

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions  
How did the prayers go last week?

## World Communion

## Sermon Reflection Notes

Mark 10:2-16 is made of three sub-units. The first verse is about Jesus' transition from Galilee toward Jerusalem. The message is clear. Voluntarily, Jesus is on his way toward Jerusalem where he will experience rejection, death, and the resurrection about which he has already spoken twice. The second sub-unit is a typical controversy story where the Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce. It was a controversial, divisive story of the first century, and the Pharisees asked the question not to learn from Jesus, but to put him to the test. The final sub-unit is about Jesus' love of children. It is a story repeated in all three of the synoptic gospels, but Mark's version may well be the most warmly human version of the traditional story, and it has had a quiet but steady influence on the life of the church through the centuries.

The irony of the passage is apparent on World Communion Sunday, a day when we as Christians celebrate that we are part of the universal church, part of the Body of Christ that transcends all languages, races, and nation states. And yet, the scripture begins with a discussion of divorce, something that dissolves unity. It is important to remember that in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, divorce was accepted, partly because marriage was viewed differently. Hardly anyone married for love; instead, marriage was a social contract to continue the family name, to rise in social or political standing, to better the family fortunes. Marriage was more of a legal contract and less of a romantic idea. Therefore, the Pharisees are not asking about the morality of divorce; they were testing Jesus (again) with a legal question. They want to know what they can get away with. And as he so often did, Jesus turned the question back to them, and they proceed to quote the Law of Moses, Deuteronomy 24.

Jesus acknowledges that yes, that is what Moses wrote, but he does not leave it there. Jesus goes back to Genesis and turns the conversation from divorce to marriage. He knows, and points out, that divorce isn't what God intended; division is not God's desire. God desires unity. From the beginning, God intended humans to be at one with one another, to find joy in one another, to be one with each other and with God.

But we don't always get it. And we certainly don't always get it right. Everybody has been impacted by divorce in some way, whether it is within a family, within a friend group, even within a church. We acknowledge that unity is broken all the time. And often, we find that staying together creates more sin than dissolving a union. But that doesn't mean it doesn't hurt; it's still sad. We desire, as God desires, to be together.

In a world filled with division, God calls us together, calls us to unity: not because we need to all think the same way, not for a transactional relationship, but in the self-giving love of Jesus. As we take communion together, we come to healing through brokenness. It is a holy mystery to come to the table and become one flesh in the Body of Christ. We do so to remember that what God has joined together, no one can separate.

## Scripture

*Mark 10: 2-16*

<sup>2</sup>Some, testing him, asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" <sup>3</sup>He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" <sup>4</sup>They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." <sup>5</sup>But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. <sup>6</sup>But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' <sup>7</sup>'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, <sup>8</sup>and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. <sup>9</sup>Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

<sup>10</sup>Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. <sup>11</sup>He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, <sup>12</sup>and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

<sup>13</sup>People were bringing children to him in order that he might touch them, and the disciples spoke sternly to them. <sup>14</sup>But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. <sup>15</sup>Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." <sup>16</sup>And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

## Discussion Questions

1. How and why is it significant that this story comes as Jesus leaves Galilee and begins to move toward Jerusalem?
2. The Pharisees are asking about divorce, but they aren't, really. What are they asking and why are they asking it?
  - How does Jesus answer them? What does he talk about? What does his answer reveal?
3. We often hear the phrase "The United States is a Christian nation" and yet, Rev. Beaton suggested, by definition, theologically, that cannot be true. Why not?
4. Jesus said "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." And then, our attention is turned to the children. We love this passage. We even sing songs about it. But we sometimes forget to notice that the disciples missed the point. Who are the children we separate from the body of Christ when we act like the disciples did in this moment?
5. What was the power of the Lauren Winner story about the octogenarian couple at communion? How do we become "one flesh" as the Body of Christ?
6. How did the World Communion Sunday service make you feel and/or what did it make you think about?

## Closing Prayer

Holy God, you are the One who creates everything. You gather us, your creation, into neighborly communities, creatures of all language groups, of all races, of all cultures. We are amazed at the way you gather us together. You pour out your Spirit on your Church and send us out with transformative gifts into the world. You call us to find ways toward celebrating our differences, ways toward acceptance of each other, ways toward peace. We pray for forgiveness for those ways we lean toward divisiveness, and we pray for your healing that we might become peace makers. Hear our gratitude this day for the One who leads us back together, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

*“What God has joined together, let no one separate.”*