

Mark 10:2-16

When the Pharisees came to Jesus now, they were looking for ways to trip him up because he was becoming more popular than they were, and they were losing their power over the people. They decided to try this time with something they knew was no longer the way God had ordained it to be, that of the covenant of marriage. Jesus could get into some really hot water over this one. They posed a question of the law. "Is it lawful..." thinking they could get Jesus to say something to convict him on. But as usual, Jesus knew what they were doing and turned it around.

Jesus said that God wants us to keep the covenant of marriage intact, but we, as sinful humans, can not always follow what God asks of us. We have hardened our hearts. What's very interesting about the time of Jesus is that a man could have more than one wife; there was no need for a man to divorce his wife to marry another woman. And if that woman was a bother to him he could simply keep her away from him. Or, he could write up a certificate of dismissal and send her away. Penniless. Unable to work for a living, unlikely to find another man who would marry her.

Our society has gotten to the place where divorce is taken for granted. Women are able to take care of themselves. They can remarry if they so desire. If two people decide they can't live together any longer they get a divorce. If one is abusing the other, they should get a divorce. The question is, "What is more loving?"

Now let's face it, if there is a divorce in your past is just that... past. What is important is your present life. Are you working to build the best relationships you can have?

In the gospel lesson from today the disciples want to know more. Jesus is talking privately with his disciples when makes the statement, "if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." This would have completely confused the disciples of Jesus time because women could not get a divorce, only men could get a divorce. Jesus is bringing up a justice issue with them.

Then we hear about the little children the disciples are turning away. Children were nothing, children were not important, yet people were bringing the children to Jesus. The disciples, thinking of them as unimportant try turning them away. Jesus says, no, I love these little children bring them to me. Again, it was a justice issue. Jesus was standing up for those who are less important to society. Jesus is standing up for the women and children in this passage. He's standing up for those who are vulnerable.

Not only is Jesus standing up for the children, but he's also pointing out that they have not had their hearts hardened by the world. They are willing to open themselves to what Jesus brings to the world: the kingdom of God.

Jesus came to bring the kingdom of God to us. He was not distant; he was right here on earth with us. He wasn't silent, he spoke to us. He spoke the truth. Hebrews tells us that the one who sanctifies us (Jesus) and those who are sanctified (each of us) all have one Father.

Jesus says he will proclaim our name among his brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation he will praise us. Jesus knows our name.

Take a little journey in your mind. Picture a field of grass. Maybe there is a gentle breeze blowing, the sun is shining. You walk into this field and ahead of you turning around to greet you is Jesus. He calls you by name. He takes your hand and you walk together. As you walk you talk about life, about anything at all. You allow Jesus to get to know you better as you get to know him. As you separate at the end of the field you feel the love flowing from him, knowing you will never be alone, that Jesus will always be with you.

This man who is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, is your companion. He's come to make you more productive. In John 15:8 Jesus tells us, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciple." My disciple. The one who cares for the widow and children. The one who cares for the vulnerable. Hebrews 13:1-5 tells us we are to have mutual love, give hospitality to strangers, concern for prisoners, be faithful in marriage and a life free from the love of money. That's asking a lot in this day and age. How can we open up our door to someone who might tie us up, or worse, and take our stuff to sell for drug money? It's a vile and vicious world we live in. It was in Jesus' day too.

Yet we cannot let ourselves be stressed by this... we are going to be most productive when we're calm, knowing our solution comes from God. Listening to God's direction... We aren't going to bear much fruit if we are feeling stressed or guilty or just not enough...

Jesus came to bless us, to save us, not to condemn us. Jesus came to make us just uncomfortable enough that we want to find a way to make life easier for those who are on the fringes. Maybe its by giving food to the food bank, maybe its making friends with a stranger and introducing them to Jesus. We are blessed to be a blessing.

The difference is that Jesus loves us and cares for us just as he showed loving care to the women and children of his time. He calls us brother and sisters and wants to walk with us and talk with us and tell us we are his own. He wants us to grow in relationship with him by working on building that relationship. Just like a good marriage takes work, it doesn't just happen.

The good news is that Jesus loves us just as we are but he loves us too much to leave us this way. Like any good friendship, relationship, or marriage, we have to make our relationship with Jesus a priority. It has to be more important than our favorite sports team. It has to be more important than being on the boat. It has to be more important than sleeping in. We need to have a desire to grow closer to Jesus. The writer of Hebrews tells us we have been placed under the care of Jesus the Christ who in these last days is the expression of God.

All glory be to God.