

## **Breaking Up is Hard To Do**

Mark 10:2-16 (NRSV)

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Virginia Beach, VA

Time after Pentecost

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The Holy Gospel according to Saint Mark, the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter:

<sup>2</sup> Some Pharisees came, and to test [Jesus] they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" <sup>3</sup> He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" <sup>4</sup> They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." <sup>5</sup> But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. <sup>6</sup> But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' <sup>7</sup> 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, <sup>8</sup> and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. <sup>9</sup> Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." <sup>10</sup> Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. <sup>11</sup> He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; <sup>12</sup> and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." <sup>13</sup> People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. <sup>14</sup> But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. <sup>15</sup> Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." <sup>16</sup> And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

The Gospel of our Lord

Let's start with a story:

An elderly pastor was searching his closet for his collar before church one Sunday morning. In the back of the closet, he found a small box containing 3 eggs and 100 \$1 bills. He called his wife into the closet to ask her about the box and its contents.

Embarrassed, she admitted having hidden the box for their entire 25 years of marriage. Disappointed and hurt, the pastor asked her, "WHY?" The wife replied that she hadn't wanted to hurt his feelings. He asked her how the box could have hurt his feelings. She said that every time during their marriage that he delivered a poor sermon, she had placed an egg in the box. The pastor felt that 3 poor sermons in 25 years was certainly nothing to feel bad about, so he asked her what the \$100 was for. She replied, "Each time I got a dozen eggs, I sold them to the neighbors for \$1. I guess they lived in the country."

What does that have to do with this message? Well, it's about marriage, which we're discussing today. The Pharisees were at it again. This time they were trying trap Jesus with another loaded question. Did Jesus know the law? Of course, Jesus knew the law (He's the Son of God!), but more importantly Jesus *understood* the law in its truest sense. Essentially the law said a man could divorce his wife for whatever reason—with a note. But, Jesus pounced on that interpretation because it was so inhumane and unequal. He redefines the law undergirding the sanctity of marriage and the rights (and responsibilities) of both people. The society in the Gospel was a patriarchal society. But even so, Jesus' point was that marriage is sacred. It is not something to be just entered into lightly or thrown away at our pleasure, by either person. And even more fundamental a principle, the one that marriage is based upon, is God's plan for humans to be in community. Being connected to others is fundamental to

creation. This fundamental principle is why Jesus is so high on marriage and so hard on divorce.

Let's look at our reading from Genesis 2. In this part of the first creation story God has culminated much of the *separation* of things in creation (sky/sea, night/day, flying things/animals on land) with saying that humans should *not* be separate, human beings should have a helper or a partner. And then, this is where it gets funny. Let's imagine the situation here. Use your holy sense of humor. The man needed a partner so God was like, "I'll start working with the play dough here (the soil), give these things life, and when I get to something you like you say *stop*." What ended up happening (and remember use your holy sense of humor) was a parade of animals passing by the man with God saying, "Hey, how about this one? How about that one...pretty cute huh? Wink...wink. You can just picture the guy saying, "Well, not to be rude God, I mean the cow, llama, and guinea pig aren't

*bad*...the kangaroo is much better, but they're still not *exactly* what I'm looking for." Obviously, those animals didn't cut it.

Finally, God created a partner by taking a rib from the man and creating a partner that is bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh: woman. And she was *exactly* what the man was looking for.

"Yeah God, you finally got it!"

So what does this story mean for us? It means that we were created to *not* be alone, from the beginning of time. Now, this doesn't necessarily mean marriage. Many people feel called to singleness. Paul in the New Testament is a great example of this.

But, we have to acknowledge that God created humans to be in community. Like cogs in a wheel, we need each other. We are interdependent on one another in life and faith. We see evidence of this Truth throughout Scripture. Paul speaks of this as being the Body of Christ in Romans 12, verse 5: "so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of

another.” And in 1 Corinthians 12, verse 12 Paul writes, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

And so anything that harms that community, anything that harms the Body of Christ, is bad for people because it hurts people.

Anything that hurts the bond created in marriage then is inherently bad because it hurts people.

That is the tragedy of divorce; it hurts people. That’s why Jesus was so against it. We all know someone who has gone through, is going through, or is struggling with whether to get a divorce. We have seen what it does to people. It tears people apart, from each other, from their children, from their families and friends.

Divorce is existentially painful. And here’s the odd thing, because it is so painful the Church doesn’t end up talking about it. What’s up with that? But then again, it’s understandable. What if

someone's feelings are hurt? What if someone is embarrassed?  
What if someone feels judged, guilty, or uncomfortable? All true.  
So, the Church chooses to never talk about it because we don't  
want to appear as judgmental, uncaring, etc. So, then what do we  
do? We pretend divorce doesn't exist. How terrible is that?  
People are really hurting and the church is silent about it.

BUT, what if we faced reality and acknowledged the hurt and  
*actually* helped people? We could *actually* be a safe place where  
people *could* share their struggles with one another. If a couple is  
having a tough time in marriage the Church could offer assistance,  
prayer, and solidarity. Pastors could counsel couples and do  
everything we could to reconcile any problems that exist. A  
couple doesn't need to feel like they are on their own with help  
only from secular therapists and lawyers. The Church could *be*  
*there (should be there)*, reminding them of Christ walking with  
them.

The Church is compassion. We are a compassionate people. It's not that we hope to be compassionate people or we want to be compassionate people or even that we *try* to be compassionate people. Because *Christ* lives in us, then *we are* compassionate people. He was compassionate therefore as his people *we are* too.

In Matthew 9 we read: "When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

And in Matthew 20, verse 34 we read: "Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him."

In Luke 7, verse 13: "When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, 'Do not weep.'"

And in Philippians 2, verses 1-4 we read:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each

of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

So, since community and compassion are at the heart of who we are, what would it look like to support those folks who experience divorce...or *any* tragedy in life? What would it look like? We could make this place a safe place where there is no judgment and condemnation. Because this is a safe place then we could be *real* about *all* the tragedies in our lives, including divorce. We could ask folks how they are doing and they could be honest about it. It seems so simple: create an environment where we can all be real with one another, no judgment. Then, simply ask how people are doing and listen and ask how we could be there for them.. Wow, how great would that be? And think about what a difference that would make.

In a society where greater than 50% of married households end up in divorce, it is time for us to be caring, supporting, and

compassionate to people in their times of need, to give them guidance during the hard times so they know there are not alone, and to know that maybe there are other options including the possibility of reconciliation in Christ. We can do all this if we're a community that doesn't judge. We can be the incarnate presence of Jesus Christ that walks with people through their darkest valleys. People do not have to wear masks here. All are welcome here and all are welcome to be themselves here. All are part of this community where we *are* the Body of Christ.

As Paul says in Romans, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame" (Rom 10:11 NRS). There is no shame in Christ Jesus.

There is no shame for anyone in this place.

Thanks be to God.

Amen