



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Deep Dive: Divorce

Week 10: Matthew chapters 19 and 20

Talking to the Kids
Families are not always the same. Some families have one Mom and one Dad. Some families have a Mom, a Step-Mom, a Dad, and a Step-Dad. Some families have only one Mom or one Dad. Some families have two Moms or two Dads. And there are many more combinations of what families can look like.

God wants a family to be complete and safe. God wants families to be a place where love is experienced and no one is left out. Families where there is always fighting or always anger or always someone being harmed do not fit God's picture of family.

So, God has a way for families that are not healthy to stop and for families to find new ways of being complete and healthy.

So if your friend's family doesn't look exactly like your family, that is okay, as long as it looks like God's picture - complete, healthy, and where love is fully experienced.

- The opening passage of Matthew 19 deals with the question of divorce. This is a sensitive subject for many. For some, it is sensitive because they see this as a scriptural injunction against divorce, and some may even say "I do not believe in divorce," even if it means staying in a harmful relationship. For others, it is sensitive because they are divorced - and being divorced comes with a label that carries certain societal and cultural shame. And for others still, it is sensitive because they are divorced and remarried and have found a love they think this passage just cannot possibly understand. So, let's take a moment and deal with this sensitive passage and try to honor what the gospel writer is doing, and navigate our various sensitivities.
- For a long time our culture really hammered this passage as a prohibition against divorce for any reason, except infidelity, as cited by Jesus. Churches and church leaders would counsel couples, even couples dealing with physical abuse, that divorce was worse than staying married to an abusive partner. Gradually the taboo against divorce has waned, and the need to be safe against an abuser has become more important. So the focus of this passage has shifted.
- In our recent cultural wars over faith and politics, this passage is often cited as a reason against two people of the same sex getting married .. after all, Jesus quotes Genesis 2 "at the beginning, God made them male and female" ... etc.
- What we really need to do is step out of our cultural wars over faith and politics. This passage isn't about divorce, this isn't about who can get married. This is about how the law of God is going to be interpreted. Are we going to interpret the law of God in a way that people continue to be harmed, or are we going to interpret the law of God so they find the freedom that comes with God's Kingdom.
- Our ancient ancestors of faith, those living at Jesus' time, wrestled with this as well. Marriages then were done not out of love, but out of uniting families, creating financial stability, advancing family lines. The women were property of their fathers until a financial arrangement was reached that the woman became the financial property of the husband. And some husbands were really terrible, and would abandon their wives if they were not "good-enough", or didn't produce the right children, or even lesser reasons. So yes, Jesus acknowledges Moses' law contains provisions for divorce -- because we people mess up our relationships really badly.
- What Matthew wants us to hear from Jesus is that there is an image of fidelity and love in marriage that transcends the patriarchy of his own day, that transcends the "well, you said it, so you are stuck together no matter what" mentality of our own day, that transcends even our understanding of gender and gender identity today. We are called to find this ideal, and live into this ideal. When it is broken, we need a way out, we need a way to step away from the broken, and find something new and healthy. The Kingdom of God is about creating this healthy space for us in a partnership that is holy and filled with love.

Gathered by God, we live our faith with: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy