

Gospel: Mark 10:2-16

Glory to You, O Lord

2Some Pharisees came, and to test [Jesus] they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” 3He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” 4They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” 5But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. 6But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ 7‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 8and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

10Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; 12and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

13People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. 14But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 15Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” 16And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to You, O Christ

Gracious and Beloved Creator, Savior and One who makes us Holy, you created us to be in relationship with you and with each other and we cannot do this without the help of your Spirit. You, however, do not cast us away from your Spirit, but instead draw us close, heal our wounds and lift up our hearts to yours. Draw us close and make us whole again. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

These words in the Gospel are hard to hear without allowing our minds to go to all the powerful ways these words have been used to beat people up in the shame and blame game of divorce and broken relationships. We have had some hard texts last week and this week. For someone who

doesn't get to preach every week like I did when I was in the Parish, I hit the bonanza of texts preachers like to avoid. Last week it was the hyperbolic phrases of cutting off our hands and feet and plucking out our eyeballs to avoid going into hell. That I got to preach with the good people of St. James Lutheran Church in Brunswick, GA and this text on divorce I get to preach with you, the good people of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Maryville, TN and all of you good people who are watching this Synod Sermon. We survived and learned a few things last week and I trust we will survive and learn a few things today as we open ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit to be fed and nourished on Word and Sacrament today, which is World Communion Sunday.

This text is less about beating up people who have gone through marital separation or divorce and more about healing relationships that have gone asunder; those who suffer when this happens and ultimately our relationship with the Three in One who will never leave us for any reason.

We were created to be in relationship, to have companions to share this journey we call life. In the Genesis passage that is chosen for this week we witness God trying to come up with a fitting partner for the first human *ha Adam* because after the "it is good's" of Genesis 1, God names that it is NOT GOOD for humankind to be alone. Numerous animals were created to be a partner; animals of the field and birds of the air but none were the perfect pair for the first human. Relationship, companionship, family comes in many different forms; I've got many friends who prefer animal companionship over most complicated human relationships and I've often said that it is not a coincidence that God and Dog share the same letters . . . but I digress.

As we read the Gospel for this morning, immediately we see that the Pharisees are testing Jesus again. This time it is about marriage and divorce; trying to trap him into saying something they can hold against him. When they bring up Moses, Jesus responds that Moses did that because the Israelites hardened hearts demanded a loophole to get out of an inconvenient partnership for something better. God wants better for us and points out that what God has joined, let no one separate. The Divine intent for humans is to be in relationship meets the human failing of not being able to do this well because we want to do it ourselves. In the Garden of Eden, that first relationship, not between Adam and Eve, the first couple, but between God and humanity suffers alienation, estrangement and pain

because humanity strayed from obedience to do it our way. The first sin was our foolishness in disobeying what God asked us to do for our own good and our resulting shame in thinking God was casting us away. We left the garden, yes, but God never left us. On this World Communion Sunday we celebrate our unity in Christ. Started in 1936 by the Presbyterians, it was adopted by the Federal Council of Churches, the predecessor body of the National Council of Churches. The idea of Christian Unity reminds us that it is not only other churches we are connected to but we have an indestructible connection to God. This unity of Christian Churches finds primary expression through social justice; advocating for those who cannot advocate for themselves. In ancient times, according to Scripture, a man could give his wife a certificate of divorce if he found something about her that he didn't like. A woman who had been divorced, especially if she had children, had no rights and little opportunity to care for herself or her children. Jesus was indignant when he saw the disciples trying to prevent parents from bringing their children to Jesus for a blessing. Who are the most likely to be hurt when a marriage relationship deteriorates? The children suffer the most.

We are actually interconnected with all of creation. We can't do something that doesn't also affect someone or something else. We are not self-made but totally dependent upon God and each other for life. God's building block for society is the family - but family has many different ways of being and it is not intended to be characterized by male supremacy and female and child inferiority and dependence. It is primarily intended to provide companionship, partnership and mutual support. As the family of God, the relationship/communion is between God and humanity. Next, we are in relationship or Communion with others we share a life and a home with and finally, we are in relationship/communion with our global neighbors.

This companionship and our relationships have been challenged deeply by the isolation of a pandemic which has had dreadful consequences of depression, fear, hopelessness and violence against self and other. The highly politicized environment we live in further alienates us from family, loved ones, neighbors and fellow inhabitants on this planet. This divorce is less about human sexual relationships and much more about the breakdown in the relationship between God and humankind resulting from unfaithfulness on the human side.

- **What has driven us apart from God?**

- **How do we build a bridge to a healthy relationship with God?**
- **What can we do to fix broken relationships in our homes, in our churches, in our communities?**

Our benchmark for healthy relationship is the Trinity. God the Father or Parent, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit abide together in mutual love and partnership; each invested in the other; each leaning on and supporting the other; each loving the other.

The Trinity is the perfect paradigm for healthy family relationships and healthy church relationships as well as healthy relationships with our neighbors whether they are next door or across the world. It starts with our relationship with God and moves outward from there. It is less about power and more about partnership and appreciation for the gifts of the other. Selfish individualism and greed get in the way of healthy relationship but God keeps calling us back. God keeps forgiving us and setting us back on the path to healthy abiding with God and each other. God keeps reminding us to watch out for the marginalized, the powerless and the lonely. Our distractions, whether that be work or social media or infidelity break the relationship by isolating us from each other. Sometimes that isolation comes from sources we didn't see coming. In those instances, we need to be hyper-vigilant at home and in the world that those who are outside are welcomed in, those who are lonely or imprisoned are visited and those who are ill and need healing, receive it.

God is the mover and lover and change agent in the world around us, the only one who loves all and encourages us to love each other and who heals us from our broken relationships and brings reconciliation. In Holy Communion we are forgiven and brought back into community with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We cannot do it alone. God knows this and God intervenes through the peacemakers and the prayers and the forgiven, every time we repent and return to the fold. God is on the margins bringing in those who have been forgotten. God heals us of our isms; racism, ageism, sexism, ableism and anything else that separates and isolates us from divine and human contact and compassion

We are healed through the grace and mercy of God and we are reconciled with God and each other to be in right relationship. Amen and Alleluia!