

SERMON

“HEALING FOR A BROKEN WORLD”

Preaching text: Mark 10:2-16

This is a first for me today! It’s nice to still have “firsts” even at 51 years old. This is the first time as a divorced man I have to preach on marriage and divorce. Just because I switched sides doesn’t mean my views have changed. The Bible’s views definitely haven’t changed. Today’s Bible reading deals with this.

Our reading for today is about marriage. It is also about the painful subject of divorce. Divorce is a painful reality that touches all of our lives in one way or another. I do think it’s important for us to know the answer to ... “What does the Bible really say about marriage and divorce?”

I remember growing up seeing reruns of programs like, “Leave it to Beaver” and “Father Knows Best.” Everything that was represented about the family unit seemed so innocent. Dad went out to work ... the kids treated their parents with respect ... and Mom dutifully kept the home fires burning. It all seemed so simple. I’m guessing the truth about family bliss wasn’t always as idyllic as they were portrayed on TV.

Well, things have changed. Technology has afforded us abilities that would have been unimaginable back then. And that is good. But with those advancements have come some costs. We are working longer hours ... there is more stress ... more meals away from home ... more disposable income ... and less free time to enjoy it.

Another significant change seems to be how the family unit has evolved. We now live in a world of single parent families ... blended families ... and kids who are more on their own. Divorce now affects 60% of the children in America before they turn 18. I imagine every person in this room has been touched by divorce in one way or another. Even if you were never personally divorced ... maybe it was your brother or sister ... your son or daughter ... or a close friend who was divorced. Maybe it was your parents. Maybe you grew up in a home where your parents stayed together but when in reality it would have been better for everyone if that marriage had ended.

Our Bible reading deals with marriage and divorce. For many, they read this and see no good news whatsoever. For those of us who are divorced it seems to convict us.

Throughout Christian history this passage has been used by people of faith ... pastors, priests, and popes ... to justify harsh treatment to those who have failed to maintain the permanency of their marriage vows. As we listen to this passage ... it seems as if even Jesus has joined the chorus of condemnation.

To understand this passage, it is important for us to understand the historical setting in the time of Jesus. The Pharisees raise the question of divorce ... and they wanted to talk about it in terms of the Law of Moses. The Jewish law permitted a man to divorce his wife rather easily. And because of that ... divorce was very prevalent. Here are some of the reasons a man could get a divorce:

- A man could divorce his wife if she spoiled dinner by burning it or using too much salt.
- A man could divorce his wife if she went out into public without her head covered.
- A man could divorce his wife if she spoke disrespectfully about her husband's parents.

For these ... and a number of other reasons ... ridiculous reasons ... a husband could divorce his wife by simply giving her, before a witness, a document which stated, "Let this be for thee thy writ of divorce and thy letter of dismissal." That was all!

A whole ridiculous system of laws came into existence. To show you how this worked, consider this. According to Pharisaic Law there were only 39 acts which were permissible to do on the Sabbath. One law involved the tying of knots. Only certain knots were allowed ... because tying knots was considered work. But there was a loophole: one permissible law was the tying of a woman's girdle. Now picture this. A man becomes thirsty on the Sabbath. He goes to the well to get a drink of water ... but he remembers the law about knots. Now he can't tie the rope onto the pail. But he thinks awhile and guess what he comes up with? Sure! He can take a woman's girdle to the pail and lower that. People

actually did things like that! They spent all their time looking for loopholes in the law.

So, in our Bible reading when Jesus is asked about divorce ... he doesn't start by condemning anyone. He goes back to the Book of Genesis and the Creation story. Jesus points to God's intention that "the 2 become 1." In their time of easy divorce ... Jesus wanted the Pharisees to understand what God intends for marriage. And in our time of easy divorce ... this is what God still intends for marriage ... that "the 2 become 1."

But what happens when we fail in marriage? Again, Jesus doesn't condemn. And that's good news, because we all fail in some area of life to live up to God's intentions for us. So, when a couple's marriage is broken ... we don't condemn them. We can hold up God's Easter promise of new life which gives them hope that they can move through this experience to new life and new possibilities.

There is no one here ... no matter how young or old you are ... how rich or poor ... whether you are single, married, divorced or widowed ... there is no one here or anywhere that is living beyond the boundaries of God's love. To love God is to try as faithfully as you can to live up to God's intentions for you. When you fail, confess your sins. God has already paid the price for your forgiveness.

There is good news in today's reading. Instead of being concerned with loopholes in the law ... let's celebrate the reality that there are no loopholes in God's love!

AMEN.