

27 Ord, Sunday B
Genesis 2:18-24; Hebrews 2:9-11; Mark 10:2-16
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Notre Dame Church (Michigan City, IN)
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The story is told of an elderly man who called his son in New York just a week before Christmas. He said, “Son, your mother and I have been married for 40 years. I’m calling to tell you that we’ve decided to get a divorce.”

The son was aghast. He said, “Dad, that’s terrible! Don’t you and Mom do a thing until I’ve had a chance to come and talk to you. I’ll be on the next plane to Phoenix!”

When he hung up, the son called his sister in Chicago. He said, “Sis, Dad just called. He told me that he and Mom are getting a divorce.”

His sister said, “Like heck they are! I’ll meet you in Phoenix, and we’ll talk some sense into them.”

She hung up and immediately telephoned her father. She said, “Dad, Jack just told me you and Mom have decided to get a divorce. Don’t you do a thing until I’ve had a chance to talk with you. I’ll be on the next plane to Phoenix.”

After they hung up, the father turned to his wife, and said: “Honey, good news! Both kids are going to be home for Christmas—and they’re paying their own way!”

For those who have suffered a real divorce, or are presently separating, or contemplating divorce, the words of Jesus in today’s gospel can be painful. That’s why we have to be clear about the context of this episode. For the last few weeks, the gospels have shown Jesus reaching out to those with troubles. A deaf man with a speech impediment was brought to him, and Jesus said, “Be opened”; the man’s hearing and speech were restored. When Peter declared Jesus to be the Christ, Jesus declared that the Christ would suffer greatly and be rejected and killed. In other words, Jesus would himself enter into the human reality of pain. Last Sunday, Jesus rejoiced that even those who were not his followers were driving out demons in his name. And he used the example of a child—the most helpless and

unprotected person in his time—as the epitome of those who enter into the kingdom of God.

The Pharisees were always seeking ways to show that Jesus was soft on the law. As the passage says, “They were testing him.” In fact, there was no law against divorce in Judaism. The question was what circumstances would justify it. For men, it could be as trivial as a burned supper! Women had no such right.

Jesus evades answering the Pharisee’s question by quoting God’s intentions as laid out in the book of Genesis. God created man and woman to be one flesh. Humans are made in the image of God. All relationships have this goal. They are to reflect communion of life and love. That is the goal.

Divorce is a tearing apart of togetherness. It is a rending of all things built to keep a family comfortable and safe. It is the destruction of together-dreams, forever-dreams, family-dreams, love-dreams. You cannot leave a marriage without doing violence to all those things, no matter how amicable or necessary the divorce. The divorced and separated know this better than anyone else.

But the ideal of marriage must be lived in the context of Jesus’ compassion and care. As Jesus said in the Gospel of John, “The Son of man has not come to condemn the world, but to save it.” Jesus comes as a comforter, a healer, a helper. Those who have gone through the pain of divorce should not regard themselves as failures either in marriage or in faith.

Despite the romantic image of children as angels and innocents, we know that that is not entirely true. They can be fidgety and restless, noisy and demanding, needy and troublesome, unruly and undisciplined. That’s why the apostles wanted to keep the children away from Jesus. But Jesus welcomed them despite all of this.

So also, Jesus welcomes and blesses us. Despite our mistakes and shortcomings, our sins and failures. Jesus loves us. Although we fall short of our goals and ideals, Jesus does not judge us. He invites us to himself, no matter what, unconditionally. And with Jesus at our side, we can never despair.