

A husband and wife go to a counselor after 15 years of marriage. The counselor asks them what the problem is, and the wife goes into a tirade listing every single problem they have had in the 15 years they've been married. She goes on and on and on. Finally, the counselor gets up, walks around the desk, embraces the wife and kisses her passionately. The woman shuts up and sits quietly in a daze. The counselor turns to the husband and says, "This is what your wife needs at least 3 times a week. Can you do this?" The husband thinks for a moment and replies, "Well, I can drop her off here on Mondays and Wednesdays, but on Fridays, I play golf." (No author specified)

First a little background on the GENESIS text, which is quoted in our gospel. We are told that the man leaves his parents, unites with the woman, "and the two become one flesh." Now the one flesh seems to be about their having sex. And you're all thinking – "Wow – that Fr. John is a genius! Look at what he figured out! DUH!" But there is so much more going on here. Even having sex in the bible is about something else.

In the Jewish understanding, words are extremely meaningful. While the English language has somewhere between 1 and 2 HUNDRED thousand words, the Hebrew language has around 7 thousand words. So in Hebrew, words have to cover a lot of ground. A single word can have tremendous depth and significance. When it is said that the man and woman will become 'one flesh,' the word for ONE in Hebrew is the word ECHAD.

ECHAD is oneness made up of several parts or members. So the man and woman are two people, two separate, independent beings, and yet when they come together, they're 'one.' The word is significant because it occurs in one of the most well-known passages of Scripture in Jewish history. It's a prayer from the Book of Deuteronomy that begins, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is ONE." This prayer, called the SHEMA, from the word 'to hear,' is the central declaration of the Jewish faith, a way of reaffirming all that life is about. It's about ONE. This prayer is said by Jews when they wake up, when they go to sleep, when they gather on the Sabbath, when they study, when someone dies – there are numerous legends of great Jews having it on their lips as they were martyred. The Lord is ONE. The Lord is ECHAD. God is ECHAD. It's the same words as the 'one flesh': "And the man and woman shall be ECHAD flesh."

Central to the Bible is the affirmation that there is one God. Not many, one. And sex between the man and woman has something to do with God. Who God is. What God is like. Adam and Eve are one as God is one. Same word. This marriage between a man and woman – their having sex – is about something much bigger than the relationship itself. It points beyond them to someone else – to God. The point of marriage isn't marriage. It's a picture. A display. A window that we look through to something else. A marriage has a mission. Our world isn't ECHAD. It isn't one. It's broken, shattered, fractured, with pieces lying all over the floor. We all have friends – or we ourselves came from – 'broken homes.' A couple 'split up.' A spouse is 'shattered' by a lover's infidelity. Somebody's marriage fell apart and she's 'picking up the pieces.'

A marriage is designed to counter all of this. Not to add to the brokenness of the world but to add to the 'oneness' of the world. This man and this woman who have given themselves to each other are supposed to give the world a glimpse of hope, a display of what God is like, a bit of ECHAD on earth. Ah, the world needs to 'make love' more, have more ECHAD, more oneness. It's probably why we are so moved when we go to a wedding – we want this couple to succeed. We intuitively know that their 'success' is somehow tied to ours. Their making of love makes the world a better place to live, a place where there is more love for all of us. This is why we notice great marriages. When their love is growing, it inspires us. Their life together spills over into the lives around them – far beyond their children and grandchildren. A marriage reminds us that it's

all connected. Supposed to be one. We're all connected. Supposed to be one. (Adapted from Rob Bell, SEX GOD, p. 151-154)

Second, so now we are ready to deal with the gospel text. Jesus does not engage in the questions around divorce. For Him, the symbolism of divorce tells the whole story. It is what is often called a breakup. Things that are supposed to be ECHAD get broken, are no longer in communion. There is separation. The original, unitive consciousness of creation is lost; and the ONE who came to restore creation wants it otherwise. And I want anyone who is divorced to hear this loud and clear. You did the best you could. Move on! God accompanies all of us in our successes – and in our failures. That's life. And God wants us to move on making the world one. So we see that this gospel isn't just about divorce – it's about our world – its brokenness, the things that we do that contribute to its brokenness, and the call of ALL OF US to make our world ECHAD, ONE. Like God.

Part of the big problem in our world is that we often operate from a separation consciousness – we focus on the surfaces where everything is unconnected and detached. We see another person – who is made in the image and likeness of God – as OTHER. How could they be 'other'? They are made in the same image as us. The Christ who came to put the world back together – to SAVE it – is the Christ who reconciles. That is why Jesus quotes that GOD MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. They are in the image of God. We are in the image of God. We should be able to recognize each other as children of God. When we label gay/straight, black/ white, foreign/native-born, legal/illegal, democrat/republican, outsider/insider we are making the world less ECHAD, less like God, less one.

And remember this isn't just about marriage – it's about every relationship that everyone of us is in every moment of our lives. We can't sit back and say "well, I'm not divorced so this doesn't apply to me." It absolutely applies to every single one of us in this church. We are supposed to be about making the world ECHAD, one. The married couple is simply a symbol for us. And what does Jesus explain as the reason why the world is not one: Because their hearts have hardened. They have turned in on themselves; they cannot melt, flow, and merge. This is sin, a failure to sustain the original consciousness of creation. Jesus is the second Adam (see 1 Cor 15), the one who lives in unitive consciousness, and He wants all of life to be permeated by the truth of communion, the truth of 'the Garden.' That was when Adam and Eve were perfectly ONE, ECHAD with God – when they walked with God in the cool of the day. As I've said before they walked 'ad-ora' – 'mouth-to-mouth' – in ADORATION – perfect creature to Creator relationship. And when we are in adoratio – when we are in right relationship with God – when we are in unitive consciousness – then we are one – ECHAD with others, recognizing everyone in this world as another son or daughter of God – and as our brother and sister. No exceptions.

Third, It might initially appear that the end of the gospel about the child is just a whole new thought. It's not. Here's where the little child comes in. Marriage symbolizes unitive consciousness on the horizontal level: people in communion with each other. A child symbolizes unitive consciousness on the vertical level: the person in communion with God. The disciples of course, are not aware of this symbolic potential of children. They are working out of conventional social awareness. Children at the time were seen as unimportant and so should not bother Jesus, who is important. Jesus had previously taught the disciples that embracing the child, then a symbol of the least, will bring them into the consciousness of Christ and through that consciousness to the consciousness of God (Mk 9:37) They do not seem to be ready for this. They are not practicing the welcoming attitude that will bring them into kingdom consciousness.

The clue about why the kingdom belongs to children is in the word 'receive' (v. 15) Children, by definition, know they are not the cause of their own being. They have not forgotten their source, and they do

not delude themselves by fantasizing that they are completely independent. Instead, they are aware of being in relationship. This is not an equal relationship. It is a relationship with their origin, their beginning. This relationship is not 'over and done with,' an event in the past. They are permanently present to God, and God is permanently present to them. There is no separation. "Such as these" (v. 14) are those who live in communion with their Divine Source.

Jesus embraces these children as their SIBLING. They share the consciousness of the same parent. In the center of His being, Jesus knows Himself as the BELOVED SON who is always receiving the Holy Spirit from the Father – we see this in all the accounts of Jesus' baptism. When Jesus urges the disciples not to push away the children, He is pushing them toward God consciousness. The disciples are God's children and they are brothers and sisters of one another and 'such as these.'

To embrace the child is to embrace all. To embrace all is to enter the kingdom. To be a kingdom person is to be a maker of ECHAD, a maker of Love, of ONENESS. Is there anything our world needs more than love? Than to be one? (last two sections inspired and adapted from John Shea, EATING WITH THE BRIDEGROOM, p. 240243)

OK, I know this probably was too heavy. But I find all of this so rich and so meaningful and so challenging – and so wonderful! How lucky we are to have such a wondrous tradition to help us on our walk here on earth. Perhaps a story can help to conclude.

An adult – now a spouse and parent himself – remembers his mom and dad: "I grew up in the '50s with very practical parents. A mother, God love her, who washed aluminum foil after she cooked with it, then reused it. She was the original recycle queen, before they had a name for it. My father was happier getting old shoes fixed than buying new ones. Their marriage was good, their dreams focused. Their best friends lived barely a wave away. I can see them now: Dad in trousers, tee shirt and a hat, with screwdrivers and wrenches going from one project to the next; and Mom in a house dress, a dish towel or some cooking utensil always in her hand.

"It was the time for fixing things. A curtain rod, the kitchen radio, the screen door, the oven door, the hem of a dress. Things we keep. It was a way of life, and sometimes it made me crazy. All that re-fixing, re-heating, renewing. I wanted just once to be wasteful. Waste meant affluence. Throwing things away meant you knew there'd always be more.

"But then my mother died, and on that clear summer's night, in the warmth of the hospital room, I was struck with the pain of learning that sometimes there isn't any more. Sometimes, what we care about most gets all used up and goes away....never to return. So, while we have it....it's best we love it....and care for it....and fix it when it's broken....and heal it when it's sick.

"This is true for marriage....and old cars....and children with bad report cards.....and dogs with bad hips....and aging parents....and grandparents....and friendships. We keep them because they are worth it, because we are worth it." Because the world needs more ECHAD. More love. More Oneness. More healing. More God. Amen. (last story from CONNECTIONS, 7 October 2018, p. 1)