

October 3, 2021
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Mark 10:2-16

GOD DOES NOT GIVE UP

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

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Mark, the 10th chapter which you heard read earlier.

Pharisees came to Jesus with a question hoping to trap Him in His words. It was not their first attempt to trap Him, (cf: Mark 8:11) and it would not be the last. (cf: Mark 12:15) And what better place to set a trap than within the seemingly private matter of marriage and divorce. They asked:

“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” (Mark 10:2)

It seems like a straightforward question, but it was a difficult subject. At that time there were two different schools of rabbinical thought on how to interpret God’s word on divorce as recorded in Deuteronomy 24:1. The conservative interpretation was a literal understanding of God’s Word. It stated that a man could ***only release*** his wife from their marriage if he found something ***indecent*** in her, such as adultery or immorality. The more liberal interpretation stated the husband could release his wife for ***any reason***, even if she burned her husband’s food or found a better-looking woman. (cf: The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel, Lenski, 414)

The Pharisees think they have Jesus caught in the perfect trap. If He agrees with the liberal interpretation, they can accuse Him of loose morals and not following God’s command given in the Garden of Eden and the Ten Commandments. And if He agrees with the conservative interpretation, they can accuse Him of not following the commands of Moses as recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. But as Jesus often does, instead of answering their question directly, He asks them a question in return, saying:

“What did Moses command you?” ⁴ ***They said, ‘Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.’***” (Mark 10:3–4)

What they thought was a failsafe and deadly steel trap to spring on Jesus – Jesus in turn, springs upon them, saying:

“Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.” (Mark 10:5)

Jesus does not beat around the bush. He cuts to the heart of the matter. He is saying that divorce is not about the divorce certificate but a matter of the heart. The commandment that Moses gave was never the way that marriage was supposed to be treated from the beginning. Just like today,

there were lots of folks who refused to submit to God's Law, folks who had hardened their hearts toward God and hardened their hearts toward their spouse, and many times those hardened hearts want things their own way, like getting rid of their spouse and taking another. And what made it worse was that Rabbis couldn't agree on an interpretation of Deuteronomy 24 where it says that if a man takes a wife and finds some indecency in her, he can write her a certificate of divorce and send her out of his house. With the certificate of divorce, she can become another man's wife – but – if he also divorces her or dies – she cannot go back to her first husband. That would be an abomination before the Lord. (cf: Deuteronomy 24:1–4)

In those days, many marriages were social and legal contracts between two families that would benefit both families in property – and – with children who could work and care for the property. When Moses gave his commandment regarding the certificate of divorce, he gave it as part of the civil law, not the moral Law. But was not an approval of obvious sin. It was nothing more than a concession to provide a legal form for dissolving marriage to keeping order in the community and protect Israelite women and children from being traded back and forth for financial gain. But in the hands of a legalist, the same protective law became a license for divorce.

Much like you and me, the Pharisees were always looking for loopholes... lawful ways to get around God's original intent when He laid the foundations of the world. You look for lawful ways to do whatever you want to do, whenever you want to do it, even though it goes against God's commands. There is only one God – and you're not Him. But in your selfish quest to be God, you divorce yourselves from your Creator and all that He has joined you with: spouse, your family, and your brothers and sisters in Christ's Church.

Like the Pharisees, you ask the question: *"Is it lawful?"* It's really the same question that the devil asked Eve in the Garden before the fall: *"Did God actually say?"* *"Did God actually say* is always the devil's first question before he makes his bald-faced lies that directly contradicts God's Word. His tactics don't change. He first plants his seed of doubt and then deceives you into unbelief with his lies. Just look around the world at all the broken marriages, broken families, broken children, and broken churches. Perhaps you don't physically commit the sin, but how many times have you stood quietly by, giving approval to those who have? (cf: Romans 1:32) There are situations where we've all said, *"In this case, divorce only makes sense. Jesus will certainly understand."* Or: *"Splitting up the children – or – the congregation is in the best interest of everyone. Jesus will forgive."*

God's Word is clear on His plan for the human family. He designed it and He instituted it. It belongs to Him, so mankind doesn't get to redefine marriage and family however he wishes. Jesus validates Old Testament testimony saying that marriage was instituted in the Garden of Eden. (cf: Genesis 2:18-25) It wasn't Adam's idea. It was God's creation and His gift to mankind. Woman was built out of man's rib to be his help-mate, to do those things that the man could not do – like growing and birthing babies – an also so man would not be alone. Jesus says:

***"... from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'* ⁷
'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ⁸
and the two shall become one flesh.' ⁹ *So they are no longer two but one flesh.* ⁹
What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (Mark 10:6–9)**

This is the will of God. One man. One woman. Joined together as one. Until death parts them. God joins them, and then, if and whenever He wills, He might bless the couple with the gift of new life to grow His Church as mom and dad bring the children up in the love and admonition of the Lord. (cf: Ephesians 6:4) The Psalmist writes:

"³ Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. ⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. ⁵ Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!" (Psalm 127:3–5)

It wasn't long after God created marriage and family that it came under attack by sinful humans who fell for Satan's deception and lies. Scripture is filled with stories of family fights, murder, and bloodshed. There's unfaithfulness, concubines, polygamy, and child sacrifice – all going against God's Law. But as:

"⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, ... the word of our God will stand forever." (Isaiah 40:8)

Jesus doesn't view marriage the way we do. His Law has no loopholes and or revisions. His instituted estate of marriage is Holy – and with the exception of adultery – all divorce is a grievous sin. (cf: Matthew 5:32; 1 Corinthians 7:12–14). **But**, so are every other form of immorality, idolatry, unrighteousness, drunkenness, and greed. (cf: 1 Corinthians 6:9–10) So, before you point your finger at someone who has divorced, examine yourself. Maybe you've never been divorced, but you and I are also guilty of sin and deserve eternal damnation.

Humans throw away relationships at the first sign of difficulty, but Jesus doesn't view relationships the same way we do. He doesn't give up on relationships. To give up on a relationship would go against His nature. Scripture says:

"¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself." (2 Timothy 2:13)

There's no room for arguments or subjective opinions. When God makes a promise, He keeps His promise.

Jesus is the Bridegroom who came in the flesh of man to win for Himself a Bride, His one Holy Christian and Apostolic Church, of which you became a member in baptismal waters. Regardless of how many times His Bride is unfaithful and turns her back on Him, He remains forever faithful. His patience and ever-loving kindness toward you has no end. Jesus came not only to win a Bride, but give His life and blood for Her to save Her from sin, death, and the devil. He is the only one who could keep God's Law perfectly – and He has done it **for you**. Everyone else fails. Even those who really, really, sincerely try to keep all God's Commandments fail. You fail. I fail. We all fail miserably.

St Paul describes the holy estate of marriage to the Christians in Ephesus, writing:

"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." (Ephesians 5:31–33)

It's better than a fairy tale. Paul writes:

"... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle

or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25–27)

Marriage and divorce are not about manmade certificates but a matter of the heart. Marriage is a promise of commitment – regardless of circumstances. Christ, the Bridegroom gave His life on the cross to save His Bride. Although the Bride’s heart is hard, within the Bridegroom’s heart is divine love. Hanging on the cross, pierced by a spear, from His heart flowed a fountain of blood into the chalice in His Holy Supper and water into the font of Holy Baptism, both by which the Holy Spirit creates faith and sustains the Bride of Christ, His Church, and brings her to the Bridegroom holy and without blemish.

Jesus loves you with a love that is unwilling to lose you or let you go. It’s the same love that caused Him to be indignant with His disciples when they tried to keep the children away from Him. He said:

“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” (Mk 10:14)

It’s a love that never gives up and no barrier can block Him from you. Nothing in all creation can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (cf: Romans 8:39) So, examine yourself and come to the Bridegroom’s table where He pours into you more forgiveness than you’ve got sin and more life than you’ve got death. From the table He sends you out into the world forgiven, strengthened, and renewed to live a life worthy of being His a member of His Bride the Church.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.