

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost – October 14, 2012  
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

**Mark 10:2-16 (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." 13) People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14) When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, **"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15) I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."** 16) And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

**BLESSINGS FOR OUR MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES**

Fellow members of God's Family:

BETTY JANE WYLIE, A Canadian playwright and author made this comment in her book, *Family: An Exploration*: "Marriage is to family what legs are to a table." Marriage is to family what legs are to a table. I wish I could think up witty things like that. How functional is a table with a broken or missing leg? I suppose you might find ways to make it work but without stable legs things will slip and slide off the table and sooner or later we'll end up with a mess on our laps or broken dishes on the floor. And that's not what we want our families to become.

To rephrase Betty Wylie's comment, "A solid marriage provides a solid foundation for a family." But we can say even more than that. The Order of Worship that we use in our congregation at wedding service (Page 141 of *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*) speaks highly of the marriage relationship.

**When God in love created the world, he made man and women in his own image and bonded them together in marriage. Through this blessed union of husband and wife, God established the family, provided for the physical and spiritual welfare of children and fostered the peace and stability of society.**

**God intended marriage to bring loving companionship to the people of this world. But because of sin, the joy of marriage was soon overcast with sorrow, and the harmony of family life was shattered by strife. Out of love God sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross and take away the sins of all people everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness and is enabled by the Holy Spirit to live in peace and joy...The pattern for Christian marriage is the intimate union of Christ and his Church which the apostle Paul depicts in Ephesians 5. After urging believers to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ," he makes this application for Christian spouses: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord...Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her." It is reverence for Christ on the part of husband and wife that lays down the foundation for Christian marriage.**

We have been speaking very highly about marriage but not everyone holds that same opinion. Already at the time of Jesus there were those who had little or no regard for the importance of a marriage relationship blessed by God as evidenced by the “test question” which the Pharisees asked Jesus. "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" As we meditate on this text more we are reminded that

There was some debate among the religious legal experts (the Pharisees) of Jesus' day concerning divorce. Some were of the opinion that the only reason for divorce was moral indecency. Others held the opinion that anything in a wife that did not please the husband was grounds for divorce. Sadly the Pharisees had long ago legitimized divorce. They weren't seeking approval for their divorces. They know this was one of those “hot-button topics” of society and were hoping they could use any comments Jesus made in answer to their questions to discredit him among certain segments of the population much in the same way some political groups try to use questions about family values or abortion to undermine the popularity of their opponents.

However both Jesus' answer to their question and the event that follows in our text show us that

**Theme:** God's Blessing Rests on Families

1. Who love Him and his word
2. Where parents love each other
3. When Children are brought to Jesus

Jesus responded to the question of the Pharisees regarding divorce with a question of his own. "What did Moses command you?" He directed them to God's word. Since marriage is God's institution his word is the final authority on the subject. Those who love God's Word will turn to that word as they seek God's blessings for their families. Love for God's word will express itself by following and applying that Word. **Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it.** (Luke 11:28 NIV84)

As individuals who freely have freely acknowledged our inabilities to do what is good we understand that the only way we can expect God's blessings on our lives is through faith in Jesus and his forgiveness for our failures. Confident that God offered up his own son for sins, we are convinced that God who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all will also, along with him, graciously give us all things. (cf. Romans 8:32) And that includes his blessings for our families.

It is Christ's love for us that calls forth our love for God, for his word, for our spouses and for our children. Through faith our love for the Lord shows itself in our love for our spouses, our children and our families. God's word provides the stable foundation for our family life.

When Jesus pointed the Pharisees to God's word they turned to a passage that seemed to say what they wanted to hear about divorce. **They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."** (cf. Deuteronomy 24:1ff) But Jesus had another “word of Moses” in mind – one which clearly expressed God's blessings on marriage.

**"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."**

“Jesus met their challenge. First he told them that Moses' regulation which they had quoted was simply a concession to their hardness of heart. It was an attempt to keep reasonable order in society and not at all a statement whereby God approved of divorce. Next, Jesus referred back to creation and called attention to the principals God established for marriage. Then he gave them his own judgment based on those principals: “So

they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Mark – The Peoples Bible, pg. 139, Harold Wicke, NPH 1988)

When Jesus points us to the beginning of creation when God made Adam and Eve and established marriage he’s pointing us to a time when the world was perfect and without sin as a reminder that marriage is intended to be a blessing to us. In the account of creation in Genesis we repeatedly read the words, “**And God saw that it was good.**” (cf. Genesis 1: 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) But in the middle of the sixth day of creation God discovered something that was not good! **The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."** (Genesis 2:18 NIV84)

God instituted marriage when he presented Adam with Eve to be his life-long companion and partner. It was his desire that they would live together in an intimate relationship with each other that would involve a union of love, trust and faithfulness. **'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.

**"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."** (John 13:34) The intimate relationship that husbands and wives have with each other provides a unique opportunity to put this command into practice. Husbands and wives who love the Lord and his Word will love each other.

God’s Word, which by his grace we love, describes love as much more than a tender passionate affection or a strong feeling of attachment for another person. **Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5) It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6) Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7) It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.** (1 Corinthians 13:4-8 NIV)

What a blessing it is to our families when parents demonstrate patience and kindness in their relationships with each other instead of letting their impatience and rudeness ooze to the service. What a blessing it is to our families when parents make the needs of their spouse, children and family as their number 1 priority instead of selfishly arguing with each other and seeking their own interests. What a blessing it is to our families when parents are willing to lovingly set aside and forgive the wrongs they commit against each other – forgiving as Christ forgive -- **without limit.** What a blessing it when parents hang on to the truths of God’s word which promises them the strength to hope and persevere through all things. Such love, my friends, is solid material for the legs of our family table.

In our text Jesus let God’s will for marriage speak for itself as he condemned divorce. And as he did so he courageously held out for us not only God’s will for marriage but his promises of blessing. Let’s turn back to the Garden of Eden for a moment listen in as God spoke his blessing on the first family: **So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number..."** (Genesis 2:27)

Children are a blessing from the Lord and the last section of our text for today reminds us that God’s blessings rest on families where children are brought to Jesus. **People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14) When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.**

Sometime after Jesus had the conversation about marriage and divorce with the Pharisees and his apostles we are told that people were bringing young children and infants to Jesus to have him touch them and place his blessing on them. It’s not often that we hear that Jesus became indigent or angry. In our text we have

seen how he patiently and lovingly responded to the Pharisees who were trying to test him with their question about divorce. Now we hear that Jesus became indignant with his disciples because they were turning the children and their parents and caretakers away.

Those who brought their children to Jesus loved them and Jesus loved them too. Perhaps some of you have taught your children to sing;

Jesus loves the little children, All the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, All are precious in His sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world.	<i>or</i>	Jesus died for all the children, All the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, All are precious in His sight, Jesus died for all the children of the world. <sup>1</sup>
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No doubt, Jesus' words and actions in the text inspired that well loved children's verse. Jesus love is inclusive and he showed that over and over again in his earthly ministry as he welcomed and assured tax collectors, prostitutes, sinners of all sorts, Jews and Samaritans and even a Roman centurion of his love and forgiveness.

**God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son.** (cf. John 3:16) **The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.** (cf. Luke 19:10)

Confident of Jesus' love and blessings we bring our children to him to be baptized in his name for the forgiveness of their sins. Seeking his grace and blessing we have brought them with us here today to hear his word and learn of his grace and love. And we are not disappointed. God blesses families who bring their children to him.

**The kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15) I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16) And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.**

In his grace God has included our children in his gracious kingdom by calling them to faith through the Gospel in Baptism. And in his grace God strengthens that faith each and every time we enable them to hear his word. The kingdom of God belongs to our children because of God's grace and love. Simple faith and trust in Jesus as their Savior from sin is the only way anyone can enter God's kingdom. The blessing of being included in God's family and in his kingdom isn't something that we earn by our own works or our wonderful life. This is a blessing which is a gift of God's grace. And it's in response to that grace that we love him and his word, love our spouses and bring our children to Jesus.

Jesus selfless love becomes even more clear for us when we are reminded that the events of this text took place as Jesus was heading to Jerusalem for the last time. The dark shadow of the cross loomed over the horizon and Jesus was well aware of the agony that awaited him there. It was love that compelled him to walk the path to the cross where he laid down his perfect life for the sins of the world. As an expression of his love he took the children in his arms and blessed them. And as an expression of his love he takes us in his loving arms and blesses us as we use his Word, as we seek to follow his Word in our marriage relationships and our families.

Confident of the Lord's blessings for our families we can face the tasks of today and the unknowns of tomorrow with the assurance of his protection and strength. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Jesus Loves the Little Children*, C. Herbert Woolston (1856-1927) Children often sing just the refrain, which is a song all to itself!  
<http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/j/e/jesloves.htm>