

October 4, 2015
Mark 10:2-16

Proper 22B
The God Who Doesn't Give Up

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that something has gone terribly wrong in our society with regard to marriage and family. This summer we had the Obergefell vs. Hodges Supreme Court decision legalizing gay marriage. And the debate over the definition of marriage will go on for a long time? Why are we doing this? Why do so many younger (and older!) people choose to live together rather than make a commitment and seek God's blessing in marriage? Why is pornography one of the biggest industries in the world? Why since 1973 and before do we treat children in the womb as either "a person" or "not a person" depending on whether or not the mom wishes to bring the child to term? This discussion has even been more prevalent with the Planned Parenthood videos. How have we reached the point where casual sex has become widely regarded as a recreational activity to be enjoyed whenever and wherever you can find two (or more) consenting adults? How has this casual approach to sex spread down even into our elementary schools? Why this huge escalation of divorce? Why are there so few children in so many families that could be blessed with more but deliberately choose not to have them? And why do so many, even in our own churches, give tacit approval to some or all of this under a satanic twisting of our Lord's words, "Judge not"? What is going on?

These are good questions to ask!

"Did God really say?" the serpent asked Eve. That's always the first question by which Satan plants the seeds of uncertainty and doubt before he proceeds to flat out contradict God's Word to you. His tactics don't change. What's happened to us as a society is that we have been seduced first into doubt and then into disbelief of God's Word—His Word about family, about marriage, and about children. All three are special objects of Satan's hate because all three find their foundation in God's will and plan for the human race to bring us blessing.

Make no mistake about it—the Holy Scriptures reveal God's plan for the human family. Marriage and family are not a social construct as the world tells us it is or even something we dreamed up. We don't get to define them as we choose. You heard that today in the Old Testament reading from Genesis. Marriage wasn't Adam's idea. Marriage was God's idea and his gift. He created the woman to be the helper for the man, so he would not be alone. He brought the woman to our first father and gave her to him, and Adam received her as a gift. Moses concludes: *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."*

That is the Lord's will, the Lord's plan. Male and female, a man and a woman, given to each other, the nucleus of a new family. After all, when two become one, the Lord often

delights to give even more gifts: the gift of children. And they are not, in the Lord's plan, to be thought of as a burden, but a blessing. You heard it in the Introit that we spoke together, *"Children are a heritage from the Lord...Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!"* So far, God's plan!

But you don't have to read very far into the Scriptures before you see this institution of the Lord, given for our benefit and blessing, under attack by the fallen nature of the world: polygamy, unfaithfulness, concubines, family dissensions, fights, murder, bloodshed, and yes the painful burden of infertility. The pages of Scripture are littered with the damage inflicted on the human race by the unflinching assault of Satan on this good gift of God and our buying into his lies.

All of that had been going on already for thousands of years when the Pharisees came to Jesus in today's Gospel, seeking to trap him by drawing on the mess God's own people had made into marriage. *"Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?' They said, 'Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.'" But Jesus regards even these words of Moses in Deuteronomy that permitted divorce under certain circumstances to be merely a concession of the hardness of the human heart. He says in response, "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female...and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let not man separate."* Echos of Malachi 2: *"Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring."*

The disciples struggled with the Lord's adamant insistence that divorce is not the will of God, that it undoes what God himself has done in uniting together the man and the woman. They asked the Lord in effect, if he really meant it. His words are uncompromising: *"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."* Divorce and remarriage is simply adultery and contrary to the will of God expressed in the Sixth Commandment. He allows no wiggle room in today's Gospel.

Jesus doesn't think about marriage the same way we tend to. Most people know situations where, if they are honest, they'd say that divorce simply made sense. Or perhaps you have lived it. It's the reasonable thing to do. Why doesn't our Lord get that? People loved by God, grasp the answer to that question, and the entire Gospel today will shine with new and joyful light!

Why doesn't Jesus "get" divorce? Because your God doesn't "get" giving up on relationships. That would be contrary to His nature. *"If we are faithless, He remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself."* The Lord couldn't and wouldn't back off on His promises. They hold. They hold forever. The Lord chose to stay with his unfaithful people, the Children of Israel. He chose to stay with the people that hurt him.

And so our Lord Jesus comes into the flesh to win a Bride for himself, a Bride to whom he will be faithful forever. If our problem is a hard heart, God in the flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, has a tender heart. As God put Adam to sleep and took from his side that with which he made the woman, so our Lord Jesus sleeps in death on his cross, and his tender heart is pierced. Then from that heart flows a fountain of blood and water. Long has the church seen in the water and blood that flow from the pierced heart of our Lord as a picture of both Baptism and the Lord's Supper, by which the Holy Spirit tenderly creates the Bride of Christ, the Church, and brings her to the Bridegroom.

And that Bridegroom, your Jesus is faithful to you, for his heart is not hard. He is faithful even when you have been faithless to Him and have gone off and fooled around with other gods. When you hurt him, He still loves you. He doesn't "get" divorce. Makes no sense to him, because in his heart is a divine love that simply is unwilling to let you go, unwilling to lose you, no matter what. It's the same divine love that had no patience with his disciples trying to block the little ones from coming to him for his blessing. *"Let the little children come to me; do not hinder them."* It's the same divine love that rebuked the disciples when they were trying to prevent the kids from coming to and seeing Jesus. It's a divine love that simply doesn't give up, doesn't "get" giving up, and will put no barrier between you and Him. It's same divine love that even when you put up barriers or try to put up barriers for any of God's precious children, He tears them down. It's the same divine love that welcomes all of his children, from zero to over a hundred, to his throne of grace. He wants all people to hear the Word of God and see what is going on as He gives His gifts to His people.

All of this, you see, is pictured in the way God—not we, not Adam, not our society—long ago described the institution of marriage and family.

God established marriage and family to be an image of His own unfailing commitment to you, his people.

Therefore, if there is anything in this sad world that can bring hope and future to counter the mess we've made of trying to do marriage and family on our terms because of the hardness of our hearts, thinking we know better than God, it's the open hearts of Jesus. His open heart mirrors, for us for us the Father and reveals the unfailing love of God, his "patience and loving kindness toward us" that "have no end".

Come, taste it anew, at your Bridegroom's Table as He pours into you more forgiveness than you've got sin and more life than you've got death. He sends you forth forgiven and renewed to begin mirroring in your families and your neighborhood the divine love of your Bridegroom, who holds you fast and has become one with you forever.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.