

Let Not Man Separate

Proper 22

Pastor Josh Frazee

Mark 10:2-16

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

What is the blessing that humanity received before the fall into sin? It wasn't Holy Baptism or Holy Communion. It wasn't the Lord's Prayer. Marriage was given to the very first man and woman.

When God created the heavens and the earth, and after He had made the first man, the only thing which was deemed not good was that His man creation was alone, with no helper found who was fit for him.

God created Eve from the rib of the man Adam to make a helper fit for him. Then God blessed marriage with His Word: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

But of course then there was the fall into sin; and every kind of sin entered the world—even those against the institution of marriage. Just one book later, Moses would enter the picture of history. It was he who would write a certificate for divorce for when sin would break marriages. But divorce did not please God.

This is what Jesus, God the Son, said in the Gospel of Matthew: "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." Jesus upheld what God's Word had said about marriage: "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

Ultimately, the reason God detests divorce is because marriage is the perfect reflection of His love for us. In giving instruction to husbands and wives in the epistle to the Ephesians, God's Word said: "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32)."

Those are the ideas which connect the two accounts of our Gospel reading for this morning from Mark chapter ten.

Verse 1

"Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?' They said, 'Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.' And Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, "God made them male and female." "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.'"

God intends marriage to be lifelong. It is not without warning that He has said "let not man separate." After all, a marriage is not the joining of two together but two into one. Divorce rips that one being apart.

Sadly sin does rip that unity apart whenever and wherever Satan can sink his teeth in. There are justifiable reasons for divorce—marital unfaithfulness and desertion—but both of those are still sin ripping the marriage apart—not a good occasion.

The certificate for divorce was only given because of humanity's hardness of heart—not because God wanted it to take place. Marriage is the gift He gave us before the fall into sin. God doesn't want us returning it or ruining it; He desires that we would find comfort in our spouses, someone to have sexual relations with, and a head and a helper. In short, God desires for us to receive benefit from marriage.

These are the things God's Word tells us; and that is why we have it in our marriage liturgy. Just like our regular liturgy, our liturgy for marriage is filled with Scripture because Scripture is God's direction for how to live according to His Will. Not everyone on earth can live according to His Will as those outside of the Church—Church with a capital “C”—cannot do it. You, however, are in the Church. You have received His Word and have been brought into His family by the waters of Baptism. You have received His Holy Spirit to live as one who has faith. Yes, we still fall into sin on occasion, but our new man earnestly desires to live according to God's Will. And so we have Scripture in our marriage liturgy to remind us that it was God who commands and gives us marriage as something which should not be separated by man, but should be enjoyed as God has intended.

Verse 2

“(I)n the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.’”

As Jesus most likely shocked His listeners in Matthew 5 with likening hatred to murder and lust to having sex outside of marriage, He most likely shocked His disciples with His comments about marriage. From what they had been taught, divorce was permissible. They go to ask Jesus about this—and rather than saying that He was just being hard on those outside or something like it, Jesus digs deeper with God's Word on marriage. Not only is it commanded that man should not separate marriages; if a man or woman does divorce and marry another, he or she is guilty of adultery!

Now, again, there are sins which can break a marriage—unfaithfulness and desertion. But marriage should not be dissolved on a whim. Marriage is the uniting of a man and a woman that they may love one another—but which kind of love? Is it the Greek word for love *eros*? That is the one most people consider today when considering getting married. *Eros* is a love based on feelings and visual pleasure. This kind of love is fleeting—and it is not—that's right, not—the kind of love employed in marriage. Rather, it is *agape* love—the same kind of love with which God loves us. It is a sacrificial love which serves another with all that one has. God loved us with this love in giving His own life to pay for your sins and mine. And it is the one who will receive this love who is a good match for it.

In other words, you have particular talents and ways of sharing your love. If you are seeking someone to marry, the best person is someone who is willing to receive your love through your particular talents and ways of sharing it. Husbands share their love by being heads of the household—which means learning the best way to love their wives and children and then loving them that way. He asks himself, “What does my wife need?” And he constantly researches that question and serves to provide it. Wives share their love by being helpers. While that does entail looking to their husbands as their heads, the original purpose God gave in the Garden of Eden was for women to be helpers in what their husbands were doing.

In these ways, couples *agape* one another; and in these ways, those seeking one to marry learn to *agape* for potential dates. This is the kind of love which endures every hardship and does not let a marriage be dissolved on a whim.

Verse 3

“And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to

such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.’ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.”

These last verses come under a different heading in our Bibles—but remember that the headings, like the chapters and verses, were added later. So we must wonder why our lectionary, and indeed Mark and God Himself, put these two ideas together. It is as we heard before: marriage is the perfect picture of God’s love—His *agape* love—for His Bride, the Church. Just as we human beings are not to separate what God joins in marriage, Jesus rebuked the disciples because they were separating these children from Him.

Jesus desires for everyone to come to be members of His Bride; and by keeping the children from Him, the disciples were preventing potential members of His Bride from coming to Him. Jesus did not and does not want anyone kept separate from Him—just as much as a husband or wife does not want anyone or anything to separate them from each other.

After all, Jesus loves His Bride so much that He was willing to die for her. As a husband would desire to do anything to protect his bride, Jesus went to the cross to protect His Bride from her own sins. He paid the price for all her sins, and now every member of her has that forgiveness—every one of her members, from you to me.

That is why the marriage picture is so beautiful and precious: because it demonstrates the love that God has for His Church, for you and for me. Thanks be to God for His love for us, which also enables us to love one another—especially as it enables husbands to love their wives and wives to love their husbands. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.