

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, October 2-8 (B) – Mark 10:2-16

Living in Christ: *Love*

Focus Question: *What does God intend for marriage?*

word of life

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” Mark 10:14 (NRSV)

Read Mark 10:2-16

Once more Jesus is tested. This time the test focuses on the age-old question of divorce. The Pharisees were well aware of the differing teachings concerning divorce. At least since the time of Moses, acceptable reasons for divorce had sparked heavy debate. “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” (Mark 10:2 NRSV) At this point, the discussion does not suggest the possibility of a woman divorcing her husband. Keep in mind Mark is written during the first century culture. Some viewed women as property to be easily discarded.

1. *What would Jesus need to say to pass the test by the Pharisees?*
2. *Why has this question been around for centuries?*

Jesus simply reminds the Pharisees of the teachings of Moses allowing a man to dismiss his wife with a certificate. The key aspect of the response lies in what comes next. Moses allowed divorce due to the hardness of heart, so that wives and children might be protected. (See Deuteronomy 24:1-4.) It was a way to offset cruel and inhumane treatment of husbands towards their wives when they were finished with them. No longer were husbands to put out a wife like garbage, ostracized from the community and society. Minimally, a certificate would allow a woman options for her future.

3. *How have laws about divorce changed since biblical days?*
4. *How was Moses attempting to bring decency into the divorce?*

Nevertheless, God does not intend divorce to be the outcome of marriage. God desires the union of marriage to be a sacred joining together of two persons. “Two shall become one flesh.” (Mark 10:8 NRSV) The standard established by God is a high one, based on God’s love unifying two into one. When the two are split at death or divorce, there is a painful severing of one flesh. The separation of this union is not to be felt like a splinter under the skin, but a splitting of one’s flesh.

5. *How does Jesus raise the standard for marriage?*

Inside the house and away from the crowd, the disciples ask Jesus more questions. At this point, Jesus equalizes the possibilities. Husbands or wives who divorce are held to the same standard. Women in the first century would have not been able to divorce their husbands. In a strange way, Jesus turns things upside down by this radical teaching.

Jesus emphasizes the standard of love in all circumstances and in all relationships. God intends for marriage to be a life-giving union. Yet, reality reveals some marriages do not realize God’s intended union. The two who have been joined remain separated, living disjointed lives. Jesus does not take time to deal with exceptions, but is interrupted by the disciples who are restricting the children from coming to him. This is where Jesus becomes indignant. “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” (Mark 10:14-15 NRSV) Again and again, Jesus turns things upside down.

6. *What are options when marriage no longer reflects God’s union of two persons?*

word among us

The church wedding was a like a fairy tale with friends and family from faraway places. The pastor spoke appropriate words during the sermon, and the blessing was uttered with confidence. Everything concerning the wedding went on schedule with gorgeous pictures to serve as a reminder.

Yet after the wedding gifts were put away and the thank-you cards were written, troubles began to creep into the marriage. The newlyweds realized they had nothing in common, nor did they particularly like each other. Somehow they had become so caught up in planning the perfect wedding; they ignored their own deteriorating relationship. Neither one had the skills nor motivation to try to build a foundation for marriage, nor did they turn to God for guidance. Instead, they chose to lead independent lives, becoming strangers to each other.

They chose not to divorce, but knew they were not living as a unified body blessed by God as one flesh. They developed unhealthy patterns of deeply wounding each other through their daily words and actions.

1. *What does God intend for marriage?*
2. *How can good people marry, but not experience God's blessing of unity? (Use this case study as an illustration.)*
3. *Under what circumstances might couples consider divorcing?*

Unfortunately, that phrase "hardness of heart" in Mark 10:5 does not just apply to those who lived in the first century, nor is it limited to the marriage relationship. Hardness of heart is a human condition that can open the door to the worst treatment of others. When hardness of heart creeps into a marriage, the relationship withers and dies. People may continue in the marriage, but there is neither life nor God. Those marriages are in need of resurrection, a gift from God to restore the unity and love. It might be argued that every marriage is less than God intends because two sinful human beings are involved. Marriage and all relationships are in need of God's presence.

4. *What counsel might you give to those who find themselves in a marriage that is less than God's intention?*
5. *What role does God play in renewal of marriage?*
6. *What are the possibilities of new life in marriage if both do not desire it?*

The disciples who restrict the children from coming to Jesus have missed the point. Their concern is with their own personal status. They cannot see Jesus reaching out to all, particularly to those with no status. Again and again, Jesus points to God's kingdom. This is true in all relationships, including marriage.

As disciples, we are called to align our lives and our relationships with Jesus and his vision of God's kingdom. Ultimately, Jesus is concerned with God's reign and the manifestation of that reign in our lives and our treatment of others.

Prayer

Gracious God, grant your grace to fill our relationships as we seek your reign in our lives. Amen

Dig Deeper

Matthew 19:1-9

last word

This week, find a way to encourage someone's marriage.



Daily Discipleship

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October 2-8 (B) Page 2 of 2