

Sermon for October 4, 2015

We tend to take this passage very personally when we hear it read in church; especially those of us who have gone through a divorce or have had parents or other family members or friends go through a divorce. When we hear this passage as if it is addressed to individuals it causes us to feel ashamed or angry or hurt. But what if Jesus didn't mean it to single out individuals, but as something that could be helpful to a community?

The Pharisees aren't having a conversation with Jesus about love, marriage and divorce. They are there to test him. Notice how it starts, "Some Pharisees came and to test him, said 'Is it lawful . . .'" They aren't even really testing Jesus about divorce, but about the law. While it was agreed that divorce was legal; there were many different schools of thought as to what circumstances constituted granting a divorce. The Pharisees are trying to get Jesus to commit to a certain school of thought. They are trying to label him, trying to entrap him so they know better how to deal with him.

But Jesus doesn't fall for it; instead he turns their question away from matters of the law and turns it instead to the matter of relationship—in particular the hope that God has for us that our relationships are more than just legal matters. So Jesus goes to the book of Genesis and he tells the Pharisees that marriage and divorce aren't just about legal matters, but are about how our creator God wishes that we be in relationships of mutual dependence and health.

Jesus goes further and takes what had become a legal convenience—especially for the men seeking the divorce—and pushes his questioners to see

that this law—in fact all law—was given to protect the vulnerable. When a woman was divorced she lost pretty much everything—her status, her reputation, her economic security—everything. When your actions result in such a devastating loss for another person; how can you treat it as a convenience let alone a testing point? When we use the law in any way other than to protect the vulnerable we are turning it away from God’s plan for creation.

Jesus is speaking to more than just individuals here. He’s making a statement about the kind of community we are to be. We’re invited to imagine a community that is centered in and on real relationships; relationships that are grounded in love and mutual dependence and fostered by respect and dignity—all for the protection of the vulnerable.

While Jesus may have started the discussion with divorce because of the Pharisees’ question; it isn’t the heart of what’s going on here. We get to that with Jesus’ reaction to the way the disciples treat those bringing children to Jesus for a blessing. Let’s put this passage in context. Jesus and the disciples are on their way to Jerusalem where Jesus will be beaten, crucified and raised from the dead. In response to this pronouncement from Jesus the disciples argued on the way about who is the greatest among them. Jesus tells them that greatness is found in service; especially service to the most vulnerable in society—children.

Now those listening to Jesus talk about the purpose of the law are bringing children to Jesus for a blessing and the disciples are keeping them away from Jesus. Jesus becomes indignant with the disciples and reminds them that to

welcome the kingdom of God is to welcome the children, the least, the vulnerable, those in need.

This passage is about community, but not the type of community we're told everyday to seek out. We're told to seek out the strong, the wealthy, the powerful. It's about a community of the broken, of the vulnerable, of the least. It's a community of those who know they are in need and seek to be in relationship with each other because they have learned that by being in an honest relationship with each other they are in a relationship with the God who created them.

That's what the church was about in the first place. It was a place for all who had been broken by life and rejected by the powerful to come and experience God through the crucified one; the one who met them in the midst of their brokenness not to keep them from harm, but to open them to the brokenness and need of those around them. But it's easy for us to forget. Paul was constantly reminding the Corinthians about this very fact. "Consider your own call, brothers and sisters; not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God."

As human beings we're insecure, we're aware of our need and we're embarrassed by our need. But Jesus and Paul after him remind us that to be

broken isn't something to be ashamed of. To be broken is to be human. And to be human is to be loved by God and to be drawn together into relationship with all the others who God loves.

When we meet on Sunday mornings it is the local gathering of the broken and loved, of the hurting and healing, and of the lost yet found. It is the gathering of those in need who seek not just to have their needs met, but realize that in helping meet the needs of others their own needs are met. We are given the opportunity to see our communities as those places where God is at work to heal and restore the whole creation, not by taking away our problems, but by surrounding us with people who understand and care. We are a community of the broken and the blessed; a community that is loved by God, being healed by God and who God is working through to make all things new.