

Sermon  
10/7/2018

**Sermon on Mark 10:2–16**  
**Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, October 7, 2018**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Gospel lesson begins with a lengthy account of Jesus teaching on the subject of marriage, divorce, and adultery. It all began when the Pharisees came to Jesus to test him, so as to trip him up and try to make him say something wrong or ridiculous, so that they might have a reason to prosecute him, jail him, or better yet, kill him.

So it is to this day that the true church and true Christians, like Jesus, are always under the gun. And the false church and false Christians and the devil who animates them are always trying to trip us up and extinguish the pure preaching of the word.

They will use any issue or doctrine to do so; currently a popular issue to trip the true Christian up is homosexuality, or transgenderism, things that the bible clearly calls sin, even an abomination. But sin that can be repented of and forgiven.

So the world and false church will always seek to trip us up but they will never succeed, not ultimately. And this is the joy that we have here at Our Savior's where the pure word is taught. Here you find the true church and God's approval. Here is where we hear and cling to the promises of the Gospel and the forgiveness of sins that Christ won for us on the cross. So should the world and the false church take our property, even our life, they cannot take away our Christ and His word from our hearts. Hallelujah.

Now the subject that the Pharisees used to try to trip Jesus up was the subject of divorce. A contentious issue to this day. Jesus matter-of-fact response to them was to bring them back to Scripture, the Bible, using the phrase, "*What did Moses say?*" Moses, after all, wrote the first five books of the Bible: Genesis through Deuteronomy.

The fact is Moses did allow for a man to divorce his wife. The problem was that the Pharisees, as do we to this day, take the exceptions and the caveats and the special conditions and turn them into the rule itself. So it is that some rabbis eventually taught that a man could divorce his wife if she burnt his toast. And today you can get a divorce for the simple reason that you cannot get along—irreconcilable differences—Good grief!

Friends, we have an utter crisis not just in society but in the church itself with divorce and adultery. It is nothing short of appalling. And we pastors have to pick up the slack and preach God's word on the matter.

God forgive us Lutheran pastors for failing to teach the sanctity of marriage and the great blessing of bringing children into this world who can be baptized and raised in the faith. Jesus taught the sanctity of marriage and the blessing of children, so should we pastors, if we wish to be faithful.

And you too, ought to consider and hear Jesus' teaching on marriage and the blessing of children and take it to heart. God will not tolerate neglect and abuse of the sixth commandment, "*You shall not commit adultery.*" What does this mean, "We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do and husband and wife love and honor each other"

And sin in this regard is not just outward, but includes lust and unfaithfulness in the heart. Repent of it now, and be forgiven in Christ's name. We Christians want to be faithful husbands and wives and fathers and mothers; and we also want to be chaste single people too, they are a great blessing to the church as well!

Now, let's be careful to understand Jesus' words in our text. Jesus recognized that there is such a thing as a legitimate divorce but indicates that it is nevertheless the result of gross sin and "*hardness of heart*" as he says in our text. So it is that in God's eyes there is no such thing as an amicable divorce; divorce is always a great tragedy with much sin involved.

So, the question remains what makes for a legitimate divorce? For this we must turn to Matthew's Gospel, and his account of our Mark ten text this morning. And in this text Jesus taught that sexual immorality, adultery, is the only biblical and legitimate grounds for divorce.

But pastor, we can't stand each other and are ready to kill each other, what should we do? Then separate for a time and cool off and try to reconcile. But pastor, I'm going to get lonely, can't I just marry this other person? No, you can't, or at least you shouldn't lest you commit a grave sin. Bear your cross and suffer with nobleness. In heaven you will be free, for there is no marriage in heaven except that between Christ and the church. Hallelujah.

Notice in our text how Jesus taught the sacredness of marriage to the Pharisees, and he is teaching us this today: marriage is sacred, instituted by God himself in the beginning of creation.

And when husband and wife are joined together in marriage, whether done by a pastor, or a justice of the peace, or an imam, or whoever, it is actually God who has brought them together. And Jesus gives a solemn warning about the sacredness of marriage, *"What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."*

So God expects all people on earth to take marriage seriously, and we should, as our catechism again reads in the sixth commandment, "fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life [or chaste life as the old version states] in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other"

Now following this text on marriage and divorce. Mark leads the reader to the fascinating account of Jesus welcoming children and blessing them. And we are left with the impression that Jesus is so serious about the sanctity of marriage because it means children are produced and nurtured and can come to Jesus to be blessed by him.

In other words, God hates divorce because it interrupts the birth of children, their nurturing by loving parents, and their coming to Christ to be saved.

This does not mean that children of divorcees cannot be saved, not at all. Divorcees themselves can be saved through repentance and faith like everybody else. The samaritan woman at the well in John chapter four was a five-time loser in marriage, but who repented of her sin and was saved.

But the fact remains that divorce messes with God's design for marriage to produce godly offspring. The prophet Malachi preached this very same thing to the Jews when they returned to Palestine. God hates divorce, because he wants godly offspring; that is he wants children who are brought to the blessing of baptism and who are nurtured in the faith.

Now let's take a closer look at the second part of our text where Jesus welcomes the children.

*"And they were bringing children to him that Jesus might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, '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.' And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them."*

So what do we have we learned so far. God instituted marriage between male and female, it should not be severed; also, God desires godly offspring; and finally with this last portion of our Gospel text, God loves children, he wants them to be saved and nurtured in the Christian faith.

Mark and Matthew, who both record this account, do not reveal why the disciples were rebuking the parents for bringing their children to Jesus. My guess is that the disciples thought Jesus was too important and busy to deal with such immature people, crying and sniffing little children.

This sort of thing happens to this day in Evangelical churches that hold children's church during the main service. The whole concept is to get the

immature, disruptive little kids out of the way for the more important people, the adults.

But there are all sorts of problems with this. It really is a denial of the gifts of salvation to the most helpless and needy among us

Praise be to God that Jesus rebuked the disciples and welcomed the children, because Jesus' invitation to the children teaches us about his great love and compassion for the insignificant, the small, the helpless, the needy – and we are all needy!

This text is one of the reasons why we baptize infants, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as them.

And so it was that most of you were brought to the waters of Holy Baptism as an infant, maybe sniffling, maybe crying, maybe sleeping. And at the font, because of the powerful and efficacious word of God that is combined with the water, the pastor said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." So it is that it became a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit as we confess in the catechism.

Infant baptism is wonderful, it is how children are brought to the faith and become acceptable to God. And God's baptismal promise extends to all of you as older people who presently rejoice in the fact that "*All who believe and are baptized shall be saved*"

Notice, too, that Jesus presented the children to the disciples as a model to imitate when he said, "*Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.*"

Indeed, Jesus wants us to imitate children too. But in what sense though? We should not model their selfishness and self-centeredness, certainly not. But we can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, model their unquestioning trustfulness and acceptance of the things of God.

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You tell a small child that God created Adam and Eve and the whole world with his powerful word—and they believe it! You teach a small child that we should be good and follow the Ten Commandments—and they believe you, and they try, they fail a lot but with encouragement they try!

You tell a small child that we are all sinners and deserve God's wrath but that Jesus died for us—and they believe it and rejoice! God grant us all faith to be childlike in our trust of Him, and to cast aside our adult-like rejections of God and his word.

Okay, so let's sum things up once again.

God created marriage for male and female at the beginning of creation; this marriage bond should not be broken through divorce; God instituted marriage for the generation of offspring who would be brought to the Christian faith and nurtured in it; and, in fact, a child's unquestioning trustfulness in Christ and the Gospel is a model for us all.

God grant that we learn this lesson well.

The peace of God that transcends all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.