

### 10.3.21 L27P19 Grace for the Even Greater Divorce

- Today's gospel reading about divorce has been included in a list of passages from scripture that at least one scholar calls... a Text of Terror [Mark 10:2-16]
  - It's easy to feel what makes this story a text of terror, not only because preachers like me who know some of your stories feel uncomfortable reading this out loud, but even more importantly this text of terror makes many of you squirm and wish that you had slept in this morning
  - This lesson's harsh words about divorce brings both tears and fears – it brings tears if not to the eyes then at least to the hearts of people who have been divorced, and it also brings fears to people who feel trapped in harsh and even violent marriages
  - But you know something? This is exactly why so many years ago the Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife!
    - In the story Jesus' questioners wanted TO TEST him
    - There was no good answer even back then that either didn't hurt feelings, or come off sounding like "FAMILY VALUES" were more important than happiness or safety
- And speaking of what we now call family values, do you know what states in the nation have the highest rates of divorce?
  - Well it's not California which is popularly viewed as the most liberal state – in fact so far this year California has had the lowest rate of divorce
  - Ironically, about half of the ten states with the highest rates of divorce are in the so-called southern Bible belt – with Arkansas as the worst, followed by Oklahoma, Nevada, New Mexico, Kentucky, Wyoming, Delaware, Utah, Kansas, and Alabama
  - And what about domestic violence? Again, about half the states with the highest rate of abuse are in states that are popularly viewed as pious places – Oklahoma, Iowa, Kentucky, North Carolina, Nevada, Alaska, Arizona, Washington, Idaho, and Missouri

- Clearly, a broad religious culture in the community doesn't seem to lower the rate of FEARS OR TEARS, and in fact, sometimes it even seems to make it worse
- Apparently you just can't read this TEXT OF TERROR on divorce out of the Bible and expect couples and marriages to suddenly improve, people to become safe, and divorces and break-ups to end – and let's be honest, *Jesus knew that, and God surely knows it*
- The issue today, is really the age-old issue for Christians that is not only is true for marriage, and for all kinds of relationships, but also true for all of for life itself – there is great tension between what God wanted and intended for us in life, and what our lives actually look like
  - If we drill down deep into the biblical witness, this tension between God's intention and our lives is revealed through an earlier, more painful, and much deeper divorce – and that is the divorce, that is the separation, that is the broken relationship between God and us
  - It is telling, that in Genesis soon after the man and woman becoming one flesh that is also quoted in today's gospel – it is telling that soon after the wonder of loving partnership is lifted up, it comes crashing down because sin enters the world and their lives, and in Genesis we soon hear the first couple arguing and blaming each other
  - The same sin that causes the divorce between God and us, is the very same sin that puts *not just marriage, but puts EVERY human relationship at best in tension, and at worst in brokenness*
- The Good News, God's response to this unfortunately is NOT in our gospel reading for today, but the Good News IS woven like a glimmering thread throughout all of the witness of scripture
- God loves us, and God first of all wants to heal the divorce that sin has caused between God and us – and that was why Jesus took on flesh, lived among us, went to the cross and broke down the door of the tomb
  - You may remember what is perhaps the most beloved, and most well-known passage of scripture in the Bible which declares God love for all humanity even though sin has separated us from God – John 3:16-17: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that

everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

- Or from the Hebrew scriptures long before Jesus, this loving verse is said not once, but is said SEVEN times from Exodus to the Psalms to Jonah: “The LORD is gracious and merciful,

slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”

- *The Good News is that God’s love is a gift, no matter what our lives look like, and no matter how great or how messed up our relationships are with spouses, partners, children, or friends*

- God who embodied love in Jesus Christ does not want people to live in tears of sadness or fears of violence... so when relationship go bad, get help! If that does not bring reconciliation, and tears continue, then maybe the relationship cannot be saved! But above all, be safe! And never doubt God’s love for you!

- And remember, the Lord’s Table as a tangible and edible promise of God’s love is always open to assure us of God’s forgiveness and life, especially when we need it the most.