

20 Pentecost, Proper 22

October 7, 2018

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Genesis 2:18-24

God created woman; man and woman become one flesh.

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Jesus is the reflection of God's glory

Mark 10:2-16

Argument with Pharisees over divorce

The Pharisees kept trying to trap Jesus. They were the experts in Jewish law, and they kept trying to either show that Jesus didn't know the law (which they were never able to do), or to get him to take a side in some controversial issue that would polarize his followers, making them fall away from him. In this hot topic of divorce, they failed again to recognize who they were dealing with.

The Pharisees brought up the legal controversy over divorce. But Jesus changed the conversation to something even more important. For him, the issue was not human law, but rather God's intention.

In Jesus' time, what legally justified divorce was a widely disputed issue. Followers of Rabbi Hillel held a very lenient interpretation of Deut 24:1; "Suppose a man marries a woman but later discovers something about her that is shameful. [So] he writes her a letter of divorce, gives it to her, and sends her away." The Hillel Jews took the position that a man could divorce for whatever reason he wanted to. By the way, the woman could NOT initiate a divorce. Remember, this was a very patristic culture.

Followers of Rabbi Shammai were much stricter in their interpretation of Deuteronomy. They would allow divorce only on the grounds of infidelity by the woman (NOT infidelity of the man).

The Pharisees' wanted Jesus to side with either the Hillel or the Shammai interpretation of the law. Taking either side would split his group of followers.

Jesus passed over the Pharisees' issue, saying; "Because of your hardness of heart (Moses) wrote this commandment for you." In other words, it was reality then, and it is reality now, that divorce is sometimes necessary. But the core message is; that is not what God WANTS for us.

Jesus quoted Genesis (2:24) saying, 'the two will become one flesh'. I understand that statement to mean that the union God intends is that each partner would be better, happier, stronger, more fulfilled, more complete as a person, when they are together. If through our human frailty that becomes impossible, I believe that God would not demand someone to withstand unresolvable resentment, or fear, or rage, or God-forbid psychological or physical abuse, for the sake of the institution of marriage. It is inconsistent with the nature of God that He would want that for us.

**Jesus' teachings are all about relationships;** our working at, nourishing, honoring, investing in relationships with God and with each other. But we might experience a time that it is impossible to resolve a disagreement with somebody.

There might be a time we try to ‘win’ an argument; which means that someone we care about has to ‘lose’. It might feel impossible to forgive a hurt. There are a few faces and incidents that flash through my mind from years ago, that I have not been able to forgive yet. (Dan S-mktg blitz-anniversary-25 yrs later.) There are times we make our personal independence more important than being ‘one flesh’ with another person. A tragic human reality is that some relationships fail.

As we look at all of the relationships in our life, we need to do the work to model each of them after God’s intention. Jesus holds up the example of little children; not as naïve followers, and not as immature believers; but as ones who come to Jesus filled with trust. “It is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”

Last Thursday was the Feast Day for St Francis of Assisi. In honor of him we held a Pet Blessing yesterday – we had about 16 people and 10 pets attend (2 turtles!). We will be doing another Pet Blessing at the 10 am service today. My message in those services is about Francis’ deep reverence for all of creation, not just animals. He wrote that everything in creation has the same father, and so we are brothers and sisters with all of creation.

Brother Sun, Sister Moon and Stars, Brother Wind, Water, animals, each other. We are people of a faith in the sanctity of relationships with the rest of creation, and with the God who created it all.

It is the depth of this bond that we show in our Prayers of the People; when we say the General Confession; when we take Holy Eucharist together from a common cup, and when we vow to be a community of support for the newly baptized and to a couple being married. We are a faith community, but more than that, we are a faith family. Our connections with each other are deeply rooted in God’s intention for all of creation.

The Son of God entered a world filled with separations -  
 bringing a divine plan to end the separation,  
 and with a mission to heal all of us who suffer from it;  
 to heal our hardness of heart,  
 to help us recognize that we belong to each other  
 and that we belong to the God who has refused to ever separate from us.

Amen