

### **Sermon - Pentecost 19 - Mark 10:2-16**

I have to be honest. This is one of my least favorite texts to preach on. Usually, I try to preach on one of the other Lectionary texts for the day. Why is that you may ask? The Pharisees and Jesus talk about the one thing that was the hardest thing I have ever had to go through: divorce. It happened when I was serving a parish also, which added a whole other layer to the difficult time. But enough of me.

The gospel of Mark tells us a story of Jesus once again being tested by the Pharisees. The Pharisees when asking Jesus, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” were not really interested in preserving marriage. They knew the answer. Moses allowed a man to divorce his wife simply by writing a certificate and giving it to his wife.” Women when divorced were put in a vulnerable position. They lost most of their rights (like the right to own property). She could easily be found begging for food on the street or prostituting herself for income.

Jesus had great concern for women. His response to the Pharisees was forthright and probably did not endear him to them. “Because of your hardness of heart [Moses] wrote this commandment for you.”

From the beginning of creation, God created male and female equal. From the dust of the ground man was created and woman from the flesh of man, not as a by-product or to show dependency, but to make them equal companions.

God made them male and female so that two shall become one flesh. They are no longer two but one flesh. To this day we hear in the wedding ritual the words, “Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate.”

There are two major differences between the Pharisees and Jesus. The Pharisees are concerned about the law and Jesus is concerned about people.

After they entered the house the disciples wanted more clarity from Jesus. Jesus believed both male and female make

their own choices. His argument was if a man or woman left their spouse for another they were committing adultery. Although it is not said I believe Jesus understood quite clearly the pain a broken marriage can cause. He wasn't concerned so much about the remarriage as much as the bonds of marriage that when broken does not just affect husband and wife but children too.

For many centuries, the Christian church had either upheld Mark's absolute prohibition of divorce or permitted Matthew's allowance of divorce in the case of adultery as the one exception (Matt 19.9). Since the gospel of Mark focuses entirely on the character of the kingdom Jesus was bent on establishing, his ethics concerning divorce in that kingdom were an ideal and not intended as a normative policy for either civil or ecclesiastical practice. In other words, the writer was talking about marriage in the context of the kingdom of God, not that of the present age.

The only way we can relate to Jesus' teaching on divorce in Mark's gospel is to say that it fails to do justice to the lived reality

of modern day human beings, who often choose their partners with all the limitations implicit in being young, limitations that fail to recognize serious potential conflicts resulting from character flaws, personality changes, the impact of economic and social stresses, cultural differences, and or the development of bad habits that sometimes lead to other things like addiction.

I would ask the question how is it that Zion welcomes those who might feel marginalized because of their marital status, their economic status, race or any other characteristic? How are we welcoming? How are we living as agents of the kingdom of God. Like the children who are invited to sit on Jesus lap, everyone is invited by Jesus to get close to him. Everyone is.

Jesus wants us to know that as children of God we all live by grace. We are all loved. By the mercy of Jesus Christ we are set free. Amen.