

**St. Paul Lutheran Church  
Grant Park, Illinois  
The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, October 7, 2018  
Mark 10:2-12**

*Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" "What did Moses command you?" he replied. They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."*

*"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."*

*When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."*

The counselor looked at the couple sitting across from him. He could sense a tension in the air. It was so thick that a knife which is so sharp it is able to split a human hair in half wouldn't be able to cut through it. The couple was sitting next to each other, but the divide between them was wider and deeper than the Grand Canyon. He had the distinct impression that this meeting was their last shot to make a go of their marriage.

I don't know whether or not this was the couple the Pharisees had in mind in our gospel lesson this morning, but the question they asked Jesus would deal directly with the situation where the couple found themselves. **"Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' 'What did Moses command you?' he replied. They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.'"**

The Pharisees wanted to know whether or not divorce would be an acceptable outcome to the difficulties the couple was experiencing. The great prophet and leader Moses had permitted them to get a divorce. Now, Jesus was being viewed as a great prophet and they wanted to know what he thought about the difficult situation. Would Jesus choose to go against Moses and Scripture or would he choose to go soft and endorse divorce?

The wife was first to speak. "I haven't been happy in a long long time. I have been doing everything around the house. I do all the cooking, cleaning, I get up at night with the kids and by the way did I mention I have a job which I work 60 plus hours a week? He is never home and he doesn't do anything when he is home besides sit on the couch and drink beer and watch football. I'm willing to give this one last chance, but he needs to change. He needs to do more to make me happy."

The husband quickly cuts her off. "There she goes again and claiming she is the only one who is miserable. She makes me miserable. She sits at a desk all day. I work construction 60 plus hours a week. I'm lifting 50, 60 pounds all day long. I'm physically worn out at the end of the day. I want a moment to relax, but she starts in on me the moment I walk in the door and doesn't stop until I walk out the door the next morning. Besides, I make the kids lunches, I get them to bed. I do the laundry."

The Pharisees' question about divorce prompts Jesus' disciples to ask him about divorce. **"When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this."** The disciples were curious about divorce and their curiosity reveals something to us. We seem to think divorce is something new and a modern day problem. The disciples' question along with the Pharisees' question reveals to us that divorce isn't a modern day issue. It has been around a long long time.

The counselor took a deep breath and sighed. The couple had just left and he was exhausted. They had spent the last hour tearing into each other and explaining how the other person was making them unhappy and they deserved better because they deserved to be happy. He had seen and dealt with couples like this numerous times before and he didn't have much hope. The clock was ticking and there wasn't much time for them to come to a resolution.

The Pharisees and Jesus' disciples were both curious on Jesus' views on divorce. The Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus with going against God's word or being soft on divorce. The disciples wanted to learn more

about a terrible evil. How would Jesus respond to their questions? **“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. ‘Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.’”**

Jesus’ answers reveal an important truth about divorce. Divorce is caused by hearts which have been hardened by sin. It is caused by people whose hearts are hardened to the fact their own sinful actions inflict pain and suffering on someone else when they make sinful choices inside of a marriage. It is caused by people who refuse to take responsibility for their sinful actions. It is caused by people who idolize their own happiness above all else.

Jesus issues us a strong warning with these words, but is absolutely necessary to listen to him. The sinful choices you make when it comes to marriage matters (whether married or single) impact other people. What do I mean? The Christian who chooses to be sexually active and move in with a partner without getting married gives the impression God doesn’t care about commitment and their actions loudly trumpet to their unbelieving neighbors that God isn’t serious about sin.

The individual who chooses to look at pornography and lust after the image on the screen or magazine degrades the way their spouse looks and cheats on their spouse in their heart. The people who idolize their own happiness above all else selfishly put their needs and wants ahead of their significant other who might put up with it for a while, but their sinful nature will eventually explode because it doesn’t like being put second every single time.

What about you? Do you need to hear Jesus’ warning about taking marriage seriously? Do you make sure to stop and think about the way your actions will impact others? Or is your head stuck looking down at your own tummy because you can’t lift it to look up and think about others? You might want to act selflessly and think about the way your actions impact others, but the sinful heart is hard. Eventually, we don’t care and we indulge our sinful hearts and sin against God’s gift of marriage.

We all sin against God’s gift of marriage. Singles. Married couples. We all do because each one of us has a sinful heart which doesn’t always put a spouse or a future spouse or God’s gift of singleness first in all our actions. Where can we turn for hope? **“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”**

Your situation as a sinner is not hopeless, because God provides hope for you in Christ. Yes, your heart and mine are sinful, but the apostle Paul shares with us Jesus’ heart and attitude towards us. You and I are members of the church. Did you hear what Jesus has done for you? He loves you and gave himself up for you. What does it mean for you that Jesus loved you and gave himself up for you? It means everything when it comes to your salvation.

Our hearts are tainted by sin. There are parts of them which do not want to honor God or his gift of marriage, but Jesus is different. Jesus is sinless. He is perfect which means he loves you with a love no one else can. How did he display his love for you and me? He patiently led a woman who was living with

her boyfriend to repent of her sin and trust in him as her savior. He didn't come down hard on her. He didn't slam her. He patiently instructed her to look to him for forgiveness.

One day Jesus was brought a woman who was caught in the act of cheating on her husband. The people who brought her to him were ready to kill her, but Jesus refused to condemn her and spoke in her defense and her accusers let her live. Jesus refused to idolize his happiness and wellbeing by willingly taking up the cross to endure God's punishment for those who idolize their happiness above all else. What does Jesus' love for you mean for your life?

**"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."** It means you are holy and blameless in God's sight. God doesn't see the hardness of your heart. He doesn't see the idols which you keep. He sees Christ in all his glory and perfection when he looks at you.

How do we respond to this wonderful reality? **"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."** We respond by honoring and treasuring for what it is: it is God's gift to us. We honor God's gift of marriage when we love and care about others.

Are you married? You can show your spouse you love them by thinking about the way your sinful choices hurt your spouse and then refusing to do the things which hurt your spouse. Are you single? Honor God with the choices you make in your life. Keep yourself pure by saving yourself for marriage and wait to live with a spouse rather than a partner. Don't think you'll ever get married? Build up and encourage your married friends who are having troubles.

Will it always be easy to honor God's gift of marriage? No, it is hard because each one of us has a sinful heart which wants to be put first and doesn't care about God's idea of purity and loves to tear others down. You and I will fail to honor God's gift of marriage. What happens when we fail? Confess your sin and accept responsibility for your actions, but more importantly remember Jesus' actions on your behalf. He gave himself up for you to forgive and empower you to honor God's gift of marriage. Amen.