

SERMON  
Time after Pentecost – Lectionary 27  
October 4, 2009

Genesis 2:18-24

Psalm 8

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Mark 10:2-16

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen.

As I read over today's reading from Mark's Gospel I had two distinct reactions. The first part of the reading left me unsettled. I felt like saying; "No Jesus, you can't mean that; those words are just too strong. Where is your compassion and forgiveness?"

The second part of the reading left me wanting to scream; "Yeah, Jesus, you tell um! This is the Lord that I want to follow."

I wondered how I could have two such opposing emotions in such a short read. Is there a common theme here? Is Jesus being fair? Perhaps it is my own life experiences that have determined my reactions? Maybe some of you feel the same way?

Of course the first part of the story has Jesus addressing the issue of divorce and remarriage. This is like the big elephant in the living room that no one wants to talk about. I wonder how many artists have painted pictures of this scene in the Bible?

The second part of the story has Jesus welcoming the children. It kind of gives you warm fuzzies all over. There is no shortage of artist's renditions of this scene.

Sometimes I use the Internet to find ideas and commentaries for preaching. One web site features sermons that have been submitted by various pastors throughout the world.

When I referenced the scripture reading where Jesus talks about divorce and remarriage, there were 3 sermons submitted. When I referenced the following passage regarding Jesus welcoming children, there were 28 sermons submitted. There is one word I would like to say to those 28 pastors: “CHICKEN!”

As a church that follows the lectionary readings, we are forced to deal with the tough issues. We are challenged to dig deep into what Jesus says, even if it might offend us. We ask the question; “Where is the good news here?” Well, let’s take a look.

Over 50 percent of marriages in the United States end up in divorce. Some countries have a higher rate. In Belarus, 68 percent of all marriages fail. But some countries are remarkably lower. The divorce rate in Greece is 15 percent; in Spain, it’s 13 percent; and in Uzbekistan, the rate of divorce is only 5 percent.

I would guess that all of us here today have been affected in one way or another by the tragedy of divorce. Some of you are currently divorced. Some of you have been divorced and are now remarried. Some of you have parents who are divorced.

Others have friends or other family members who are divorced. Perhaps some of you know someone who is currently going through a divorce.

Your stories are no doubt numerous. They are also no doubt painful. There is no way around it. Divorce is painful.

In our first reading this morning from the book of Genesis, we heard the words; “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

I remember when I was a teenager, a new product came out on the market called “Super Glue”. This stuff was awesome. It could make anything stick together.

It was also quite dangerous. Remember the dares? “I dare you to put some on your fingers and stick them together.” This is the kind of thing you might say to your little sister.

But those who tried it soon found out that this was no childhood prank. This was serious business. For when you pulled your fingers apart, you lost some skin on both fingers. And it hurt like crazy!

I believe that this is what God is talking about when he says that husband and wife shall become one flesh. Because to tear apart flesh, is painful. Once the two are united together, there is no easy way to part.

Therefore, we can conclude that God knows that divorce is not good. It is painful for everyone involved. But again, this is not some new revelation. This is something that we all know. I would guess that none of us who are married recited our vows expecting to someday get divorced. None of us anticipate that pain of a broken relationship.

But, let’s face it. There are times when we break our promises. We are sinful creatures, and no matter how hard we try – no matter how good our intentions are, we mess up. We do not do what we say we will do.

This is not breaking news to God. God has known this from the beginning of creation. Adam and Eve broke their promises right from the start.

Even so, Our God is faithful in spite of our promise-breaking. Whether it be worshipers of a golden calf, an adulterous King David, disciples who flee or deny, or a church that is more faithful to a consumer culture than to the purposes of Jesus. For our God is a God of love and forgiveness.

However, let's address these words of Jesus head on. Jesus tells his disciples; "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

Most of us would like to just forget about these words of Jesus since it affects so many of us. Like I mentioned last week in my sermon, I always find it interesting how we pick and choose what we want to believe from the Bible. Basically, if it agrees with our point of view, our experience, our lifestyle, then it must be true. If not, we don't want to talk about it.

I think that what we must understand here is that Jesus was not establishing another form of legalism. He fought his entire life arguing against turning faith into a bunch of rules and regulations. We are in grave error if we turn Jesus into a new form of Pharisee with an updated form of the Law.

Some time ago, I received an e-mail about a letter which was sent to Dr. Laura Schlessinger. Dr. Laura is a Jewish psychologist who has numerous nationally syndicated radio shows. Perhaps some of you have heard her, or have read the letter.

The letter to Dr. Laura reads as follows:

"Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's law. I have learned a great deal from you, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate.

However, I do need some advice from you regarding some of the specific laws and how to best follow them.

When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord as stated in Leviticus 1:9. The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. How should I deal with this?

I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as it suggests in Exodus 21:7. However, in this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness as it says in Leviticus 15:19-24. The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

Leviticus 25:44 states that I may buy slaves from the nations that are around us. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans but not Canadians. Can you clarify.

I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?

A friend of mine feels that eating shellfish is an abomination to God as stated in Leviticus 10:10. So if I eat a plate of shrimp scampi, is that as bad as having an adulterous affair?

Leviticus 20:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

The question is; If we live by the law, where do we draw the line? And how do we determine what applies to us in this day and age? So am I saying that God doesn't care what we do? Absolutely not!

What I am saying is that the law will ultimately drive us to despair. There is no way we can be everything that God wants us to be. There is no way that we can fulfill the law.

Therefore God came to earth in the form of his Son. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law so that we might be reunited with the one who created us.

In our reading today, Jesus is not giving us another set of laws – a list of inflexible codes that we must follow. If anything, throughout Scripture, Jesus redefines the law. “It has been told to you, but now I say to you.” You see, Jesus is addressing the issue of “hardness of heart”.

The laws were given because the people had turned away from God. Their hearts were hard. But with the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, there is no need for laws of how to live. For in Christ the love of God has been written on our hearts.

So you see, by treating marriage as grounded in God’s creative love, Jesus removes it from the realm of law.

In this story, Jesus is showing compassion for the lowest and weakest in the culture he was a part of. For in his day, women and children were considered to be mere property that you could do anything you want with.

About the time of Moses, the status of women had dropped from the ideal of an equal partner with man. They had little or no value. They could be cast aside for something as minor as burning the breakfast toast.

What Jesus is saying is that no more can women be divorced – left to a life of prostitution or begging. No more can children be cast aside as worthless. Again, we see Jesus on the side of those who have no voice – those who are marginalized in society.

Before I close, I want to make something very clear. God created marriage and calls us to be faithful to our promises. God knows how painful and tragic broken relationships can be. But God is also forgiving and compassionate. And for that, we can all be thankful. Amen.

May the peace that passes all understanding be with you now and for life everlasting.  
Amen.

## CHILDREN'S SERMON

Today I want to talk about (PRETEND TO SNEEZE) If no one says anything, ask what people sometimes say when someone sneezes. People often say "God bless you" when someone sneezes.

What do you think that means? What is a blessing? That's a hard word, isn't it?

A blessing is wishing good things for someone, or asking God to help someone or give them good things. So, when you sneeze and people say; "God bless you," they want God to be with you and be good to you. Isn't that great!

I certainly want God to be with me and to be good to me, don't you?

In the Bible, blessings were an important part of daily life. Powerful or important people usually were the ones who received the blessings.

In our Bible story today, Jesus gave a special blessing. But this time he didn't bless powerful or important grown-ups. This time he chose to bless children like you. Their moms and dads had brought them to Jesus for blessing and he was glad.

Wouldn't it have been great to have Jesus give you a blessing!

Did you know that you are already blessed? You are blessed whenever you feel God's love and are thankful.

So you see, every time we come to worship, we receive God's blessing. So as you go back to your seats, how about if I give you a blessing that God's people have been giving each other for thousands of years.

“May the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.” Amen.

Let us pray.....Lord, you brought little children to you and blessed them. Continue to bless us all so that we may be a blessing to others. Amen.