

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

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October 3, 2021

Mark 10:2-16

The gospel lesson for today contains “that passage about divorce,” which has been interpreted by some churches to mean that Christians are not allowed to get a divorce, or at least, if they do get a divorce, then they are not allowed to get married again.

First of all, I want to acknowledge that divorce hurts. Even when it’s our idea. Even when we think it is the most healthy step forward, it still hurts. And I am sorry that it hurts. God feels the hurt too.

Some churches interpret this passage to mean that we are never allowed to get a divorce or that you can’t marry after a divorce. I suppose that is a legitimate interpretation, if you want to interpret the Bible as a rule book. But if you do that, then you have to interpret all the other passages as a rule book too. So for example in next week’s gospel lesson, a man asks Jesus what he must do to gain eternal life. Jesus him man that he has to sell all he has and give it to the poor, then come, follow Jesus. In the fourteenth chapter of Luke, Jesus says to everyone, you cannot become his disciple if you don’t give up all your possessions.

If you are going to interpret today’s gospel lesson using the Bible as a rule book, then you have to interpret that passage about possessions as a rule book too. You can’t pick and choose what is convenient for you and what isn’t.

I do not interpret today’s gospel lesson in that way, I disagree with such interpretations. The ELCA also disagrees. We honor the fact that there are rules in the Bible, but the primary purpose of the Bible is not as a rule book. It is Scripture, the Word of God. Its purpose is to show us who God is, who we are, and who Jesus is. From this perspective, we allow marriage after a divorce for a couple of reasons.

First, we understand that we are all sinners, we are fallen and broken and sometimes divorce is the least bad option. It's like war. It's not good but sometimes it is necessary. We believe in the grace of God, in new creation and new life, so we allow people to get married even if they have been divorced.

The second answer is longer. Look at the context of Jesus's statement. Nobody in this passage is coming up to Jesus and saying, "Jesus, I genuinely want to know what the right thing to do is. I trust you, I want to obey you. Can you tell us?"

No. Nobody in this passage is doing that. What are they doing? The Pharisees are asking Jesus about divorce in order to get him killed. You may remember that the ruler of that region, Herod Antipas cut John the Baptist's head off for criticizing him over a divorce. John the Baptist had criticized Herodias for divorcing her husband and marrying him, for political purposes, for money and status and power. Not for love or joy or honor. So Herod throws John the Baptist in jail and Herodias manipulates the court into killing him.

If Jesus comes out strongly against divorce, Herod might have him killed too.

This has been going on since chapter three of Mark. In chapter three, Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, and the pharisees are furious. Jesus has shown that they do not control the healing of God. They thought they had the power or authority to define who God is and how God works and Jesus has shown them that they don't. They are furious. It says, from that point on they seek a way to destroy him.

There is no genuine desire for guidance here. This is a petty, mean spirited, vindictive, hateful manipulation of the word of God for purposes of power and control and death.

And how does Jesus respond? Jesus responds by referring to a story of life. He refers to Genesis chapter 2 which we read in our Hebrew Scripture for today. A few months ago, I went to some lengths to show how this story of the creation of Eve shows Eve and all women to be of the same dignity, the same value, the same authority, the same importance as men. Indeed, Eve is portrayed in a profoundly human way.

Today, I want to show you how funny this story is. For example, all through Genesis chapter 1, God in magisterial grandeur has been speaking the world into existence. God says, “let there be light,” and God saw that the light was good.

God makes the dry land and the seas and sees that it is good.

God puts plants on the land and puts the sun and moon in the sky and sees that it is good. God fills the ocean with wonderful creatures and the air with birds and God sees that it is good.

God makes animals and it is good.

God makes human beings in God’s own image. In God’s image God creates them, male and female God creates them, and God saw that it is very good.

Suddenly in Genesis chapter two, God says, “Oh, this is not good.”

So God says, “It’s good, it’s good, it’s good, it’s good. Oh, it’s not good.”

God says, “It is not good that the human being should be alone.”

God wants us to have community, connection, life.

So God forms from the ground all kinds of animals to be a companion to the human being thing. God makes elephants and armadillos and giraffes and kangaroos and alpacas and pandas, and none of them are quite right. Got close with a dog or a cat. But none of them have the zing.

So God decides to try a different way. See how God can try new things? God puts the human being to sleep and from the human being God forms a woman.

Then the man says, “Wow she is really great. She is smart and nice and she has a great sense of humor.”

This, of course, is a patriarchal text. That means it was written in a time and place when men did most of the talking and women didn’t get to say much, so we don’t get to hear what Eve says about Adam.

Maybe she said, “Hmm, needs a haircut.” Or maybe, “Let’s see what he looks like in a suit.” Or maybe she says, “Wow, look at that hunk o’ man. Let me at him!”

Don’t know what she says. But we do know God’s intention. God’s intention is laughter. God’s purpose is joy.

That’s why we let people get married even if they have been divorced. Rather, God’s intention is laughter and God’s purpose is joy.

Marriage is not always easy. It can take a lot of work. You have to listen to someone else who is different from you. You have to respect someone else who might disagree with you. You have to say “I’m sorry” sometimes, and you have to forgive sometimes. It can be hard work. But it can also be really funny. And sometimes you get to see God, there in that holy space between you and that other person, who lives in a different world, and who loves you.

Thanks be to God.