**DIVORCE** Oct 6, 2024 Mk 10-2-16

* Marriage in today’s society might be described by many as something “soft”, something intangible, and not valued highly.
* But those who take it seriously & stick it out through the good and the bad can

attest that it is, in the end, of enduring value.

* They can attest that it is a great blessing from God – one of the greatest blessings that He had given humanity.
* If marriage is such a blessing, you certainly wouldn’t know it by looking at our society where over 50% of all marriages end up in divorce.
* Something has gone terribly wrong, and continues to get worse.
* It has been said, & I happen to agree very strongly, that marriage represents the core values of civilization.
* And when the institution of marriage crumbles, our entire civilization will crumble with it.
* Think for a moment about our Old Testament reading from Job
* It is of course about Job’s affliction and

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suffering

* Don’t believe those putting the lectionary together intended to associate affliction & suffering with marriage.
* But I do believe there is a strong model here that can relate to marriage & that model is ***perseverance***.
* Just as job persevered through the bad times & did not curse God, I believe it speaks to how we are called to persevere through the rocky times that all marriages experience.
* Today, there are numerous things that are attacking the institution of marriage.
* One, that has caused a great deal of division & confusion in our church is spoken off in today’s gospel reading.
* Basically, it’s the question: “***is divorce ok***?”
* Down side preaching from the Revised Common Lectionary is that we sometimes are forced to deal with some very uncomfortable topics.
* Such as the whole subject of human sexuality – one that many wish would

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go away.

* The more divisive issues in our Christian walk are ones that we might like to pretend aren’t there, but they are.
* Rather than dismiss or deny such uncomfortable topics, I believe we need to face them.
* Even when we may feel uncomfortable talking about a particular subject or issue, it is when we talk about them that we are able to grow and to honestly seek what God’s will may be.
* The whole subject of divorce is one that has caused a great deal of division & confusion in the church.
* Yet many people who sit in our church pews have experienced the pain of divorce.
* Because pastors basically want to be people pleasers, they/we might have a tendency to tell people only what they want to hear.
* Usually a cost to speak truth, but I believe there is a much greater cost to not speak truth.
* Because there may be people who

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because of divorce, are living in denial, guilt or even shame.

* And the only thing that can release them from this is truth and God’s forgiveness and healing grace.
* Not looking down at a person who has had a divorce.
* While not something I had to deal with, it’s only by the grace of God that I didn’t.
* There was a time when my marriage was in serious trouble
* Actually, I never spend a lot of time thinking about people who had been divorced.
* Until one day a very good friend of mine, a priest who had been divorced and was going remarry, asked me to do the service.
* I did not give an immediate answer and I struggled a great deal before I could answer him.
* In my struggle I realized that the answer is not the black & white response that some people would suggest it is.
* Many absolutes in Bible, but

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concerning divorce, even Jesus highlighted a discrepancy by asking “***What did Moses command you?***”

* Response was that Moses permitted divorce.
* But now we have Jesus’ words saying that that was wrong & **not** according to God’s plan.
* But also V. important that we know the context of Jesus’ words we have just read concerning divorce & remarriage.
* Context is very important when reading the Bible
* Context here is that Jesus is responding to the Pharisees
* 1st keep in mind that whenever we read in the gospels about the times when the Pharisees & Jesus were having a conversation, the Pharisees are never asking Jesus a question in order to learn what he thought about a subject.
* When Pharisees come to Jesus to pose a question to Him, they are always trying to trip Him up – to trap Him – to get something they can use against Him.
* Another imp factor in the context of

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this encounter between Jesus & the Pharisees is that it happened in Judea which was in the direct jurisdiction of king Herod Antipas.

* Divorce & remarriage was both a very hot as well as a political topic when it came to king Herod.
* Remember John the Baptist (cousin of Jesus). King Herod had John imprisoned & executed because of this subject.
* Herod had been married to a daughter of a Nabatean king (a political alliance.)
* But Herod decided that he wanted to marry another woman named Herodias, who just happened to be his sister-in-law. (married to Herod’s own brother Phillip)
* So Herodias divorced Philip & Herod divorced his wife and Herodias & Herod got married.
* John the Baptist criticized Herod very vocally for this situation (marrying his sister-in-law), saying it dishonored God.
* That criticism made Herod even more

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unpopular with the people, and resulted in Herod arresting John to shut him up and eventually having him beheaded.

* So when the Pharisees asked Jesus: “***Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?***” this wasn’t just an innocent question that the Pharisees were asking Jesus about marriage.
* Rather it was the Pharisees attempting to light a fuse to a political powder keg.
* The underlying question was: “***Was it lawful for Herod to divorce his wife?***”
* This was the trap they were attempting to catch Jesus in.
* Jesus’ response in verses 11 & 12; “***Anyone who divorces his wife & marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband & marries another man, she commits adultery.***”
* This is a response that is referring specifically to King Herod’s & Herodias’s situation.
* I think it is V. important to know the background & context to this passage of Scripture before we make hard fast

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judgements on this subject.

* Still, however, does not mean that we can dismiss Jesus’ words as just referring to a specific situation.
* There should be no attempt to justify.
* The more important response and the truth of Scripture is when Jesus referred to the truth of God’s creation as found in Genesis: “***But at the beginning of creation, God made them male & female. For this reason a man will leave his father & mother & be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So, they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate***.” (Mk 10:6-9)
* This is God’s plan & Jesus makes it very clear that divorce & remarriage were **not** part of God’s plan.
* We are called by God to uphold and strive for the Biblical understanding of the marriage covenant.
* It is a special relationship, unlike any other earthly relationships.
* It is meant to be such an intimate & loving relationship where a couple

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realizes the fullness of God’s blessing as they express who they are as male & female – created in the image of God.

* This marriage relationship shouldn’t be entered into lightly nor dissolved on a whim. In fact, Jesus says that ideally it should last until death.
* That is God’s plan for marriage & divorce was not part of God’s plan.
* In saying this, I need to highlight another concern.
* There is a tension within marriage where we are called to persevere through the tough times, and this is true, but this never means that we should remain in an abusive relationship.
* The tension is that we are also called to be good stewards of our own bodies –created in the image of God & as Christians we are the temple of the HS.
* Also, by leaving an abusive relationship – that may be the motivation for the abusive partner to seek help – **or not.**

Should never remain in an abusive relationship.

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* In Malachi 2:16 we read: “***I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel.***”
* Divorce destroys relationships & even lives.
* Anyone who has experienced a divorce can attest to the pain & destruction – whether a husband, a wife, or even moreso children who have suffered the consequences of a divorce.
* Greg’s story (in working with kids in youth ministry (Mtl) & seeing the impact & pain in children from broken homes, and then having cancer himself at age 19 – said he would take cancer any day over the pain associated with having parents divorced)
* “***I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel.***”
* So indeed God does hate divorce, but He does NOT hate divorced people.
* Reality is that we are all broken people & we live in a broken world – that was not part of God’s plan, just as divorce was not part of His plan.
* God’s answer to our broken world was to send Jesus, because He wants to redeem His people from their brokenness.
* So divorce is another part of our brokenness – it is where we have

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missed the mark & fallen short of God’s plan.

* Just like any other area of our sinful lives where we have fallen short of God’s plan.
* So, in divorce we must begin by first admitting that we have fallen short of God’s plan for us.
* We confess our own shortcomings & mistakes & ask for God’s forgiveness.
* That way the devil can not get a hold on us through guilt or shame.
* While hard work & perseverance can change the image of marriage from a “soft” intangible thing that has little value in our society to a wonderful blessing from God.
* The fact is that we must ***always, always*** remember that our God is a God of second chances & we can always start all over again with Him.
* I remind you of the story in John’s gospel about the woman brought to Jesus by the Pharisees and the teachers of the law because she was caught in adultery.
* Jesus said to them: “***If any one of you***

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***is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her***.” (Jn 8:7)

* And when the crowd, one by one, all walked away, Jesus asked the woman: “***Has no one condemned you? No one sir she said. Then: neither do I condemn you.***” Jesus declared (Jn 8:10-11)
* It is never too late for God to salvage our lives.