

**Mark 10:2-16** – “God Unites, Sin Divides”

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In our OT reading we heard how God made the first woman from the rib or side of man. She was a part of man’s own flesh and blood. Two separate beings created by God to live not separately but united, as one; taking care of each other as God in Christ takes care of us, His body or family—the Church.

From the beginning God has worked to unite and keep us united to Him and to one another through the power of His love. God’s uniting love is a gift, but as with any gift, once it’s given, it can be rejected even if its given by God. Not long after God breathed His life and love into Adam and Eve, they fell prey to the lie that God didn’t love them and want what was best for them. Was their any proof of that? None whatsoever. But the moment they began to believe that foundation-less lie is the moment they separated themselves from the foundation of their lives—God. In their minds they were now on their own and had to fend for themselves—to do what they believed was best, even if it was contrary to what God told them was best (like eating the forbidden fruit), because they no longer trusted God.

This rejection of God not only separated or divorced Adam and Eve from God but also from one another. This became obvious when Adam blamed Eve for his sin. When God asked Adam, “*Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?*” Adam said “*The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.*”

In an attempt to dodge the bullet of God’s judgement, Adam held up Eve. Instead of being willing to sacrifice himself for Eve, Adam sacrificed Eve to try and save himself. From then on, Adam and Eve, and all their children (which includes you and and me) have struggled to love each other as God intended—to put the needs of others before ourselves.

This becomes obvious in our Gospel reading which begins with a discussion about divorce. Divorce was not a part of God’s original plan for man, just as it’s rarely a part of any couples plan when they marry. But because of our sinful nature, which causes us to think more about ourselves than others, it’s not uncommon in a marriage for one or the other to divorce or separate themselves from their spouse by their words or actions. Anyone who’s married knows how often this happens in little ways throughout their marriage, long before any legal action may take place. That’s why I tell couples planning to get married that marriage is a laboratory or testing ground of repentance and forgiveness. Repentance and forgiveness is the work of God in our lives, which keeps us united to God and each other.

In an attempt to help manage some of the damage caused by divorce, God established a civil law during the days of Moses. Such divorce laws certainly do not condone divorce any more than laws which deal with cases of rape condone rape. But, neither do such laws get rid of the sinful, self-centered desires in our hearts. Such laws do, however, help to show us our need for a Savior to not only help us deal with the fallout of our sins and the sins of others, but to deliver us from all sin and its effects.

Our text may seem to leave us hanging on a bunch of laws when it comes to the topic of divorce. Where’s the Gospel that saves us from hanging or death and brings us back into joyful union with God and one another?

The Gospel comes in the last paragraph of our text, which focuses on those who were “*bringing children to [Jesus] that He might touch them.*” After expressing His displeasure with the disciples’ attempt to separate the children from Him, Jesus said: “*Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.*”

Then Jesus showed them how a little child, who is also born in sin and in need of salvation; how sinners, young and old, are received back into union with God. “[Jesus] took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands on them.”

In our fallen condition we, like Adam and Eve and those children, are helpless until God reaches down to bless us. He lays His hand on us through His Word and the waters of Holy Baptism to bless us—to save us. He can do that because He has already taken the bullet for us, in payment for our sins, through His death on a cross. He who is first made Himself last by sacrificing everything, even His very life, in order to save us. Through Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection God assures us of His love by doing all in His power to reunite us with Him and with each other. The marriage of Christ and His body or family, the Church.

This is the way God gets us back, through His sacrificial love for us, which in turn enables us to truly love one another. Listen to these words from Chrysostom (a 4th century pastor) who comments on Ephesians 5(21-33), which speaks of husbands and wives submitting to one another in love. He speaks first to the husband, but the same is true for the wife. “If you take the premise that your wife should submit to you, as the Church submits to Christ, then you should also take the same kind of careful, sacrificial thought for her that Christ takes for the church...Even if you must undergo countless struggles on her behalf and have all kinds of things to endure and suffer, you must not refuse. Even if you suffer all this [even death], you have still not done as much as Christ has for the church. For you are married when you act this way, whereas Christ [was] acting for [people] who... rejected and hated Him. So just as [Christ], when [people were] rejecting, hating, spurning and nagging Him, brought them to trust Him by His great [love]... so must you also act toward your wife. Even if you see her looking down on you, nagging and despising you, you [may] be able to win her over with your great love and affection for her [and visa versa].

Such love, which loves the other person even when they are not loving us, is not only difficult for us selfish, sinful people, it’s impossible! Why does our Lord tell us to do something that’s impossible? To help us recognize our need for help outside of ourselves. What we need the most is forgiveness for all the ways we have (and no doubt will) fail to love God first and foremost in our lives and to love our neighbor (including and especially our spouse) as ourselves. Fortunately that’s why our Lord is here today, through His Word and Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, to assure us of His love and forgiveness. Our Savior, Jesus Christ’s, undying love and forgiveness is what enables us to turn our focus away from thinking only about how our spouse and others can best love us, to thinking about how we can best love our spouse and others. “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 Jn 4:19).

How often will we need God’s merciful love and forgiveness? Daily, to say the least. Thankfully the Lord promises through His Word and Sacraments to give us all the love, forgiveness and help we need, and as often as we need it, so that we will be able to continue forgiving and loving each other forever and ever. Amen.

[Children’s sermon] This morning I’m going to talk about our kneelers. Not all of our members are able to use the kneelers because when they kneel down they have a hard time getting up again. But you young people don’t tend to have that problem. So I want you to gently take down the kneelers, and kneel down on them.

One of the reasons we may kneel in church during the confession of our sins, prayer, and when we receive the Lord’s Supper is to remind ourselves that because of our sins, we cannot stand upright before God and live. When we kneel, bow or hang our heads/hearts before God, we are saying that we know that we deserve His judgement of death because of our sins.

But because of Jesus death on the cross to pay for our sins, we also know how much God loves us and wants us not to die and be separated from Him but to be with Him and the rest of the family of God forever.

So, what does God tell us when we repent, or tell God that we’re sorry for our sins? “*I forgive you.*” We are forgiven because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, all because He loves us. As a result of God’s forgiveness, instead of walking through this life on our knees, God raises us up so that we can share His love with others.

All Glory be to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.