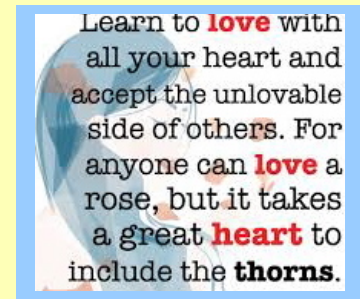


October 4, 2015

"Jesus' Response to Arrogance"

Genesis 2
Mark 10:2-16

We often leave it to the comedians to talk about those issues that are hard for us to talk about in 'polite' conversation. Things like religion and politics and within the Christian church the topic of divorce.



Atypical four-year-old girl – cute, inquisitive, bright as a new penny had difficulty in grasping the concept of marriage, so her father decided to pull out his wedding photo album, thinking visual images would help. One page after another, he pointed out the bride arriving at the church, the entrance, the wedding ceremony, the recessional, the reception, etc. "Now do you understand?" he asked. "I think so," she said, "is that when mommy came to work for us?"

Marriages are hard. Relationships are hard.
Mother Theresa – strong advocate for not allowing divorce -- yet she also said: Loneliness and the feeling that nobody needs you is the worst kind of poverty.

A son was having a conversation about marriage with his father. He said, "Dad, is it true? I heard that in India a man doesn't know his wife until he marries her." His father responded, "Son, that happens everywhere – all around the world"

Marriages can result in very painful times, times of incredible vulnerability. And for some it feels like the church hits you when you are down.

There is a story of woman who had lived a very hard and difficult life – sometimes because of her own choices, mostly because of the way others had treated her. She was divorced. One day, a friend invited her to go to church. "Why would I go there" she said. "They would just make me feel worse about myself than I already do."

Church should be and needs to be a safe place

A safe place to fall

And God knows we all fall. Any words about divorce need to be said with compassion, care, humility love and a deep sense of empathy for the pain that is experienced in relationships between two people who have entered into marriage. Church needs to be a place where we are surrounded not by judgment and scorn but by compassion and care, community and hope

We have been studying Mark's gospel. The themes so far have been about inclusion and breaking barriers -seeing each other as fellow human beings - God's siblings in Christ. Mark, through Jesus, is encouraging us to begin putting these themes into practice now. At the same time things get more intense. Jesus is heading to Jerusalem. He knows what lies ahead of him. He is surrounded by people who don't or won't understand. People around him are still seeing disconnectedness, when God's vision is connectedness; seeing brokenness, when God's vision is wholeness.

There is a sense of incredible frustration building up in Jesus against the arrogance around him. It is all men he is talking to in this passage - men who are ridiculing him, or at least trying to, with their smug superiority on the outside and hearts of stone inside. And they begin talking about women in the only way men can when there are no women around - as objects to be desired, to be used, to be wed and then discarded when the "lustre" is off. And Jesus explodes!

These are not the only words Jesus says about divorce nor are they the final word in the bible about marriage. These words need to be seen in context. Jesus has had it up to here with the arrogance of the powerful and privileged and he lets loose with both barrels. In doing so he protects the vulnerable and disenfranchised - in this case women who were objectified and considered property.

They ask him about the right to divorce a woman. "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" The first overt clue of arrogance is the question itself. The question was not is it lawful for people to be divorced. Rather it was "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Something else is going on in this passage. At that time the law stated a man could divorce his wife, not only with proof of adultery but also because she burned his toast in the morning.

In a historic and powerful move, lifting up the human dignity and equal value of women, Jesus told them Moses had a weak moment when he allowed men to divorce their wives. Then recounting the story of creation, again something historic, he referred to the deep connection between husbands and wives - something that was a gift from God

The context here is everything. Jesus words stopped the arrogance of men in its tracks. The disciples were shocked, couldn't believe their ears. They were stunned into silence. Later they asked him again. They wanted to make sure they heard right. You see this passage is all about giving equality to women. It is about protecting women in a marital relationship. It is all about checking arrogance and the way arrogance objectifies others.

Mark, the gospel writer, wants to make sure we get the message straight so he follows up this radical teaching with the well known story of Jesus and the children. We have domesticated this story so much, turned it into just a cute photo op of Jesus that we miss its radical nature. Here the disciples are the arrogant ones. Here the disciples have objectified people - in this case, women and their children. Here Jesus lets loose again. Rebuking the disciples, he says: "Let the children come to me." He holds children up as an example of faith and trust. First, women held up to be equal with men Then children held up to be leaders among us all.

The question that comes from this text is not is it lawful for a man to divorce a woman. But rather, "Is it appropriate for us as human beings to objectify others, including those we know and love deeply? Including those we are married to? So far in Mark's gospel the themes have been breaking down barriers between people different than us. Mark has Jesus interrupting the social norms over and over again letting loose the love of God in those relationships.

Now Mark's Jesus turns inward into those relationships within the home. And the question for us is, "When do we objectify the other in our relationships within our family?" Perhaps when we are caught up in roles we think we are supposed to play or the other is supposed to play; perhaps when we are convinced everything is the others fault; when we are convinced we are right and the other is wrong.

Perhaps when we complain that the other does not make us happy, doesn't fulfil us, or doesn't meet our expectations. Perhaps when the other becomes an object of hatred for us, becomes less than human to us.

On the other hand there are times when divorce is necessary – when relationships become toxic; when the pain is too deep; when the sense of self is totally lost; when relationships become abusive; when power imbalances take over a relationship.

In situations like these great compassion is the church's only response. Love, care and gentleness are the words we need to speak as we talk about things only the comedians dare to talk about.

The comedians and Jesus, that is.

Thanks be to God.