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**Pentecost 20 B, October 5, 2024**

**"Learning the Basics"**

**Read: Mark 10: 1–12 and/or Mark 10:6 – 8 a**

**In their continuing conflict, the Pharisees came to "trap Jesus "and asked Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Jesus asked them, "What did Moses command? They replied correctly that Moses permitted a man to simply give his wife a certificate of divorce, and that was all there was to it.**

**It seemed to them like they had Jesus between a "rock and a hard place." If He answered "yes" to the question He would be promoting marital irresponsibility. If He answered "no "to the question He would be disagreeing with Moses, the greatest patriarch of Israel. Either way they would win because it would enable them to discredit Him with some part of the people.**

**I think we need a little background on this. Divorce was a pretty tricky thing then and it's still pretty tricky. I suspect very few of us have not been touched by the impact of a divorce in a family. The direction by Moses that a man could give his wife a certificate of divorce sounds cruel, but it was actually a protection and help for her.**

**One school of Rabbis held that the only reason that a man could divorce his wife, was because of sexual immorality. Another school of rabbis took a much different view of it. In their view, if a man didn't like what he got for dinner, or if he found somebody more attractive, it was OK for him to divorce his wife. All he had to do was say "we're divorced," and send her on our way. However, without a certificate to prove that she was divorced, she might very well suffer greatly.**

**Now Jesus was not about to get caught in a contest between Moses and various schools of the rabbis. So, He took it in a very different direction. He wanted to**

**take them back to the plan of God for marriage. He told them that divorce came into being as a concession to their hard hearts. Divorce was never part of God's plan, but came out of our brokenness because of sin.**

**For those of us who have suffered through a divorce, we can speak to the fact that it was not part of God's plan because of all the hurts that come with it. There was suffering all around it. It was painful for us, for all impacted by it, including the larger community. In many instances, people were put in the position of having to choose sides, bringing further suffering, pain and hurt to more people. So, rather than viewing this from the perspective of brokenness, which we know can't heal us, let's view it from the plan of God.**

**Perhaps you've experienced this. It's called a "rulebook syndrome." A lot of times people want to get away with something, so they'll quote the rulebook when it's to their advantage, and ignore it when it's not. Jesus was saying marriage had been established by God from the beginning. The man was to leave father and mother and be joined to his wife. By the miracle of love, the two should become one. Joined with the exhortation that, "What God joins together, no one should split apart."**

**Paul says that marriage is a matter of mutual respect! Ephesians 5, is part of what is called a "household code." During the time of Jesus, typically these so-called "household codes" spelled out the obligations of husbands, wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. They were meant to establish the relationships in which people would live.**

**"Household codes" were a very common kind of writing at this time. Hence, there was nothing very uniquely Christian about this practice of instructions that wives should be submissive to their husbands. Simply put, everyone in their world would have agreed to and insisted upon it. The point is we express ourselves differently today.**

**Paul would be amazed if a spouse said to their partner, after worship, they were going into the office to work. Nobody would do that. There can be no work done then because the Sabbath was meant to be honored by doing no work. So, we**

may want to read those words, "Wives, must submit themselves to their husbands," in the light of that reality.

And we certainly can't ignore what Paul says next, for it certainly reveals a level of care for each other: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." In a world where husbands were considered the authority, these were revolutionary words. Paul continues on: "Husbands should love their wives just as Christ loved the church and sacrificed Himself for her to make her Holy." Paul says they are called to live sacrificially for each other, which is a totally different worldview.

We live in a time when there are many competing viewpoints about marriage. The market economy talks in terms of freedom, while the planned economy talks in terms of equality. The Gospel writers, on the other hand, do not speak in those ways.

The Gospels speak of relationships; where mutual love and respect towards one another guides their lives together. Rather than one being in charge and the other being subordinate, the Gospels see both husbands and wives deferring to one another and loving one another out of "reverence for Christ!"

The Hebrew morning prayer went something like this: "I thank you Lord that I am not a slave, that I'm not a Gentile, and that I'm not a woman." But, once again, we see Paul deferring to Christ to understand the relationships in Galatians: "So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and freemen, between men and women, you were all one in union with Christ Jesus."

Thus, we have a higher calling. We are called by God to follow His instructions regarding marital commitment. A kindergarten teacher was talking and tells us something very profound about the meaning of Jesus' words: "That whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter into it."

She told how the children arrive at school in September, many of them, unfocused and undisciplined. They're not really able to receive anything because their listening skills and their ability to follow directions are as yet undeveloped and untrained.

**She talked about how the young students' listening skills and discipline, the following of directions are developed in the life of a kindergarten student. For example, she explained that at the daily snack time, the students all got a little carton of milk with a straw. At the beginning of the year, she asked her students to listen and follow directions very carefully.**

**Then she went through these directions: "Now boys and girls, please watch me and do exactly what I am doing. First of all, open your milk carton like this (she shows them). Take the rapper off your straw, once again, showing them. Put the straw into your carton of milk, just like I am doing. Now, boys and girls, this is very important. Close the opening in the milk carton back around your straw so that if you accidentally spill your milk, you will not lose very much on the table. "**

**She went on to say that it takes until about Thanksgiving for them to master that. The milk spills happen because the children have listening and discipline lapses. This is not a complaint. After all, they are only children.**

**So, when Jesus talks about having a child-like faith, He's not talking literally. What He's saying is that if you have a leader or teacher, who has your best interest and welfare in mind, you should follow that leader or teacher literally.**

**There is a warning in that though, also. It logically follows that one should not follow or listen to a supposed leader or teacher who is out to dictate and dominate in a manipulative way.**

**Genuine love means being committed to each other, no matter how you might feel about one another at any moment. Any husband and wife can have times when they're not happy with one another, because of something one of them did. This is our human nature. Regardless of how they feel about each other, in marriage they are committed through Christ, to love one another unconditionally, to act lovingly toward each other, even when they do not like each other at that moment.**

**There are times in the family when there is illness, when there has been a death, or spouses have been working long hours apart from one another, when that "romantic feeling" of love disappears, but there are also moments when spouses**

**spend time together. Things like vacations, holidays, going out to dinner together, getting away for a weekend alone or spending a quiet day off together, enables that romantic feeling of love to return, once again.**

**Real love is about being committed; investing in the marital relationship, knowing that, the romantic feeling of love will always return. Unfortunately, some married couples invest time, energy and money on everything else, but their most valuable possession: their marriage and their life together.**

**The most valuable gift we can give to ourselves, our families, our children and our communities is a loving and stable marriage. Marriage deserves this kind of commitment in Christ. Most importantly, marriage needs the commitment of love in Christ to hold it together.**

**Count me in: What can you do to support God's plan for marriage?**