

Mark 10:2-16

The religious leaders challenge Jesus on whether it is acceptable to divorce one's wife. Jesus says that the law allowed it only because of our hard hearts, but that if someone divorces and remarries, they commit adultery. Then, when the disciples scold those who bring children to Jesus to be blessed, Jesus stops them and tells them that God's kingdom belongs to those who are like children, and that if we don't welcome children, we cannot be part of God's Reign.

Some Pharisees came, and to test him they 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 dismissal and to divorce her." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 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."

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Since Moses stated a "commandment" regarding divorce, there really wasn't a question whether it was lawful or not. The real issue is what constituted appropriate grounds for divorce. In Mark's gospel, Jesus says divorce is simply a symptom of human failure that is contrary to God's intentions in creation, so he says, "What God joined together, let no human separate." Is this a blanket prohibition against divorce? What about the abusive or destructive relationships of which we are painfully aware? In Jesus' time, only husbands in the patriarchal Jewish society had the prerogative of divorcing their wives. So, a prohibition of divorce provided a safeguard for women who could be left seriously disadvantaged after a divorce. As Jesus spells out to the disciples in 10:10-12, in situations where either party could initiate a divorce, it's the faithful partner that is harmed when his or her spouse divorces in order to marry someone else. Committing adultery is not an abstract, moral sin. It is a real, hurtful action against one's God-joined partner.

59B Readings

The connections in this week's Lectionary are fascinating and challenging. While Job suffers innocently under his affliction, he remains faithful, even as the Psalmist, in Psalm 26, pleads with God for deliverance from suffering. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks about how faithfulness to God must be reflected in our treatment of others. Our relationship with our spouses is not to be lightly discarded - even when it gets tough (as with Job and his wife) - but to be nurtured, sustained and honoured. So, too the place of our children in God's Reign must be nurtured and honoured, both for their sakes and for our own - for our hearts need to learn childlikeness in order to follow Jesus. The message of the Lectionary this week is focussed on relationships as a reflection of our place in God's Reign, and of our faithfulness to the ways of God. When we remain faithful to Jesus, our relationships will enjoy the benefits and blessings of our faithfulness, and, in the healing and unity that our relationships bring, we will grow more faithful in touching the world with the grace and salvation of God.

Family relationships are an important foundation in the well-being of society. These relationships can be broken down in two ways - through moral and ethical choices that undermine monogamy, fidelity and compassionate child care, and through rigid, one-dimensional definitions of family that ignore the realities and challenges of today's world, and that keep God's grace from those who seek to create faithful monogamous families outside of the "norm". Both lack grace, and both fail to reflect God's love and compassion in the way that family relationships were intended to. However, when we graciously celebrate and support those who seek to build faithful relationships, and create meaningful and stable families in whatever form they may take, they reveal God's grace, and help to provide a strong foundation for a faithful and compassionate society. Our faithfulness in working for justice and in building God's grace, then, is necessarily and powerfully reflected in how we work for support, recognition and resources to build strong, faithful and life-giving relationships in our world, especially in the family context. This means we are called to support at-risk children, orphans and child-headed families however we can. It also means we are called to sustain good, committed and faithful relationships, ensuring that intimacy, mutual care and self-giving become the norm, rather than the exception in our communities. Anytime we fight against legislation that makes committed relationships (of any kind) harder, we risk standing against the relational call of the Gospel, and risk becoming contributors to the injustice in our world.

(Commentary and summary of Biblical readings by John van de Laar, Sacredise)

Psalm 26

The Psalmist pleads with God to save and protect him, because he has stayed away from foolish and evil people, opting to spend time in God's house and to bless God.

Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity,
and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering.

Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and mind.

For your steadfast love is before my eyes,
and I walk in faithfulness to you.

I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites;

I hate the company of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked.

I wash my hands in innocence, and go around your altar, O Lord,
singing aloud a song of thanksgiving, and telling all your wondrous
deeds.

**O Lord, I love the house in which you dwell,
and the place where your glory abides.**

Do not sweep me away with sinners, nor my life with the bloodthirsty,
those in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of
bribes.

**But as for me, I walk in my integrity;
redeem me, and be gracious to me.**

My foot stands on level ground;
in the great congregation I will bless the Lord.

Job 1:1 , 2:1-10

'The Adversary' (Common English Bible) challenges God, saying that Job only stays faithful because God has not allowed Job to be harmed – even though the Adversary has already taken so much from Job. God allows the Adversary to afflict Job, as long as he spares Job's life. But, even though Job gets very sick with a skin disease, and though his wife tells him to curse God, he refuses to give up on his faith.

There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." Then Satan answered the Lord, "Skin for skin! All that people

have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes. Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Hebrews 1:1 - 2:12

God has spoken, as never before, through Jesus Christ, who was made a little lower than angels for a time in order to lead human beings – whom he calls sisters and brothers – to salvation.

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honour, subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you."