

**2018.10.07 Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost**  
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**Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas**

**GOSPEL**

**Mark 10: 2-16**

The holy gospel according to Saint Mark, the tenth chapter.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>2</sup>Some Pharisees came, and to test [Jesus] they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” <sup>3</sup>He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” <sup>4</sup>They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” <sup>5</sup>But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. <sup>6</sup>But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ <sup>7</sup>‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, <sup>8</sup>and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. <sup>9</sup>Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

<sup>10</sup>Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. <sup>11</sup>He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; <sup>12</sup>and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

<sup>13</sup>People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. <sup>14</sup>But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. <sup>15</sup>Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” <sup>16</sup>And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

I don't know what this past week was like for you. But for me it felt like the world and the work of being in it were heavier, harder.

So...if you are emotionally exhausted right now, I am sorry for the weight that comes with this week's scripture. It, too, is heavy and hard. And to find the good news in it...and I believe there is *very* good news in it...it requires emotional labor from us. So, I just want to say that if you don't have the energy to do that labor today...that's okay. You are allowed to take care of yourself and come back to this work when you are ready. It will wait. But these texts have done enough harm, that I think it would be more harmful to ignore them.

With that said, we should turn to Mark's gospel.

Only...I don't want to say the word until I really have to...because I know what happens when we do. As soon as we hear it, we are each carried to the place where it has invaded our lives...And it has...for all of us...in one way or another...I think...because after treading this earth and living and loving awhile...we become connected to each other...and then sometimes those connections get twisted...or broken...or they change or fall away.

Divorce.

The church has so often spoken in such hurtful or judging oversimplifications... and we remember that...feeling shut out of the place that was supposed to give us life and love...or we feel our own wounds that are still too raw to be uncovered...and we shut down. The church has not been a welcoming place to people who have gone through divorce...so now there are precious children of God who hesitate to darken a church door. There are others of us who just turn off a part of ourselves...or hide a part of our own precious, fragile story in a dark corner...like shoving kitchen clutter in the oven when company is coming.

So, again, I respect any choices you are going to make to protect and care for yourself today...because you are worthy of protection and care. In fact, I think

that has a great deal to do with what Jesus is saying today. Be gentle with yourself...because this is a hard thing.

To reclaim the gospel from the damaging way Jesus' words have been used I think we can look closely at this text in three ways. One, Jesus is *not* talking about some of the things we have been told he's talking about in these verses. Two, Jesus *is* talking about a number of things we haven't been told about because the church has not really listened. Three, we need to look at *who* Jesus is talking to (and who is talking to Jesus), because this makes a difference.

First – what is Jesus really saying or not saying? To understand this requires the intellectual labor of considering language *and* culture *and* history...which we only have time to address briefly if want to make it home for football games...or whatever else may be on your schedule today...

First, Jesus reaches deeper into the history of the Israelite people than the Mosaic law (which is already pretty deep history) to answer the question about divorce...which that law did permit under certain circumstances. On the surface, this can be read as Jesus imposing a stricter law, prohibiting it entirely...but upon closer examination, I am convinced that is not the point he is trying to make. The Mosaic law has inequalities baked into it...and Jesus' reinterpretation of Genesis can be seen as a radical leveling of the playing field and erasing hierarchy.

Men and women were actually both permitted to divorce a spouse in Moses' law...though, funnily, the Pharisees only mention men in their response to Jesus. However, adultery was *defined* completely by the marital status of women...because loopholes had been created for men to have multiple relationships...so the clearest definition of an adulterous relationship was one involving a married woman and someone who was not her husband.

So, first historical item of note: only married *women* being unfaithful had a clear legal precedent to count as adultery. Does that make sense? Are you with me? Cool, right? No. Not cool.

Jesus speaks from Genesis instead of the law of Moses. And here again...when the church has read this through our cultural lens without deep examination...we have done so much harm. Let me be very clear. Jesus *isn't* trying to create a definition of marriage here between one man and one woman, as is often said to marginalize our LGBTQ siblings. Sexual orientation is *not* on his radar in this moment. In fact, he is reaching back into the moments of our story before genders were even separated from each other. This deserves its own teaching time...because I can't possibly do it justice in just a few minutes...but I have to at least name the wrong-ness of our previous readings, because they have been so harmful.

Jesus is not bringing up Genesis to create narrow parameters for human relationships...but rather...because he wants to honor that before the woman and man were separated from each other...their identities were mingled together in the very first human that God created out of the earth, and enlivened with the very breath of God. Jesus is naming marriage as a return to the wholeness, the intermingled-ness, the original goodness and unity of the first bright moments of creation. Jesus is showing us how deeply marriage connects us, to demonstrate to the Pharisees how serious a thing it is when marriages are broken or treated lightly.

Jesus see these powerful people, these Pharisees, who like to rub elbows with other powerful people...like Herod and his wife...and who don't seem to care about those who are harmed by their power plays and sick games.

And Jesus wants to remind them of how we all began in the same garden. Before we started dividing people out and putting some higher than others, we were all siblings – made for equality and love and abundant life. And when some are vulnerable...when some people put others lower...God will always choose to be with the lowest ones.

This brings me to the last point: who is part of this conversation. The Pharisees have brought this question to Jesus as a *test*, as a *trick*. They are using broken human relationships and pain to set a trap for him. And I believe that this truly enrages Jesus. I think he is furious that they would be so callous.

Jesus is *not* speaking to people who have themselves been divorced or abused...If Jesus were talking to people who were suffering from broken relationships, he would not have had these same words for them.

When your heart is broken and your life is turned upside down...when your hopes and dreams fade into a fog...these words from Jesus today are not for you. They are for those who do not care about your pain...who don't care when God's original good creation has been torn apart....Jesus would offer to sit with you, to wrap an arm around you...He would cry when he saw your eyes welling up with tears. He would not and does not condemn you.

Even the disciples don't understand this yet, because they keep the children away...because they, too, are low enough not to be important. But, oh, they are important to Jesus. They, too, are vulnerable and dismissed...and honestly, after the painfully cold conversation with the Pharisees, I believe that there might have been nothing Jesus needed more than the sincere, wild, honest hug of a child.

Jesus went where he could come closest to the wild abandon of the profligate love of the God who looked over the freshness of all creation and sighed that it was "very good." And that is what he wants for each of us...to know in our bones our own goodness and the goodness of the God who made us and loves us.

That is what Jesus wants for you, and for all those who are not treated as God's good creation...and that is what Jesus offers us still.

May you know and trust in this good news.

So be it. Amen.