

October 8, Proper 22 8 am service – Anne-Marie Jeffery

[Genesis 2:18-24](#); [Hebrews 2:\(1-8\)9-18](#); [Mark 10:2-9](#)

I find this gospel difficult to preach on. Jesus is speaking against divorce. The gospel doesn't start out in a pleasant way. The Pharisees are once again trying to bring Jesus down. They don't care about the answer to the question. They already know the answer to the question. They just want to get Jesus into trouble. So they ask their question about divorce and answer their question when Jesus tells them to. Then Jesus tells them just why Moses gave them that commandment - because of their hardness of heart but then Jesus says.

But 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.'

What is Jesus saying? Should we never get divorced? If we do get divorced should we never marry again? If we are in a marriage that has been miserable for years, should we stay? If we are being abused should we stay? Is it our fault if the other person leaves? What does it mean if we have failed at marriage?

I realized that with all these questions, I was trying to get a set of rules for Jesus' teaching - a set of rules that would deal with exceptions, if any, to what Jesus has said - the kind of rules that the church has struggled with for years, the kind of rules that the Pharisees wanted to have in place. That sounds like a very human thing to do and I wondered - is there something else at the heart of what Jesus is saying here? What is Jesus calling us to?

Let us go back to the very first words that Jesus said about what he thought. The first words are. "But from the beginning of creation." This takes us to our reading from Genesis where God sees that man alone is not good. Man alone with the animals and the plants and everything else is just not quite right. And God makes another, a woman, from the same

stuff that the man was made out of and brought her to the man and the man says "This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh."

God creates another so there can be relationship because creation was not good with one person alone. Relationship with another was needed. Relationship is very important to creation. Relationship teaches us how to love. Relationship teaches us how to love God.

This story is not so much about the roles of men and women as it is about what it is to be a human being - a human being who needed another. This story is not saying that everybody has to get married or that only married people are whole people. Jesus was the perfect image of God and he was single. This story is about relationship with another. Relationships were needed for creation to be good.

In the story of Genesis, the man and woman were one flesh. They were family. They were in relationship. There are many ways to be in relationship. We are in relationship in our marriage. We are in relationship with our parents, our sisters and brothers, our friends, and with strangers on the street.

We are in relationship because we were all created from the same stuff. We are one flesh and of one bone. We are one family God's family and God calls us to be in those relationships and hold them dearly because in those relationships we learn to love God.

Marriage is just one of those relationships we have that reminds us that we are one family and that teaches us about the love of God. Jesus is holding that relationship up and all relationships up as something of God - that something that God has created and that we are to honor.

But we are human and human fail sometimes. We fail at marriage. We fail to love the stranger. We fail to take care of creation. We fail to fight for justice for each and every human being. We get angry and frustrated with one another. We have wars. People are starving. People are homeless. We fail even in our relationship with God.

And when we do fail, God is merciful and forgives us. God welcomes us back into his arms. God's mercifulness abounds and we were reminded of

that in our opening prayer when we prayed - *Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior.*

So Jesus says what God has joined together, let no man separate. Jesus knows that separation happens sometimes and whether it is the marriage of a man and woman, or the relationship between parent and child, or the relationship between a brother and sister, or how we humans treat creation, Jesus forgives us. When we fail, when our hard heartedness gets in the way, when we fall down, Jesus comes to us and says you are my beloved, come back to me, come back into relationship. Jesus asks us to uphold and be faithful to these relationships as much as we can. They are important. They are what God has created - all of them

So I have no easy answers to this passage, no set of rules on how to follow Jesus' teaching on divorce. All I can tell you is that Jesus asks us to love one another, to be in relationship with each other because we are one flesh, made of one bone, are of one family - God's family. Jesus asks us to honor all those relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ to the best of our ability. Let us do all that we can in those relationships so that no one can separate us, so that no one can separate what God has created - we who are gathered here the family of God.