

My Family is God's Creation

Mark 10:2-16 (NIV)

² Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" ³ "What did Moses command you?" he replied. ⁴ They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." ⁵ "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. ⁶ "But 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.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." ¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. ¹¹ He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. ¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery." ¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Have we over-talked the topic of marriage over the past couple of months? Honestly, I personally think that I have not talked about it enough from the pulpit since the US Supreme Court made a blanket judgment that same sex relationships can be legal marriages. I know I've had many conversations with people outside of the pulpit about it, and the topic is still coming up. The Bible readings today were not chosen to turn the pulpit into a political soap box. It just so happens that our readings center around the idea of marriage and family. I'm not up here to tell you how to vote or what to do in response to the Supreme Court's ruling. I stand before you this morning to show you what God has to say about marriage and family.

Our Gospel reading picks up in Jesus' life as he is drawing closer and closer to Jerusalem for the final time. In the months leading up to his eventual crucifixion, he no longer shies away from the crowds, but instead continues to teach. This gives Jesus' enemies opportunities to test him. The Pharisees come to Jesus and ask, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" (verse 2)

This question is not an honest information seeking type of question. They are looking for Jesus to mess up, slip with his words, and indict himself so that they can finally get rid of him. Not only did the Pharisees disagree on what constituted as biblical grounds for divorce, but they also knew that their current ruler and his wife had divorced in order to marry each other. John the Baptist spoke out against what they had done, and this cost him not only his freedom but also, eventually, his life. If Jesus could say something like what John had said, the Pharisees could finally get rid of this Jesus and all his teachings which make them look bad.

Jesus answers their question by asking a question. "What did Moses command you?" he replied. (verse 3) For those who are in the Sunday morning adult Bible class, Jesus pulled a Colombo before Colombo was even a thing. Jesus asks this question because he knows that this is a politically charged question, one with evil intentions attached to it.

They responded, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." (verse 4) Some of the Pharisees had adopted an interpretation of this Old Testament passage from Deuteronomy 24 to mean that a man could divorce his wife for any and every reason. It was not about divorcing on account of adultery, desertion, or abuse; if she burned supper, he could write up that certificate and send her away with no ounce of guilt or remorse. Basically, the Pharisees don't have hang-ups about divorce. Moses permitted it. They see God as allowing divorce whenever people wanted it.

Jesus replied, "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law." (verse 5) He was steering the conversation to make the point that would silence the original question. God had only given Moses this law as a concession of sinful people living in a sinful world. People were sinning and would continue to sin against each other and do things to each other that would break marriages, bring about divorce.

I did a little research on the causes of divorce. I found that basically no one could agree on the leading causes. Multiple surveys and top ten lists gave reasons ranging from lack of communication, finances (both the lack thereof and the pursuit of), narcissism (you know, self-centered, self-obsessed), trust issues, lack of commitment, disagreements over religion, and yes adultery and abuse, obviously. Although it's hard to find a common thread through all these reasons, there is at least one: sin. Lack of communication comes because we don't love our spouse as Christ loved us. We selfishly pursue financial gain or argue about the fact that we have no money instead of being content with what God has given us. We sometimes think marriage is about how my spouse should take

care of me and love me instead of what I can do to take care of them and love them. The list goes on and on. All of these attitudes come from a heart infected with sin, a heart that wants to take care of itself instead of selflessly serving the other person in marriage, in the family.

Sin leads to divorce. Divorce tears families apart. There's really no way around that statement. Divorce destroys family, even when it is done on biblical grounds such as for unfaithfulness and desertion. In divorce, not only are the husband and wife ripped from a one flesh relationship, but the family is split up even more if there are kids. You hear about custody battles and who gets to see the kids and when and you hear about the kids pitting one parent against the other. Sides are chosen. Families are separated by divorce.

But it was not designed this way. "At the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (verses 6-9)

Jesus continued to steer the conversation in the way that he wanted it to go. He wanted to show the Pharisees who asked this question that instead of looking for ways to split families up and separate them and not feel bad about it, to realize that God established the family for us to be a good thing, a blessing for us. In our first reading from Genesis 2, after God made Adam and set him up to work the Garden of Eden, the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Genesis 2:18) This is the only time in the whole creation account that God says something is not good. It is not good for man to be alone. How does God solve that loneliness problem? He creates Eve, the first woman, and by doing so he creates the first family. Marriage was instituted with those words, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." (verse 7 & Genesis 2:24)

God created family by joining Adam and Eve together in the very first marriage. With marriage comes the blessings of companionship, sex, and children. These are all things that God wanted us to enjoy in the context of family. We even get the added benefit of children teaching us about our Christian faith as we see Jesus welcome the little children to him and bless them saying, "Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (verse 15) Children, which come only from a family, teach the parents to remember to accept Jesus simply and humbly, like they do.

God created family to be a mountain of blessings for us. Yet our sinful nature tries to ruin it, subvert it, avoid it. It doesn't matter if you are married or not, we all can do things that separate a family. Do we encourage one spouse to complain about the other? Do we pull a spouse away from their family for our own benefit, putting commitments on them thinking nothing of their family? Do I look to serve only myself and therefore neglect the needs of my own family – immediate or extended? Do we do things that stop children from coming to Jesus? Do glare at them for disrupting service? Do we make them come to Sunday School while we don't do any additional Bible study for ourselves, effective teaching them that you don't need this when you are older?

Our hard hearts of sin can separate the family that God has joined together. In fact, it was our hard hearts of sin that kept us away from being in the family of God when we came into this world. That is exactly why Christ suffered death, to make us holy. "Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family," we are told in our Second Lesson from Hebrews. "So Jesus is not ashamed to call them [us] brothers and sisters." (Hebrews 2:11) Not only did God create the family during creation, but he also brought us into his family. When God brings us into his family, he makes us perfect and holy. He accomplished this through his suffering and death on the cross, and then adopted us through our baptism. Now it means that much more when Jesus said, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (verse 9)

As a part of God's family through what Jesus did for us, what are we to do now to keep our families on earth joined together? If you are living together while not being married, stop playing house and get married as God intended. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, loving her more than you love your own body. Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as you do to the Lord. Follow his lead. Respect him, support him, help him be a good, Christian, godly man. Children, obey your parents in the Lord. Honor your father and mother. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, but instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

All of us here today are part of families. We are either sons or daughters, brothers or sisters, husbands or wives, fathers or mothers. We are also a part of the family of God, having been made holy by him as he removed our hardened hearts of sin. Look around at all the families here today and ask yourself what you can do to help their family, your own family, this whole family of believers that God has joined together. What can I do to build us up together and keep us from being separated? Encourage one another to live your calling, your role in the family, whatever that may be. "What God has joined together, let no one separate." (verse 9) Amen.