

20th Sunday after Pentecost Mark 10:2–16

Mark 10:2-16

Gospel: Mark 10: 2-16.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, Mark 10:2-16

2 Some Pharisees came to Him and asked Him, in order to test Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

3 He answered them by asking, “What has Moses commanded you?”

4 They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce, and divorce her.”

5 Jesus told them, “It was because your hearts were hard that he wrote this Commandment for you.

6 However, at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ 7 ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.’

Therefore they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore, no person should separate what God has joined together!”

10 When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. 11 He answered them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 If a wife divorces her husband and marries another man, she also commits adultery.”

13 People were bringing little children to Jesus that He might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 However, when Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He told them, “Allow the little children to come to Me and stop forbidding them! For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child does will certainly not enter it.”

16 He took the children in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,
Peace be with you.

We may think that the discussion of the nature of marriage is something new, but today’s Gospel demonstrates that there was controversy about marriage clear back in the first century. In this case, the Pharisees came to Jesus with a question about divorce. Jesus responded with an answer that not only speaks to divorce, but also gives a definition of marriage that speaks to the controversies concerning marriage in Australia and indeed the World today.

By this time in His ministry, the high members of society have kept an eye on Jesus for a while, and they have decided that they really don’t like Him. They have made it their business to embarrass Him in every way possible. In today’s Gospel, the Pharisees come forward with a test that they hope will challenge Jesus and make Him look bad. This is one of many tests that they present to Jesus and all of them have failed to harm Jesus’ standing in the community. As we just heard, Jesus turned the tables on the Pharisees and it’s them who come away in embarrassment.

So the Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, **2 Some Pharisees came to Him and asked Him, in order to test Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”**

3 He answered them by asking, “What has Moses commanded you?” Jesus told them to check God’s word. This is good advice. We should always check God’s Word in order to see what God says on any topic. If God put the information in His Word, we ought to listen to what He said.

The Pharisees then referenced a section of Deuteronomy. They said, **“Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce, and divorce her.”** While the Pharisees have quoted Moses correctly in so far as they went, they left out a lot of the context that Moses included in the text. The actual guideline for divorce begins with the words, **“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house.”** (Deuteronomy 24:1) Even

this limited context shows that the man must find some indecency in the woman. By quoting the passage out of context, the Pharisees give the impression that they can throw their wife out onto the street by simply publishing a certificate of divorce. The context of the passage shows that the husband must show that his wife is guilty of some indecency before he can throw her out. In other words, she must be guilty of a crime against the marriage.

Jesus elaborated further on the cause for this guideline about divorce. Then He referred to the creation of marriage that we ourselves heard from today's Old Testament reading. **Jesus told them, "It was because your hearts were hard that he wrote this Commandment for you. 6 However, at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 7 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.' Therefore they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore, no person should separate what God has joined together!"**

Jesus was saying that because of the sinful nature that we have from birth, husbands and wives will sin against each other. It's because of this sin that divorce happens. So divorce is already evil. The guidelines for divorce that Moses gave did not excuse people from the sin of divorce. They were guidelines so that the evil of a divorce did not become something even worse.

Then Jesus turned to the beginning where God created marriage even before the fall into sin. Notice that Jesus quoted and affirmed the account of the creation of marriage as Moses recorded it in Genesis. In Genesis 1, we read: **So God created man in His own image. He created them in God's image. He created them male and female.** [Genesis 1:27.] Then in the more detailed review of creation in Genesis 2 we read: **Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother. He will be united with his wife, and they will become one flesh.** [Genesis 2:24.] Note that this account in Genesis says male and female. It also says man, not men, and wife, not wives. There is one male, one female, one man, one wife. According to the Genesis account, marriage is the one flesh union of this one, male man and this one, female wife. It's this Genesis account of the creation of marriage that Jesus affirmed and upheld in the reading from today's Gospel.

From this Genesis account, Jesus then taught the conclusion: **"...and the two will become one flesh.' Therefore they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore, no person should separate what God has joined together!"** Note that Jesus says that it is two who become one flesh, not three or more, but two. Note also that Jesus says that it is God who has made this union and therefore only God can separate it. That means that if Adam and Eve had not sinned and died, they would still be married today.

From this reading and the parallel readings in the other Gospel accounts, it's very clear that Jesus teaches that marriage is the one flesh union of one and only male and one and only one female. There is no male-male or female-female. There is no polygamy, polyamory, [Polyamory, the practice of engaging in multiple sexual relationships with the consent of all the people involved.] or any other arrangement involving more than two people. Finally, this is a union that only God can terminate and therefore remains in effect until death breaks the union. People who say that Jesus has nothing to say in the current marriage debate are committing blasphemy. And the fact that they get away with it demonstrates our culture's breath-taking Biblical ignorance.

Jesus' teaching concerning marriage presents us with some real challenges in our day and age. Most of us know people who have endured the pain of divorce. Most of us know people who have had multiple sexual partners. Most of us know people who are dealing with same-sex attraction. And when we remember that Jesus taught and said, **"I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart,"** [Matthew 5:28.] we must realize that no one can live up to this marriage standard that Jesus established in today's Gospel. Once again, we must agree that **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.** [Romans 3:23.]

So where can we go or what can we do for relief from the condemnation of this impossible standard? The fact of the matter is that there is nothing that we can do. There is nowhere that we can go. Once again, we see that we stand condemned before God.

However, although there is nothing we can do, there is something that God has already done. The Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write that **God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.** [Ephesians 1:4.] We see the symbolism of this in the very way that God created Eve. **The LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and, while the man was sleeping, He took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 Then the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man.** [Genesis 2:21–22.] God created a bride for Adam from a wound in his side.

Here, although Adam and Eve had not yet sinned, God was already providing an image that pointed forward to the manner in which He would provide a bride for His only begotten Son. **After Jesus bowed his head and gave up His spirit,** [John 19:30,] **one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.** [John 19:34.] **The Son of God took on human flesh and humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.** [Philippians 2:8.] In this way, He earned forgiveness for all our sins including the sins we have committed against the estate of marriage.

Among the many errors that have slipped into the marriage debate is that the Bible somehow has a greater condemnation for sins against marriage. So often, the people who struggle with sins related to marriage have come to believe that the Bible, or at least the church, considers these sins to have a greater damning power than all the other sins condemned by the Bible ... that the sin against marriage might be the unforgivable sin. That's so sad. For the forgiveness that Jesus earned with His suffering and death on the cross is there for **all** sins. The church is for people who struggle with their sins and repent of them and look to Jesus on the cross for forgiveness. The church is not for people who are without sin for the Bible is clear. **If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** [1 John 1:8–9.]

Christ has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven in order to prepare a place for His bride, the church. On the Last Day, He will return and raise all the dead in both body and soul. Those who believe in Him will join Him in the place He has prepared. Among the people who will be there will be people who sinned against marriage and received the forgiveness that Jesus earned for them on the cross ... people like King David who had an affair with the wife of the most loyal soldier in his army ... people like Samson who had an affair with Delilah ... people like King Solomon and the patriarchs, Abraham and Jacob, who had multiple wives ... people like St. Augustine who lived on the wild side until the Holy Spirit brought him into the family of God. The history of the church is full of people who sinned against marriage and received the forgiveness that Jesus earned for them. Jesus said, **“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”** [Mark 2:17.] He came also to redeem those who sin against marriage. **Amen**

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
Amen

Prayer of the Church 20th Sunday after Pentecost

P Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.
Brief silence

P For the Christian Church, that as Christ's true Bride created from His wounded side, she may be a fit helper for Him by faithfully proclaiming His great salvation to a lost world, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For our Pastors, that they may ever pay close attention to the Lord's Word as attested to us by the apostles; and that by holding it sacred and gladly hearing and learning it, we may be kept from drifting away, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For our Church workers with thanksgiving for the good work God has done for the Gospel's sake through them, that He would be pleased to bless their present and future labours for His Church, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For the Holy Spirit's work in us, that He may lead us ever deeper into the repentant life, that we may live in the truth of our Baptism, resting daily in our Father's grace that we may walk in His ways, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For those who wrestle with their sins, that they may not despair of Christ's grace, but in the midst of their weakness they may hope in His surpassing power to save them in His righteousness, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For our nation, that we may be granted devout and faithful rulers so that we may enjoy good government in God's peace, and so that the Gospel may not be bound in our land but be freely preached to the blessing of all, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For husbands and wives, that they may serve one another as Christ has served them; for struggling couples, that Christ's forgiving love may help them to grow in love for each other; and for those who have separated what God had joined together, that in repentance and faith they may know and live in Christ's forgiveness, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For children, for Christ said, **“Permit the little children to come to Me and stop hindering them! For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”** and that the children and Catechumens learn to respect God's Word and the parents that God has given them to bring them to Christ' Church. let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For the sick and suffering [_____] that the Lord in His mercy would sustain them in faith in their trials, and that He would grant them healing in accord with His good and gracious will, let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P For Your invitation, that we joyfully gather around the banquet table of Your Son Jesus to feast on His life-giving body and blood. Grant us the sure confidence of sins forgiven and fellowship restored within the body of Your Son, the Church. let us pray to the Lord:

C Lord, have mercy.

P Into Your hands, dear Father, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.