

"You Are a Glimpse of God"

² Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

³ "What did Moses command you?" he replied. ⁴ They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

⁵ "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. ⁶ "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' ⁷ 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. ¹¹ He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. ¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

¹⁵ I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Somewhere on the wall of my mother's house is a picture of a bleach-blonde haired boy, sitting and smiling in a pile of leaves. He's wearing a striped t-shirt and some retro tennis shoes (that would probably fetch quite a price on Ebay these days). And he's got that look on his face that only kids seem to have—the look like everything is right in the world and that there couldn't be anything better than sitting right here in this pile of leaves right now. Anytime I see this picture of my 2-year-old self, I can't help but say, "Man, those were the good ol' days." It was so much better, so much simpler, so much easier then, wasn't it?

I wonder if we might have similar thoughts as we hear Jesus and the Pharisees discuss marriage and divorce this morning. On the one hand, these are important topics, and they need to be discussed openly and honestly in the light of God's Word. But on the other hand, Jesus' own words take us back to the "good ol' days," too, to a time before divorce and all its painful consequences were even an issue. Jesus answers the Pharisees' pointed and scheming questions by taking us back to Creation, to God's own words after his epic and astounding symphony of created work. Do you remember what God called his creation? **"Very good"** (Ge 1:31). The land formed and the waters gathered, the heavenly stars and planets, the man and woman God made and brought together in marriage—it was all good. But this isn't just self-serving nostalgia. This is the perfect God's assessment of his perfect work. "This is good. This is beautiful. This is just as it should be."

And this is where Jesus starts in his response to the Pharisees. **"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."** (Mk

10:6-9). God set up this system, this institution, where a man and woman cease to be two people pursuing their own goals, and instead become physically and emotionally united in marriage. And God said, “This is good.” This is good for man and woman to have this companionship and intimacy. This is good for man and woman to bear children and to raise them, teach them, protect them, and eventually to become the father and mother that these children leave to start their own family. This is good for man and woman to be married!

And this is good, too, for man and woman to support and complement and help each other, even outside of marriage. This is good for man and woman to work and serve together—in the world, in the workplace, in the church. What blessings God has given to man and woman through each other! This is good! These are God’s good and blessed gifts for his people. And as God’s good and blessed gift for his people, God reserves all authority here. This is his arena. **“Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate”** (Mk 10:9).

But perhaps when we hear these words, we don’t easily identify the “good” in God’s good gift. And maybe, we even begin to doubt whether this gift was ever good or was ever a blessing for God’s people—like Billy Joel sings, “The good ol’ days weren’t all that good.” Because what we see when we look at this world around us doesn’t always match the good and blessed gifts that God has given. Families are torn apart by divorce and abuse. Sex with anyone at any time in any way seems to be the driving motivation in many relationships. Children are often viewed as a burden, as a resource-consuming clamp on our social lives. Even the idea of marriage itself is seen as merely an option—an old-fashioned and overly restrictive one, at that—for people who’ve already lived and slept together. Good and blessed gifts? Hardly.

And maybe it surprises us to learn that some of these same attitudes and perspectives were being kicked around already in Jesus’ day. Our text today gives us a glimpse into how marriage was sometimes seen as a disposable distraction. **Some of the 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”** (Mk 10:2-4).

There’s an awful lot that gets revealed in this short exchange. Certainly, it’s eye-opening to see the Pharisees trying to get Jesus to take their bait and fall into their trap. They’re hoping that he wades into this seemingly impossible debate, stumbles and fumbles on both sides of the issue, and then loses any respect, credibility, or authority he might have. But maybe even more eye-opening is the topic that they use to bait him—none other than God’s good and blessed gift of marriage! You can almost hear their wheels spinning. *Go ahead, Jesus! Explain to these people who have suffered through the sin and pain of divorce how marriage can be such a good gift! Explain to these people why they can’t just take the easy way out—especially since Moses himself said it’s fine, maybe even good, to end a marriage!*

And here is the Son of God’s answer: **“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law”** (Mk 10:5). “Here’s the problem,” Jesus says. “YOU!” And his words are not just directed at Pharisees who were more interested in getting rid of Jesus than they were in knowing God’s law. It’s also directed at me. And you. It’s directed at people who still today see marriage as an optional arrangement. *One man and one woman? For life? Really?!* God’s Word here is directed at people who have a sinful nature that will eagerly do anything it can to shirk God-given blessings and responsibilities, or that will see the reality of sin in our lives as a sick and twisted rationale for more

sin. *Well, God, it's not my fault we've fallen out of love. He never really loved me. She was only in it for the money. Better to scrap the whole thing!*

But the problem goes even deeper. Because maybe there's a temptation to sit here today, thinking, "Well, I'm not divorced." Or, "I'd never do that." Or maybe, "I'm not even married!" But God says, "The problem is still YOU!" The problem is not the divorce, but the hard heart behind it. And that is a problem we all have. It's a heart that has its origins in the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve accepted the lie behind the devil's temptation: *Did God really say...?* The two that God had united together in this good and blessed gift of marriage were torn apart as they thought, "No, I don't think God has been totally honest, totally clear, totally good to me. And I need to find my own way in this mess."

And that same, stubborn, hard lie has infected our hearts ever since. It's been passed down to each and every one of us sitting here this morning. It leads us to question the goodness of God's gift of marriage. It leads us to try and rationalize our sin. It leads us to rely on gut instinct or common sense in our lives instead of God's clear Word. To such as these, who doubt and question and disobey, God should rightly give punishment rather than his good and blessed gifts.

But there, standing in the midst of our rebellious sin and deep-seated doubt...and there, standing in the midst of our broken and bitter attitudes about marriage and children and families...and there, standing in the midst of the Pharisees' foolish and futile trap...there is yet another gift that God gives to his people. There is the Savior, the one that not only comes to point the Pharisees and us back to the truth of God's Word, but the one who also comes to fulfill that very Word for us. There is our bridegroom—the one who unites himself to us and changes...everything! We heard it pictured beautifully in our second reading this morning: **"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and give 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"** (Ephesians 5:25-27).

There is another picture that I look at, a picture that my wife and I have up on the wall in our house. It's a picture of her grandparents on the day after their wedding. They are standing outside, but they're not dressed in their wedding clothes. Instead, they are wearing overalls and work boots. And they are each holding a milking bucket in their hands. Because even the day after their wedding, the cows still needed to be milked. It's not what many would call the prettiest wedding picture. But for us and to us, it's beautiful. Without this couple, my wife and I would not be married.

Perhaps it's not the prettiest picture to the world, but for us—to such as these sinful husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, children and siblings—the picture of Christ is the most beautiful picture there is. This is the beautiful bridegroom God gives to his people. But he did not come clothed in power and majesty and the infinite glory that was rightly his as the Son of God. To rescue his bride, he came clothed in ordinary human flesh. And he came clothed in the garments of work—of obeying God's holy law perfectly, and suffering the sweat and the shame of rejection and persecution. And he came to be sullied and stained and bloodied by the sin of his betrothed. The very ones he came to rescue nailed him to a cross. He did all the hard work so that his bride—you and me—could be washed and cleansed and covered in his perfection.

There is a reason God uses this picture of a marriage to explain what our Savior has done for us. When it comes to our human relationships, there is nothing more intimate, more meaningful, more powerful even than the connection between husband and wife. And God says to us, “Now just imagine how much greater this is with your perfect, loving Savior!” You are buried with Christ—united with him in death so that his death, his payment for sin, the punishment he suffered has been credited to you. You are now dead to sin and death! You are alive with Christ—his resurrection means that you too will rise. It means that you have an eternal home in heaven. And it means that each and every day, with the confidence of your baptism, you rise to live a new life in thanks to God and in anticipation of that eternal life you have in heaven through Christ.

And here we get to the meat of what this means for us, **“People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them (Mk 10:13-16).**

Do you see how your bridegroom changes everything? He gives a beautiful glimpse of it in how he rebukes his disciples and welcomes the little children. He marries himself to you, he cleanses you with his blood, he covers you with his perfection...so that you get to be a glimpse of him! And today especially, do you see how you get to be that glimpse in your own family, in your own home? To such as these—to those whom Christ has rescued—God gives the privilege of serving and supporting families. As husbands and wives, you get to be a glimpse of God in how you pray for each other, sacrifice for each other, and strengthen your marriage through the study of God’s Word. As fathers and mothers, you get to be a glimpse of God in how you instruct your children in love, confess your sins and failures to them, and point them to their Savior and do not hinder them. As children and siblings, you get to be a glimpse of God in how you serve and respect your parents, work to make your parents’ job joyful, and set a wonderful example of child-like trust in the Savior who welcomes you into his arms.

And God looks at all such things as these, at all such glimpses of God, and says, “My children, this is good! This is beautiful. This is wonderful. This is just as it should be!” Think of how our Christian day school is blessed by parents who love and serve each other and raise their children in the Lord! Think of how our church’s ministry is blessed by those who may not have children of their own, but still pray for families, and also recognize God’s gracious invitation to let all people find welcome in the arms of the Savior! Think of how God’s kingdom is served by people that pass on the faith, and serve as glimpses of God in their families!

We are not perfect. We fail. We falter. But to be a glimpse of God means to know the power behind the glimpse. It is to know the Savior who has bought us with his blood and clothed us with his forgiveness. May God strengthen us to be glimpses such as these. Amen.