they have all been swallowed up in the eternal marriage feast of Christ and his Bride, the Church.

Male or female, slave or free, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, married or divorced or celibate, he beckons us all to come: come to my table, receive my Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins.

And so, let us gather together at this table and hear Jesus Christ again say to us, you are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, let us come to the one who has made himself to be inseparable from us, let us be made into Christ’s fitting companion, let us receive Christ’s body into our own bodies, and let us receive the foretaste of the eternal wedding feast to come, where we shall see Jesus Christ face to face, the last Adam, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.