

20th Sunday after Pentecost
October 10, 2021
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Mark 10.2-16
Marriage God's Way

Mark 10:2–12 (NIV84)

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”³ “What did Moses command you?” he replied.⁴ They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”⁵ “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied.⁶ “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’⁷ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,⁸ and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one.⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this.¹¹ He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

Think through the many examples of marriages in the Bible. How many of these are examples of good marriages? Adam and Eve had the only perfect marriage, until they fell into sin. And right after they sinned, Adam blamed his wife and blamed God for giving him the wrong wife. Not a great example for marriage. Or maybe you think of the marriage of Abraham and Sarah. Twice Abraham tells foreign rulers that Sarah is his sister, not his wife. And these rulers try to add Sarah to their harem! God stopped it from happening. But Abraham and Sarah did not have a perfect marriage. Neither did Isaac and Rebekah. Theirs was an arranged marriage but early on the Bible tells us that Isaac loved her. But then the twins arrived and the parents picked their favorites. Rebekah and her favorite son, Jacob, deceived Isaac and his favorite son, Esau. Not ideal. Maybe you think of David and his wife Abigail and his wife Ahinoam and Michal and Maacah, Haggith, Abital, Eglah and, of course, Bathsheba. David and his many wives are not the best example to follow for marriage. Solomon took his father's way of marriage to the extreme. He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 women on the side. We don't make Solomon an example of how to have a great marriage.

There is no ideal marriage in this world. But there is an ideal for marriage that we are to strive toward. The ideal for marriage is taught by God in the beginning of the world and explained by Jesus 2,000 years ago. The same ideal for marriage holds today. We learn today from the Gospel of Mark about Marriage God's Way.

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”³ “What did Moses command you?” he replied.⁴ They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

The Pharisees were not really interested in God's definition of marriage. They wanted to trap Jesus with their question. “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” If Jesus says “yes”, the Pharisees can accuse him of going against God's word and prove that Jesus is a false prophet. If Jesus says, “no” the Pharisees can say that Jesus is teaching against Moses, who permitted divorce. Jesus avoids the trap by asking a question of them and getting them to bring up Moses. They reveal that their plan to trap Jesus is to take what Moses permitted in the civil law against what God had commanded in the beginning.

Jesus explains that God and Moses are not at odds with each other in the area of marriage. God had a reason to instruct Moses to allow for a certificate of divorce.

“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied.

The problem is the sinful heart of people. God’s ideal for marriage was not being followed by some of the children of Israel. If it was, there would be no need for a legal process for getting a divorce. But marriages were ending and through Moses, God provided a way to recognize it in their system of government.

Hearts are still hard today. Each one of us in the world today has a sinful nature that leads many away from God’s ideal for marriage. Jesus tells us God’s way for marriage.

“But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’⁷ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,⁸ and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one.⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

I teach the catechism students a simple definition for marriage based on Jesus’ words. Marriage is one man and one woman united for life. This definition is God’s ideal for marriage. This is what God designed marriage to be. Before we go farther into marriage, know that God did not intend or command that everyone be married. In 1st Corinthians, Paul points out some advantages for being single like he was. If you are single don’t live with someone as though you were married. If you are married, live according to God’s plan for marriage.

Jesus starts the discussion about marriage with how God created human beings. He made them male and female. This helps us answer some questions that I never imagined when I was growing up. But there is an increasing number of people in society today who teach and believe there are many genders, a spectrum of genders. Jesus says there are two, male and female. Because we live in a world under the curse of sin, there are rare times when someone’s biology does not line up perfectly as male or female. There are times when in someone’s mind they believe they are the opposite gender from their biology. Our response to individuals in these situations is to help and not to hate, to show compassion not condemnation. But as we do so, we also must uphold what Jesus clearly says. There are two genders, male and female.

Jesus moves on from creation of male and female to the participants in marriage. A man leaves his family to form a new family with his wife, a woman. One man and one woman. How often do we see this ideal for marriage broken in the Old Testament? Having many wives became common for many of the patriarchs and kings. This is still an issue in some parts of our world today. The culture expects men to have multiple wives but we do not let human culture determine what is right before God. We do not let the bad examples of David and Solomon tell us that it is fine to have multiple wives. God says one man and one woman.

In America/western culture, polygamy is generally frowned upon. However, marriage is being redefined and in some cases throw away by the slogan “love is love.” I’ve seen it on yard signs, bumper stickers, billboards and more. That slogan does not actually mean anything by itself. Of course a word is what the word is. Love is love. But those who use this slogan mean that if a man is in love with a man that should be married. If a woman is in love with a woman that should be called marriage. The slogan allows everyone to define love and marriage in their own way so that really there is no agreed upon definition. Everyone does what is right in their own eyes. Again we are not to respond to individuals who believe and practice same sex marriage with hatred, abuse or ridicule. However, we must not allow culture to define marriage when Jesus clearly defines marriage as one man and one woman.

Our culture has also rejected the last part of God's definition for marriage.

'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.

In marriage a man and woman are united for life. In this special one flesh union, God gives the blessings of companionship, chastity and children. This union of man and woman is not to be broken by man. But our culture has dulled the consciences of Christians by making living together a possible step towards marriage. And sleeping together happens on the first date on television and movies. God calls it adultery, sin, when that sacred one flesh union happens with those who are not married to each other. Many in society call it good. And what does society say about how long a marriage is to last? The only impediment to divorce is often the cost of the lawyers and courts. Divorce is allowed for any and every reason and happens for every reason too. But again we do not define marriage according to the culture. Jesus tells us God's way for marriage. It is for life.

Believers are not somehow immune from sins against God's definition of marriage. It may be in the way we talk about the relationship between men and women when we are not married. It may be impure thoughts and actions before or when we are married. It may be ending a marriage in divorce because of our own sin. It may be having children with someone we are not married to. We could blame our culture for the way marriage has departed from God's way but we are part of culture. Our sins contribute to this departure from God's word too.

So what do we do about it? Repent. Truly repent and recognize how you have sinned against God in this area of marriage. And then remember how the Lord God pictures himself in relation to his people. In the Old Testament, God often pictures himself as a faithful husband whose wife (his people) commits adultery by worshiping false gods. But God is faithful and forgives his unfaithful people who come to him in repentance. In the New Testament, Christ himself is pictured as the faithful husband, the bridegroom of his believers. He washes us clean in his blood shed for us on the cross and presents us to God as a beautiful bride, free from any stain, wrinkle or blemish of sin. There is forgiveness for every sin against the Sixth Commandment. There is forgiveness for every sin against God's way of marriage. For we are in a perfect spiritual marriage, not because we are perfect, but because Christ is perfect. He is always faithful, always forgiving, and will never forsake us.

So if you want an example for human marriage, don't go to the marriages of sinful people like us in the Bible. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5 that our example for earthly marriage is the relationship between Christ and the Church. Christ loved the world and gave himself on the cross for the world to save the world. Husbands, love your wife sacrificially like Christ loves you. Wives, love your husbands like you love Jesus who died for you. This is God's way for marriage.

Amen.