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19th Sunday after Pentecost
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Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Mark 10:2-16

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Today's one of those days I sort of wish we had a guest preacher.
Someone who wouldn't know your family history, your brokenness, your sin.
Someone who could simply say what the text says and then go home, without a second thought.

And if I wanted to keep any sort of popularity among you, I'd simply preach on the epistle lesson,
or avoid the real issue.

But I can't do that.

Today's a hard text:

Divorce, adultery, abortion, and those bumbling disciples who just don't get it.

Today's Gospel is a hard text—so get ready!

It begins with a regular visit from the Pharisees, trying to trap Jesus in another one of their tricks.
They ask,

“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” (Mk 10:2)

Now let me stop for a second. I know this is a bit uncharacteristic of me, but please,
if you've been divorced,
if your parents have been divorced,
if someone in your immediate family has been divorced,
please raise your hand.

Look around. Now don't tell me that the Bible isn't *relevant*! This question posed by the
Pharisees almost 2000 years ago is very much alive today!

So listen to how Jesus answers.

He turns the question around and asks,

“Well, what did Moses say?” (10:3)

And as good, Bible-believing Pharisees, they refer to Deuteronomy 24:1,
which mentions the practice of a man, having found some indecency in his wife,
writing her a certificate of divorce, putting it in her hand, and sending her on her way.

The text doesn't tell us this, but I think they had a smug look on their face when they said it.
They were proud of their attention to detail.
They found, not a command, but an instance in the Torah where divorce is customary.
If it's in Moses it's legit.

But that's not what Jesus asked.

He didn't ask what practices Moses admitted for the sake of hard-heartedness;

He asked what Moses *commanded*, instituted.

And by Moses, He most certainly means, God—what did *God* say?

So Jesus responds:

**“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.
‘What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.’”** (10:6-9)

To their question, “Is divorce lawful?” Jesus answers: “for whom—God or man?”

You see, to even ask about a man divorcing his wife is to separate the two, as if it were possible. And this is the major difference between marriage in the state and marriage in our Lord’s eyes.

Marriage, as the state defines it, is a contract between two people. In some states, they’re even willing to have it be two people of the same sex. And this contract is full of agreements, and deals, and promises. If one side wants out, there’s another list of rules and deals to be made. It’s all negotiation, *painful* negotiation.

But before God there’s no such contract. Marriage isn’t a slip of paper either filed in your cabinet or hung on your wall. It’s not an agreement, or a covenant, or a pact.

Marriage is a *union*—a mysterious union—a joining together of two to become *one flesh*.

When God instituted marriage He gave no provisions for divorce. There was no thought of a separation. No trial run. No multiple partners, or living together first. There was no adultery, no broken hearts, no abuse, no oppressive language, *no sin*.

Divorce is sin. There’s nothing good about it. It’s painful. That’s not the way God intended. And no couple comes in with it on their minds. It’s not a part of the institution of marriage. In fact it doesn’t exist in God’s eyes: what God sees is either marriage or adultery. Divorce is, to put it most plainly, sin.
“What God has joined together, *let not man separate*.”

This is a hard teaching.

The disciples thought so too. So when they got him alone in the house, they said, “*really?!*”

And then Jesus says:
“Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (10:11-12).

And like you, while the disciples were hearing this hard teaching, they became very annoyed that all these mothers were bringing their babies to Jesus.

This was serious stuff going on, and they just want their babies blessed?
Can't it wait?

All this commotion, all this crying, this tugging at their robes, this stench of poopy-diapers,
this isn't the time or the place for such a racket,
put the kids away, we've got serious things to discuss.

You've felt that frustration, too.
You've been in such conversations where the children's voices are just distractions.

And our world hasn't gotten any better since these disciples first rebuked the children.

Today we still treat our children as second rate.
We consider their pain less important than our own.

Evidence for this is in the divorce rate of our country: half of all marriages end in divorce.
And that means broken families, hurting children, and more divorce.

Another way we rebuke children today is even worse.
The abortion rates in this country are appalling: roughly 1.37 million/year, or 3,700 per day!
Abortion means to kill a human person. There's no way around it.

That's the reality of our world.
And it's ugly!

Our sin has caused such pain—to our families, to the unborn children, to ourselves.

And the disciples didn't get it.
Neither do we.

Repent.

Confess your sin, whether it's having had an abortion, getting divorced, or sleeping around—
repent.

And admitting to your guilt cling to this Christ.

For this is the point of the Gospel, this is what it's all about—
sinners redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

When Jesus calls out,
**“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom
of God,”** (10:14),
he means *you!*

You are children of the Heavenly Father.

You've been born into His kingdom by Holy Baptism.
 You've been given His name, His righteousness, His victory of sin, death, and the devil.

That's why Jesus says,
“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it” (10:15).

Children are only *given to*.
 They have no money or job to buy their own.
 They can't drive to the store or the supermarket.
 They can't defend the house from an intruder.
 And they can't decide on their own which religion is right.

They must be given to.
 They must be protected.
 They must be fed and nourished and taught what is true and right.
 Children are only *given to*—
 and that's how it is for you with Christ.

He is the giver, the protector, the nourisher, the teacher.
 He is the groom, the husband, the head of the household.
 We are His bride, the Church.
 He gives; we receive.

That's what all this talk of marriage is about, it's about Jesus.
 On the cross the two really did become *one flesh*.
 Christ and the Church are inseparable.
 There's no contract or agreement, no mere paper filed in a folder somewhere.

With Christ as groom and you as bride, He'll take you back every time.
 He runs for you, He speaks well of you, He takes you up into His arms and blesses you.

With Christ there's no divorce, no grounds for separation.
 And this union, this joining together of His life with yours is what we call *communion*.

He gives His life to you and takes your life as His own, at this altar—
 even with all your baggage:
 your adultery, your divorce, your abortion, your neglect of your children—
 He takes it all.

So, if you've had an abortion, there is forgiveness in Christ alone.
 If you've divorced and re-married, then confess your sin and receive this husband or wife as the gift our God has given to you, even despite your sin.

And then, like a child, you're free. Given to. Blessed. Forgiven.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit