

October 6, 2024

Mark 10:2-12

“Today, If You Hear His Voice ...”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Every 42 seconds, there is one divorce in America. That equates to 86 divorces per hour, 2,046 divorces per day, 14,364 divorces per week, and 746,971 divorces per year. We do not know the statistics at the time of Jesus, but you can be rest assured that there were divorces, and this has been the case for all human history.

Perhaps you have had a divorce and so this topic might be sensitive. Perhaps you have not had a divorce and you now think you can fall fast asleep during the sermon. I would suggest that we all pay close attention to what our Lord Jesus Christ has to say on this topic, as it certainly has applications that go way beyond whether you've had a divorce or not.

The Pharisees came to test Jesus by a question. Now that's an application for all of us. We are often questioning Jesus and the Scripture. The Pharisees wanted to trap him. Most of our questions are because we want to see what we can get by with in the Christian life. We want to know all the specific conditions and actions that may need to be taken or avoided. We often want to find a loophole. We want to stretch the boundaries as much as we can. And that is a problem of the heart.

There is more than just struggling with our sinful flesh in this text. There is a wonderful truth that we do not want to miss. Marriage and divorce has something to do with our relationship with Jesus and can say a lot about where we are with him. The idea of marriage and the relationship between husband and wife is a picture of what Jesus wants to have with us on a spiritual and eternal level. We are betrothed and considered to be married to Jesus by faith, and are understood as his eternal companion. He loves us with his whole heart, and wants us to have him forever in purity. For the joy set before him he endured our sin and death. Like a closely connected husband and wife, we are closely connected to Jesus by faith in his love for us on the cross and empty tomb. Paul says in Ephesians 5:29-33,

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Those are some pretty intense words! There is a mysterious relationship between Christ and the Church, and a man and a woman in marriage, which indicates that one touches upon the other. A union between husband and wife - be it good or bad - will tend to affect how we perceive Jesus and his relationship with us. This really should not be a surprise. Moreover, it would make sense that a couple who has understood their marriage in the context of the relationship between Jesus and his bride would generally have a good marriage. The one encourages and supports the other. They are reciprocal.

Even though Moses permitted a certificate of divorce, God's will for husband and wife is to be one flesh ... and that oneness is to last for a lifetime, and pictures our eternal companionship with Jesus. That

sounds simple enough, but it is rarely heard or taught that marriage is supposed to be: “until death parts us.” Instead, for most people marriages last as long as the spark of attraction lasts. Boredom and lust have replaced love and honor for spouses. Nor is it taught that when you get married that the most important thing to know is that the person you are marrying has the same beliefs that you do about Christ and the Church. Also, less and less people are getting married these days – citing that they don’t need a certificate of marriage to be married, thus negating the thought of lifelong commitment, and that is just the tip of the iceberg.

God’s will for marriage is clear when the Son of God taught: “what therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” And what Jesus says here applies to all marriages, and not only for Christians. Jesus cuts to the heart of the matter regardless of all the wrangling. Jesus completely re-frames the question when the Pharisees are trying to trap him. Instead of talking about grounds for divorce, which in the New Testament are in the case of adultery or desertion, he basically says that we should be thinking about the grounds for marriage. We should be thinking about what marriage really is and how it is a great gift and a picture of eternal realities in Jesus.

Marriage can be seen as a model for our relationship with Jesus while a divorce in this life can be terribly destructive to that understanding. Consequently, Jesus was not trapped by the question of the Pharisees. Instead of allowing them to find loopholes and stretch boundaries with the hope of succeeding in showing Jesus to be opposed to the law of Moses, our Savior takes them to the original heart of the matter, and warns them about the dangers of hardening their hearts. It is easy for us to develop a calloused heart so that we begin to lose all feeling toward what the Scripture says on such sensitive matters.

We have become a culture that is calloused to divorce. Jesus says in our gospel lesson that it was because of the hardness of their hearts that Moses allowed for a certificate of divorce. But as we learn in our gospel lesson, it was not this way from the beginning. What Jesus is saying in this section was that this law was given to bring order to situations that were resulting from hardened hearts. This was necessary to especially protect the weak. But the issue that catches my attention is Jesus’ reference to the people’s hardness of heart in the past and in his day. It isn’t just the issue of divorce that people harden their hearts. We have become a culture that has become desensitized to sin in general.

My thoughts drift to the words of Hebrews 3:8, “... do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion ...” And my thoughts further drift to the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 and the example of Israel. There Paul reminds us that they were baptized into Moses and ate the same spiritual food. Christ the Rock was with them but they rejected his provision. God was not pleased with most of the people and they were overthrown in the wilderness. The apostle Paul writes:

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were

destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Take care, brothers and sisters in Christ, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, that leads you to fall away. Be there for one another and exhort one another as long as it is today, that none of you become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. It says in Hebrews 3:14 that “we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.” And in these words we have the key. **Today, If you Hear His Voice ...** do not harden your hearts. Rather see the dangers of sin and take your share in Christ seriously, while holding on to your certainty that is found in the good news of Jesus.

There is nothing that you can desire that compares to what you have in Jesus. He is the love of our lives and our truest soul mate who changes the way we see things. The greatness of his love for you and me at the cross and empty tomb makes divorce and every other sin not worth pursuing. His gift of the forgiveness of sins and the anticipation of everything that is ours in heaven can put to death the wicked deeds of the body. We have the Holy Spirit who takes us to the love of Jesus and the goodness of a new creation so that we may not fall back into a spirit of terror over death and hell. We are God’s children, provided we suffer with him that we may be glorified with him. The sins of the flesh, and the sufferings we experience when we do not gratify our sinful desires, are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Rom. 8).

Today, If you Hear His Voice ... do not harden your hearts ... whether it be about marriage and divorce or anything else. Instead, let us lift up our hearts to the one who gives his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. And, while the promise of entering into heaven through Jesus still stands, let us have repentant hearts that abide in his steadfast love that we may remain in his rest, now and forever!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott