

A Vision & Treatment for Marriages”

18 Pentecost B Oct 3, 2021 Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed

Gospel: Mark 10:2-16

Jesus announced & enacted in history the new reality of God’s surprising activity. These two stories demonstrate this new reality: Women & children are accepted & valued, not dismissed as inferior to adult men.

²Some Pharisees came, & to test Jesus they asked, “Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?” ³Jesus answered them, “What did Moses comm& you?” ⁴They said, “Moses allowed a husband to write a certificate of dismissal & to divorce her.” ⁵But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses wrote this commandment for you. ⁶But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male & female.’ ⁷‘For this reason a man shall leave his father & mother & be joined to his wife, ⁸& the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” ¹⁰Then in the house the disciples asked Jesus again about this matter. ¹¹He said to them, “Whatever man divorces his wife & marries another commits adultery against her; ¹²& if she divorces her husband & marries another, she commits adultery.” ¹³People were bringing little children to Jesus in order that he might touch them; & the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant & said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the dominion of God belongs. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the dominion of God as a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶& Jesus took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, & blessed them.

Overview – The True vision of relationships on this side of Paradise

Jesus uses this Pharisaical “test” to point beyond the Law to the True Vision of what God intends for the most intimate of relationships. This Vision extends to all children of God.

(latter half of the gospel) - Who Would Jesus Bless Today?

Many Bibles include a heading before the latter part of today’s gospel reading (Mark 10:13-16) that says something like “Blessing the Children” or “Jesus Welcomes the Children.” In reading such a heading, we might begin to imagine a sentimental scene in which Jesus is surrounded by cute, adorable children. When we think about children being blessed in our churches today, we might imagine children gathering around the altar or at the front of the worship space for a children’s time, in which the

pastor or worship leader would say a prayer with them & give them a blessing. The parents & others may also be gathered just behind the children, smiling in adoration of these young ones. However, we cannot view the scene from Mark's gospel with only our modern understanding of the role & place of children in society. The life of many children in North America is one of relative privilege, with carefree days in which they often experience the care & love of grown-ups. Jesus, by bringing the children to him, identifies himself with those who were among the most vulnerable & helpless in society. In ancient times, children often were treated like property. They had few protections from those who would treat them badly. But Jesus came into the world for ones such as these children. Who, in our communities, is in the place of the children of ancient times? As Christ's church, do we provide a place of welcome & care for the most vulnerable & weak in our society?

Ideas - Denominational Resource

In many contexts, today's gospel is approached with trepidation. Listeners have been stung by its words before. Unfair conclusions have been drawn. Unhelpful sermons have been preached. Consult the ELCA social statement [“Human Sexuality: Gift & Trust”](#) (2009) for guidance. From the introduction: “As justified & forgiven sinners, our efforts to create trust are in response to God's faithful (trustworthy) relationship of love for the world in Christ. We are called therefore to be trustworthy in our human sexuality & to build social institutions & practices where trust & trustworthy relationships can thrive” (p. 2).

Pop Culture

Jesus' standard for human relationships is a circle beyond words & laws, to child-centered actions of faithfulness. In 2015, Todd Bachman interrupted his daughter Brittany's wedding procession, shocking those who had gathered. He walked to the first row, & tapped the shoulder of the bride's stepfather. The photographer captured a wordless exchange: he wanted the bride's other dad to help escort her. “This didn't happen overnight,” Bachman explained. He stated further that if “even one divorced couple can see this story & maybe change their way of thinking,” all the attention would be worth it (NBC's *Today* show).

[Genesis 2:18-24](#)

According to the Genesis story of creation from the more androcentric J (Yahwist) tradition, earlier than the P (Priestly) tradition of Genesis 1, females are created as helpers & companions for males rather than childbearers. In Hebrew, the noun *rib* may be connected with the Sumerian word *life*, & the noun for woman is an elaboration of the noun for man, in a way similar to female/male, woman/man. In accord with the Hebrew understanding, the woman is derivative of the man. Yet verse 24 hints at a prior gynocentric cultural pattern in which the woman was dominant & the man went to her home, rather than the reverse.

Mark 10:2-16

By having the Pharisees question Jesus about the interpretation of Mosaic Law, Mark grants to Jesus messianic scriptural authority. 1st century rabbis disagreed about the grounds for divorce. V.12 indicates that Mark's community, which included Gentiles, is considering also Roman law which gave women the right of divorce. By conflating Genesis 1:27 & 2:24, the text regards marriage as effected by God rather than as merely a legal contract. These views on the indissolubility of marriage conflict with Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 7:15. Children were brought to the rabbis for blessing on the eve of Yom Kippur. To bless something meant to thank God for it. Over the centuries, some Christians have maintained an absolute refusal of divorce or have substituted annulments, which purport that a true marriage never existed, but over the last century many churches, more in keeping with Paul in 1 Cor., have come to condone divorce. In either case, the passage proclaims a countercultural belief that marriage partners have been bonded together by God & that Christians have a higher ethical standard than the law stipulates. The reciprocity in verses 11-12 indicates parallel situations of husband & wife. We are so accustomed to the passage about little children that we sometimes miss the shock of its countercultural assertion that God's kingdom belongs to its weakest members. Jesus is "indignant" (v. [14](#)) at the disciples' inability to understand him & the nature of the Kingdom. Children are *receptive*; a child has no status, makes no claim to power. Whoever is not receptive to God's gifts will not enter the kingdom. There is no place there for human status & power.

Images in the Readings

One flesh is the biblical language for the effect & goal of sexual intercourse. Some philosophers in antiquity proposed that the first human was androgynous. After male & female sexes split, the two sexes sought each other out to regain a primal wholeness.

In the biblical world, a **child** was the least & had no independent status. Under Roman law, the father had the right to discard any infant born to him or to his household.