

What is Adultery?

Sunday October 7, 2012

Shepherd's Grace Church

Mark 10:2-16

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

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

¹³People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. (Also read Job 1: 1, 2: 1-10)

For the last several weeks, we have been talking about the Epistle of James. We have learned such lessons as "Faith without works is dead," and "Show me your faith and I'll show you works," and "move closer to God and God will move closer to you." Last week we learned at the conclusion of James' letter that in all things, sickness, health, sadness and joy we should pray! We could take encouragement from James' message and move out into the world with confidence. It is from this confidence that we are jarred into the world of Job!

Job, a righteous man, is allowed to be tested by Satan! We want to ask, "how can God allow this testing?" Why does God, who is so interested in, and I would argue, so involved in this created world want to make the world so messy? By allowing temptation, God disrupts the opportunity we have to devote our lives only to him. Satan wants to seize on this disruption and seeks to inject other distractions that can cause us to lose sight of the incredible gift of God's grace.

God allows Job to be tested because God trusts Job. He knows Job is capable of resisting the temptations of Satan and is confident that Job will do what is required of him to build the Kingdom. A.Z Tozer says, "it must grieve God greatly when we as humans, feel we are an insignificant part of God's plan." What I take from Tozer is that we do not value ourselves enough in the completion of God's plan. Job is capable of resisting because of his faith. We also are capable of this kind of faith! God wants us to know we are essential to his plan and that each of us is indispensable in the building of the Kingdom!

Therefore, the answer to our question lies in God's unparalleled gift of freedom. If we did not have choices, we could never know the joy of choosing God's goodness. We would never know the difference between that good and the pleasure of possessions or life in this world. Job expresses the correct understanding of this choice as he addresses his wife at the conclusion of today's reading. He says, "should we only praise God in our moments of joy or should we not also praise Him in moments of difficulty?" It is here that Job's message intersects our Gospel lesson this day from Mark.

Life is never going to be easy! There will be difficult situations and circumstances throughout every person's life. This "messyness" allows for us to determine our relationship with God and with others! Today Jesus gives us an example. Pharisees test him regarding divorce. Divorce is a difficulty regardless of the nature of the event. People who divorce create a strain on their relationship, on the relationship of parents and children, on the relationship of friends and family! Even in the most amicable divorce there are changes that produce undesirable results. Most who have undergone divorce would agree.

This passage however, seems to point fingers at those who seek divorce! It labels them, and it labels them from the very mouth of Jesus. How can we reconcile this label Jesus places on us? His words are harsh and they are hard to hear, but as a divorced person and a pastor, I believe we must examine them. Great care should be used in our examination. We cannot give ourselves a free pass just because we do not like these words. Instead we must look at all Jesus has for us to learn, and we must expect to have consequences in the decisions we have to make.

Six years ago, I stood before another congregation to preach this passage. If you think the passage is hard to hear, if you think this passage combined with the reading from Job are hard to hear, you should try preaching these passages. I would suggest the passages were especially hard to preach in this particular circumstance. Many know that Rochelle (my wife) and I were married on October 1. This was a Sunday and I preached that morning, we were married in the afternoon and left for a honeymoon later in the day. We were gone for a week and I came back to a congregation to preach this message.

I stood before that congregation as a divorced person, recently remarried with most of them present as witnesses, and shared the words Jesus shares this morning. Any person who divorces one person and marries another commits adultery! I stood before this congregation accused from the very mouth of Jesus. I was, and am a sinner! How could I deal with such an accusation? How could I have any

credibility? If you think reading these words is hard, try standing in front of others and acknowledging sin in your own life!

But I believe there is credibility in my action! I will say more about that in just a moment, but first we must understand the context of Jesus message this morning. He has traveled from outside Israel back into Judea (V.1) and is confronted by Pharisees. They ask a question of him not to seek clarification, but to test him.

The Pharisees did not seek a solution to divorce as a divisive event in the life of their congregations. They did not seek clarification for a particular couple who had experienced this event. Instead, the Pharisees sought division in the ministry of God! They were voyeurs hoping to capitalize on a salacious bit of gossip in order to make Jesus look bad. They wanted to catch Him in a contradiction and cause his ministry to suffer!

As Jesus realizes what is happening, he turns the tables on them. He asks a question of them. "What does Moses command?" They answer that Moses allows for divorce, but Jesus then makes his accusation of them. He says that Moses command is in the letter of the law and it exists because of the hardness of their hearts. People wanted an easy way out and Moses gave it to them to appease them in their circumstance.

In today's world, we must be careful as we look at divorce, or credit cards, or even something as simple as a diversion on a traffic ticket and consider it an easy way out. The commitments we make to ourselves and society require that we strive toward faithfulness in all of our lives! However, we must also be aware that we do not rush to judgment of others as we see what appears to be a violation. Physical, sexual, or mental abuse of a spouse should never be tolerated. Infidelity that potentially leads to the possibility of transmitting communicable diseases must be avoided. Drug and alcohol induced violence or rage against children cannot be allowed. We all know these events are contrary to God's will and plan and we must stand against them, inside or outside of marriage. Those of us on the outside often do not know the circumstances that precipitated an action of separation!

The Pharisees want to jump to the letter of the law, but Jesus holds them and us to a higher standard. It is not the letter of law, but the love behind law that must be observed in all situations! The Pharisees liked power, and the letter of law maintained their sense of control. They could lord the law over those of lesser knowledge but Jesus turns that power around as he says that the purpose of God must be paramount.

How then does this help us? How are we, those of us who are divorced or have been affected by the trauma of divorce, to understand Jesus' message today? I believe we have to look to the next section of the reading for this Sunday. The people wanted to bring their children to Jesus for a blessing. The

disciples wanted to prevent this action. Jesus, indignant at the disciples action said, "let the little children come to me. Do not prevent them, for unto them belongs the Kingdom!"

Little children have a special place in God's Kingdom! They come not as heirs with an expectation of acquiring property or possession. They come just because of their curiosity and they are increased as their curiosity is satisfied and their knowledge of God's love is increased. They receive not because they demand, but because they are open, available, and accessible!

This past week, I read a story of a pastor and his son.

Every Sunday afternoon, after the morning service at the church, the Pastor and his eleven year old son would go out into their town and hand out Gospel Tracts. This particular Sunday afternoon, as it came time for the Pastor and his son to go to the streets with their tracts, it was very cold outside, as well as pouring down rain. The boy bundled up in his warmest and driest clothes and said, "OK, dad, I'm ready." His Pastor dad asked, "Ready for what?"

"Dad, it's time we gather our tracts together and go out."

Dad responds, "Son, it's very cold outside and it's pouring down rain."

The boy gives his dad a surprised look, asking, "But Dad, aren't people still going to Hell, even though it's raining?"

Dad answers, "Son, I am not going out in this weather."

Despondently, the boy asks, "Dad, can I go? Please?"

His father hesitated for a moment then said, "Son, you can go. Here are the tracts, be careful son."

"Thanks Dad!"

And with that, he was off and out into the rain. This eleven year old boy walked the streets of the town going door to door and handing everybody he met in the street a Gospel Tract.

After two hours of walking in the rain, he was soaking, bone- chilled wet and down to his VERY LAST TRACT. He stopped on a corner and looked for someone to hand a tract to, but the streets were totally deserted.

Then he turned toward the first home he saw and started up the sidewalk to the front door and rang the door bell. He rang the bell, but nobody answered.

He rang it again and again, but still no one answered. He waited but still no answer.

Finally, this eleven year old trooper turned to leave, but something stopped him.

Again, he turned to the door and rang the bell and knocked loudly on the door with his fist. He waited, something holding him there on the front porch!

He rang again and this time the door slowly opened.

Standing in the doorway was a very sad-looking elderly lady. She softly asked, "What can I do for you, son?" With radiant eyes and a smile that lit up her world, this little boy said,

"Ma'am, I'm sorry if I disturbed you, but I just want to tell you that *JESUS REALLY DOES LOVE YOU* and I came to give you my very last Gospel Tract which will tell you all about JESUS and His great LOVE."

With that, he handed her his last tract and turned to leave.

She called to him as he departed. "Thank you, son! And God Bless You!"

Well, the following Sunday morning in church Pastor Dad was in the pulpit.

As the service began, he asked, "Does anybody have testimony or want to say anything?"

Slowly, in the back row of the church, an elderly lady stood to her feet.

As she began to speak, a look of glorious radiance came from her face, "No one in this church knows me. I've never been here before.

You see, before last Sunday I was not a Christian. My husband passed on some time ago, leaving me totally alone in this world. Last Sunday, being a particularly cold and rainy day, it was even more so in my heart that I came to the end of the line where I no longer had any hope or will to live.

So I took a rope and a chair and ascended the stairway into the attic of my home. I fastened the rope securely to a rafter in the roof, then stood on the chair and fastened the other end of the rope around my neck. Standing on that chair, so lonely and brokenhearted I was about to leap off, when suddenly the loud ringing of my doorbell downstairs startled me. I thought, "I'll wait a minute, and whoever it is will go away."

I waited and waited, but the ringing doorbell seemed to get louder and more insistent, and then the person ringing also started knocking loudly.

I thought to myself again, "Who on earth could this be? Nobody ever rings my bell or comes to see me." I loosened the rope from my neck and started for the front door, all the while the bell rang louder and louder.

When I opened the door and looked I could hardly believe my eyes, for there on my front porch was the most radiant and angelic little boy I had ever seen in my life. His SMILE, oh, I could never describe it to you!

The words that came from his mouth caused my heart that had long been dead, TO LEAP TO LIFE as he exclaimed with a cherub-like voice, "Ma'am, I just came to tell you that JESUS REALLY DOES LOVE YOU." Then he gave me this Gospel Tract that I now hold in my hand.

As the little angel disappeared back out into the cold and rain, I closed my door and read slowly every word of this Gospel Tract. Then I went up to my attic to get my rope and chair. I wouldn't be needing them any more.

You see---I am now a Happy Child of the KING. Since the address of your church was on the back of this Gospel Tract, I have come here to personally say THANK YOU to God's little angel who came just in the nick of time and by so doing, spared my soul from an eternity in hell."

There was not a dry eye in the church. And as shouts of praise and honor to THE KING resounded off the very rafters of the building, Pastor Dad descended from the pulpit to the front pew where the little angel was seated.

He took his son in his arms and sobbed uncontrollably.

Probably no church has had a more glorious moment, and probably this universe has never seen a Papa that was more filled with love & honor for his son... Except for One.

Our Father also allowed His Son to go out into a cold and dark world. He received His Son back with joy unspeakable, and as all of heaven shouted praises and honor to The King, the Father sat His beloved Son on a throne far above all principality and power and every name that is named.

Our credibility in our actions comes not from the sin we are convicted of. We are all sinners! The reason I could stand before that congregation 6 years ago, the reason I can speak to you today is not because I have deserved a free pass from God! Quite the opposite. I can stand because Christ has paid for my sin! He has paid for yours as well! He went out into the cold, dark, wet world and because of His great love for us, he has made possible our reconciliation with God! We stand, all of us as sinners, reconciled because of and only because of his grace!

Because we stand only in Grace, we must offer grace to others! We cannot be like the Pharisees who want to put God to the test! Instead we must be like Job. We must accept that we are being tested and give praise and glory to God in difficulty times as well as in good!

Adultery is desiring to possess something that is not ours as a replacement for that which we already have! We are guilty of adultery when we continue to seek after those things of this world that appear more desirable , money, power, possessions, people at the expense of turning toward God! The Pharisees were heading down this path. Jesus wanted to set them, and us back on track by reminding us that we must come to him innocently, desiring only to be loved, only to be blessed.

When I was young, I remember getting ready for family vacations. I had no responsibility in that process whatsoever. My parents took care of everything. When I had children of my own, I recognized all the responsibility my parents had as I assumed that role with my children. The assumption of that responsibility creates a rift now between me and God! I can no longer look at the world through the eyes of a child. I always seek to know the risks, the rewards, the fears and the trials that might be

involved whenever I think of entering a new place! What God asks today, that we enter the Kingdom as little children, is humanly impossible!

I think that is exactly what God wants us to know! It is impossible for us, but with God, all things are possible. I pray that you will know God's grace this week! He has poured it out for each of us that we might be reconciled to Him! We are reconciled not because we are above sin, but because the one who was above sin took on the sins of the world...mine and yours so we might have life!

Amen!