

Mark 10:2-12

A lot of pastors cringe when this Sunday comes around. Some plan it as a vacation Sunday and let a fill-in pastor preach in their place. The topics of divorce, remarriage, and adultery can get a pastor in hot water. The easy way out is to ignore what Jesus says about these things. Jesus did not ignore the question the Pharisees put to Him: *“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”* He did not answer them to be popular; He answered to proclaim the truth. *“The truth hurts,”* is a phrase familiar to us. But even more familiar should be this one: *“The truth will set you free.”*

In our society today, marriage has become something quite different from what God designed it to be. Marriage today is seen as a contract or an agreement. When Albert Pujols left the St. Louis Cardinals to join the Los Angeles Angels, Cardinal fans were upset. They treated it as a divorce and they hated him in the same way that many hate their ex-wife or ex-husband. But when athletes leave a team, it is not divorce in any sense of the word. Even when it is done illegally, it is rightly called a breach of contract.

No contract exists between a husband and wife. It's not even a covenant. It's a union. The husband becomes a part of his wife, and she becomes a part of him. Adam said of Eve that she was, *“bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”* Jesus says that husbands and wives *“are no longer two but one flesh.”*

This is a profound mystery which must be believed by faith. With our eyes we see two people, a man and a woman. But in marriage to each other, the two become one even though they remain two. Were a husband and wife to purchase only one ticket to a Cardinal game, claiming they only needed one ticket for both of them because, in marriage they are one flesh, the security guards would come and promptly set them straight. In the eyes of the world, husbands and wives are two people, but in the eyes of God they are one flesh.

Divorce, therefore, is not the shredding of a contract; it is the ripping apart of that one flesh. God did not introduce divorce into the world; sin did. God allowed it through Moses, but only as the lesser of two evils. Better to end a marriage with a divorce than to live like a playboy while still married.

But adultery is adultery, even though the names are neatly signed on the dotted line of the divorce papers. Since God is the one who gives life, life can only be ended by Him. And since God is the one who unites husband and wife in marriage, a marriage can only be ended by Him. And in God's eyes, the marriage union is ended only when a spouse has been unfaithful. And, therefore, much of our world today is living in the sin of adultery.

It is not sin that damns, however, but sin that lies within an unrepentant heart. Sin would be compounded if every divorced spouse were to rip apart their current marriage and go back to their first spouse. Rather, let those who are married stay married to their current spouse, yet with a heart that does not boast of no wrongdoing, but is full of repentance. And then better to heed Jesus' words to the woman caught in the act of adultery in John 8 - He forgave her and said, *“From now on, go and sin no more.”*

Marriage is near and dear to the heart of God because marriage is, in its essence, a witness to the Gospel. The union within marriage is an earthly reflection of our union to Christ. In the wedding ceremony of Holy Baptism, Jesus became one flesh with you. You are joined to Christ in such a way that He becomes a part of you, and you become a part of Him. You no longer live by yourself or for yourself. You live in Christ. In Him you have your being. And He lives in you.

Even though a husband and wife are two separate people, yet they are one couple. Where the husband goes, there goes his wife even when they are apart. And where the wife goes, there goes her husband. They are inseparable. Their marriage union binds them together as one even when they are miles apart.

You are not miles apart from Christ Jesus. At times you may feel like He is far away from you. Perhaps you even feel like He has divorced you; that He wants no part of you anymore. You and I have not been the best spouse. Jesus has every right to separate from us forever. Even though He has been the perfect Husband to us, we have treated Him shamefully - as someone who is an intruder into our life, and not someone who is part of us and we a part of Him.

But the word "divorce" is not in God's vocabulary. Rather, "*what God has joined together,*" says Jesus, "*let not man separate.*" Jesus refuses to divorce you even though He rightfully could. Nothing can separate Him from us, St. Paul says in Romans 8, not even our own sinfulness. If anything, your sins and mine only draw Him closer to us. The more we sin, the more He is gracious. He is the husband who will not go away. He loves you too much. You and I need Him too much.

Even if we do not take our marriage union with Christ seriously, He does. He took His vow to you all the way to the cross. There He died for His sinful bride. There He exchanged places with you. He took your sin and gave you His innocence. He took your punishment and gave you a place in heaven. Your sins do not belong to you anymore; they belong to Jesus. And everything that Jesus is, belongs to you.

Not all of us are married to an earthly spouse, but those of us who are, this is a good time for us to let go of anything in the past that is painful, hurtful, and sinful. Jesus took the sins of your spouse, and He took your sins to the cross. He forgives both of you completely. Because of that, we can forgive each other. Jesus does not hold on to all the pain and suffering we caused Him. Why should we? Jesus loves even though we have treated Him poorly. Let us who are married live as husbands and wives in that love for each other.

All of you, married, single, widowed, divorced, remarried - are God's forgiven ones in Christ. Nothing you have done in your past changes that. You are and remain Jesus' beautiful bride. You are one flesh with Him. God has joined you together with Christ in your Baptism. And what God joins together cannot be separated. Amen.