

Mark 10:2-16

If someone were to take a pair of pliers and rip out one of their fingernails, there would be dire consequences...pain, blood, a long healing process. It just isn't done therefore. We can say, can we not, that since God has joined our fingernails to our body, to separate them from each other is not a good idea.

Jesus applies this wisdom to marriage. "*What God has joined together, let not man separate.*" There are dire consequences when a husband and wife separate, and much worse than separating a nail from its finger.

But hold on a second. "Tell us something we don't know, pastor. And why pick on couples who are divorced?"

I am not at liberty to choose the texts on which I preach. The church, in her wisdom, takes that freedom away from her pastors by selecting the texts for each Sunday, in our case the 3-Year Series. And so Mark 10 is before us, and here in this text Jesus speaks about marriage and divorce. But even He does not bring it up. It is the Pharisees who approach Him. And they, attempting to test Him as Satan does in the wilderness, ask, "*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?*" So blame the Pharisees for this sermon. Or thank them, really, because in answer to their trick question Jesus speaks for us words of life.

There were two schools of thought back in Jesus' day regarding divorce. The one was quite strict. The other liberal and very tolerant. The Pharisees are trying to box Jesus into a corner by having Him choose sides. But as He always did, He quotes the Scriptures, the final word on all matters. And one thing that He points out from Genesis is that there are not 63 genders as our society today would have us believe; there are two: "*God made them male and female.*" And He brought the woman to the man and the two became one flesh.

Marriage is the only relationship where two become one. Not like Siamese twins whose bodies are physically conjoined. A husband and wife are one flesh because God has joined them together. Marriage is His institution; His idea; and He promises to bless those who live within the one flesh union of marriage.

But they look like two people. And they are. A husband and a wife exist as individuals. They can survive without each other even though romantic love songs suggest that they cannot. It is true that God designed men and women to live and function separately. A man's lungs will work just fine without a woman present. A woman's heart will continue beating even if no man is close to her. Each one of our body's systems is created by God to function on its own. Our circulatory system, our endocrine system, our skeletal system, our nervous system. All of them. Except for one...our reproductive system. This system is incomplete apart from marriage. This is by design. The one flesh aspect of marriage is seen most clearly not when a couple holds hands, not when they begin to look like each other, but when a child is conceived and born.

So think about it...the child is the fruit of that which God has joined together. No wonder Jesus says, "*What God has joined together, let not man separate.*" Because the dire consequences of separating husband and wife from each other are reaped most of all by the children.

"*Let the children come to Me.*" Jesus is flat out angry when He says these words. His disciples are preventing the parents from bringing their children to Jesus, and He is very upset at them. "Stop it!" He cries. "Stop preventing the children from coming to Me!" Is it any wonder why God hates divorce, as He says through His prophet Malachi? Because like nothing else, divorce by its very nature, prevents children from being brought to Jesus.

And Jesus loves children. He also loves adults, and teens, and parents, and husbands and wives who are divorced from each other. He wants all to come to Him. Yet here is the truth as He states it: unless we come like babies, we cannot come to Jesus. And just how do babies come to Jesus? They are brought to Him. They do not come to Him on their own. Mom and Dad bring them to Jesus. They bring their children to Jesus in Holy Baptism. And they bring their children to Jesus by immersing them in His teaching.

But divorce disrupts all of this. Tearing out a fingernail will hurt the person doing it. But tearing apart the one flesh union of husband and wife hurts not only them, but especially their children.

Because it's all about Jesus. He is the one who forgives. He is our Life and our Salvation. Apart from Jesus there is no forgiveness, no life, no salvation. All of us need to come to Jesus day after day all our life. But we can't. We must come like babies. We must be brought to Him. The Holy Spirit brings us to Jesus. But an unrepentant heart rejects the Holy Spirit. It doesn't matter what the sin is. Adultery, divorce, gossiping, cursing, despising the Word and Sacraments...to live in sin, and not repent of it, is to live without forgiveness.

Babies need forgiveness. Adults, teens, parents, singles need forgiveness. Divorced couples, and married couples, need forgiveness. We all need Jesus. But if I'm engaged in adultery; if I'm holding a grudge against my ex; if I am holding on to my sin, I am resisting the Holy Spirit who wants to bring me to Jesus. Not only will I suffer, so will my children, especially if they are young, for I am keeping myself and them away from Jesus.

So look at what Jesus does. He takes the children into His arms it says. He does an end run around His disciples and gathers up these infants and holds them close to His heart. This is so beautiful. And friend, through these very words Jesus is doing the same thing for you. He is not pushing you away, no matter what sins you have done. He is taking you up in His arms right now and holding you close to His heart.

Because this is what a loving husband does. He doesn't yell at his wife. He doesn't abuse her. He doesn't shame her. He loves her with all that he is. He forgives her at all times. This is Jesus. He took the yelling, and screaming, the mocking, and the abuse. We deserve all of it for we are the sinners in this relationship. But your loving Husband took it all for you. That cross was made for us, but Jesus went there instead. And every single one of you is forgiven. Every sin you have done is cleansed by Jesus' blood.

And there is power in this forgiveness. Power to heal and stabilize families. Power to heal couples. Power to strengthen congregations. Power to live as God's people in which the Holy Spirit is at work. Sin drives a wedge into relationships. The forgiveness we have in Christ removes these wedges. It joins together again what we have separated.

This gives peace and hope to a Christian who is divorced. You may not be together with your spouse anymore. But Jesus is with you and He holds you close to Him. He is your Spouse and that will never change. You and your children are always near and dear to His loving heart.

Jesus reminds us that God brought the woman to the man and they became one flesh. She did not, could not bring herself. Nor can we. But God can. In your Baptism He brought you to the man, Jesus. And you became one flesh with Him because He became flesh for you.

We are always doing things that disrupt and separate. But Jesus is always seeking to join together again. He seeks children...children of married couples, and children of divorced couples. He seeks them for His own. And Jesus seeks you. No wedge can keep Him away from you. No sin in your past can prevent Him from acting in mercy toward you. You are one whom He loves. And you are one whom He forgives. Amen.