

One Man, One Woman, One Marriage!  
Rev. Steven D. Spencer, Pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church  
Gen. 2:18-24 Heb. 2:9-18 Mark 10: 2-16

Grace, peace and mercy from God our Father, and His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen!

There's a story of a family that had two sons. One boy was college age while the other quite a bit younger. Shawn was the older, and went off to college. But before he went, he asked his baby brother Michael to take care of his cat. Not long after Shawn had left Michael called his brother one morning and said, "Your cat is dead, hit by a car." Shawn is devastated. "You don't deliver news as tragic as that so bluntly," he tells his brother. "A more appropriate way is to lead up to the bad news gradually. First, you would call and say 'your cat is on the roof, but don't worry we've called the fire department.' Then wait an hour later and call and say 'The fire department is here, trying to rescue your cat.' And then, another hour later, you would call and say 'your cat has been safely rescued, but unfortunately, he was scared ran into the street and was struck by a car.' That's the way you break bad news to someone."

Michael thanked his older brother and said he would try and do better next time. About a month passed, when the parents told Michael that his grandmother died. And they needed to call Shawn and let him know! But Michael said, please let me do it, Shawn taught me how to tell bad news properly. Michael called his older brother and said "Grandma's on the roof, but don't worry we've called the fire department."

Sometimes we just need to be blunt. Today's Gospel lesson is rather blunt and straightforward in stating how God feels about the subject of marriage and divorce. I thought about avoiding the Gospel lesson today and preaching on the Old Testament or Epistle. I thought about preaching only on a small portion of Jesus' words, and pointing to some higher spiritual thing. But all of our text point to the same thing, family, and family includes marriage and divorce, and it's all about the higher spiritual things. For marriage is a shadow of Christ and His bride, the church.

But here we are and before us stands a Gospel text that is so difficult for some people to read, that if some of you had known the text in advance, you might have caught a cold and stayed home this morning. ***"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another" Jesus said "commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."***

It's a difficult text to deal with. We live in a culture where divorce has become somewhat of a norm. 50% of first time marriages will end in divorce. If you divorce and remarry, there's a 67% chance it will not succeed. And don't be fooled into thinking because you're a Christian and actively involved in church, that the numbers get any better. Studies show that those numbers are about the same. By the way, when a couple gets married I generally don't share these statistics with them. Yet I am telling you this morning, because there are some in our midst who, every time they hear the "D" word in church, they are consumed by sadness and guilt and shame. I am telling it to you because there are some in our midst who, every time they hear the "D" word in church, they are filled with pride in their own marriages, and filled with judgment toward those whose marriages have failed. I am telling it to you because two messages need to be heard today: a word of caution and a word of grace. May God speak directly to you this morning, regardless of what circumstance you might be in!

We are going to start in the Old Testament with Genesis 2:24. But consider a couple very important things I want you to remember before we read this passage.

1. This passage takes place before the fall.

2. This action is untainted by the fall and by sin. This is God's perfect plan or will for man and woman.

**"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh"** (Genesis 2:24). This is God's perfect will, one man - one woman becoming one flesh for their entire life on earth. Some have tried using this passage to justify their behavior for living together in sin. They say: "Notice that they didn't have any civil ceremony or religious event for their wedding. So we can consider ourselves married in the same way. But I recommend don't try to use that as an excuse. For in the Garden of Eden God was both civil authority and religious authority. For God is the creator of civilization and therefore the head of it. And God is the one who ministered to Adam and Eve and therefore their pastor as well as their God. The Garden was both society and church for Adam and Eve for God did not separate them. Man did later, after the fall.

Now we can fast forward to the day of Jesus. Jesus was in His last 3 1/2 months of ministry before going to the cross. He and the disciples had come south out of Galilee into an area known as Perea. He is East of Jerusalem and making His final approach. In our Gospel text the Pharisees have come once again to test Jesus with a rather difficult question. The Pharisees had plagued Jesus in Judea, Galilee, and now even in Perea. Their sole motive is like that of Satan in the wilderness Matthew 4:1. It shows the spirit in which they asked the question. They wanted to destroy Him. Here's their question: **"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"** Something had changed between the time of The Garden and the time of Jesus. For God had said: "one man - one woman - one flesh!" And now divorce! What we see is "God's Perfect Will versus Man's imperfect will" "God's perfect plan versus man's imperfect plan! Blessings versus Curses!

The problem had started long before the Pharisees challenged Jesus in Perea. Notice what Jesus says in verse 3: **"And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?"** Jesus always appeals to the Old Testament. So did the Pharisees but their exegesis always missed the mark. By the way, Jesus clearly stresses the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and is saying: "Moses' word is God's Word." The problem had started long ago in the time of Moses. Men divorcing their wives for violations as serious as adultery and yet also as minuscule as burning their dinner, divorce was an uncomplicated and cruel practice. Men would simply kick their wives out of the house. No legal proceedings, no appeal process; if the man decided that the marriage was over, it was over. And you should realize that only men could terminate the relationship; women had no recourse in divorcing their husbands. You see women were considered possessions.

Before you get upset and overly focused on this, remember this was the common practice of the day and all women thought it was normal. They didn't think twice about it. With our western logic we see the great injustice or immorality about it but they didn't.

Moses saw what was happening among his people, and though he didn't approve of divorce, he sought to at least create a process by which it would be humane. If the man wrote a certificate of divorce, Moses concluded, then the woman would be freed from her marriage vows and be free to marry another. It wasn't a perfect solution to the problem; it was, however, a process to follow if divorce was inevitable. Divorce by the way was given for the benefit women, not the men. For men could remarry without a divorce decree.

Now let's fast forward back to the Pharisees question again. **"Is it okay for a man to divorce his wife?"** It was a trap. It was to test Jesus. Would he criticize the words of a religious hero like Moses? Or would Jesus authorize the cruel practice of rejection by agreeing with divorce? Brilliantly, Jesus does neither. He allows Moses' words to stand, but turns the conversation to what God intends marriage to be. **"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. What God has joined together, let no one separate."** (vss. 8-9)

Literally Jesus says: they are no longer two fleshs, but one flesh. And it is God who has caused this miracle of being joined together. When people marry, God is yoking them together. Every valid marriage must be considered as a divine yoking. The creation principle is involved. If disregarded, it proceeds from unbelief. The marriage is God's yoking, and presents a lasting principle.

In other words, Jesus is saying that God doesn't recognize divorce. You can go through all the legal and social hoops you want to, but what God has joined together, people cannot undo. That's why Jesus goes on to say that the problem is not just with the divorce, it's with re-marriage. **"If a man divorces his wife and marries another, he commits adultery. If a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."**

Is divorce painful? Yes and it should be! I'm not trying to be cruel, but the two have become one flesh. And Scripture says: **"What God has joined together let no man put asunder."** Marriage is like a fabric of two lives being weaved together into one piece of cloth. The only way to separate it is to tear it or to cut it. When most marriages fail, they do so by being torn asunder. It may start with a little rip or a small tear, but eventually it will be the intentional pulling of the fabric. Afterwards, a piece of you, is missing, it's gone. And what was once a beautiful relationship is replaced by loneliness and bitterness and emptiness and pain.

It would seem as though Jesus has just created an ironclad law that would bind people together without regard for minds that change, or love that cools, or violations that gets committed. It would seem that Jesus is erasing the compassion that He is known for, and the grace that He constantly proclaimed. A rule is a rule. A law is a law. No exceptions! But then Jesus takes a small child on his knee and tells the disciples that the children are welcome in his kingdom. **"Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."** Every child, no matter who they are, or what they've done; the children are, in fact, the reason that He came.

Here's the loophole, if you want to call it that: Are divorced people children, too? Yes they are! Maybe they have made a mess of their lives by the choices they have made; but we've all done that. Maybe they never wanted a divorce but their spouse did. Or maybe there was mistreatment and abuse. But none of it matters, because when Jesus sees a divorced person, or a dishonest person, or a mean-spirited person, or a morally corrupt person, they are still children in Jesus' eyes. They are still people who can be forgiven, and loved, and welcomed into the kingdom. Divorce is sin, but like all of our sins, Jesus has offered His life and His blood in exchange for that sin, and has invited us His children to sit with Him.

Isaiah says: **"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool"** (Isaiah 1:18). Jesus has paid the price for all your sins. And the blood of the lamb that makes you white as snow has washed away all of your sins. Jesus is the one who has called you brothers and sisters and welcomes you as child of God. For you are part of the family of God and your sins are forgiven in the name of Jesus Christ, in Jesus name, Amen!

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, AMEN.