

Re-Opening To Divine Presence:

*"Peacemaking Places Awe Above
Law...and it begins at home!"*

Mark 10:2-16, Psalm 26, Job 1:1, 2: 1-10
October 7, 2018

Bet you're wondering if I'm gonna deal with the divorce issue today. Yes, it's a part of the story, but just a part.

It's the subject for sure because the Pharisees brought it up to try once again to trick Jesus,

and framed marriage the way they did. But, what's the issue beneath this subject that Jesus is addressing?

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In its day, this teaching of Jesus on divorce is a huge step forward in the rights of women and for children and families, and even for men

...for where one is artificially held down, one is being artificially held up...both pay a price...albeit the one being held down pays quicker and more intensely!

Jesus is teaching just and right relationships for all.

Today's lesson is not a teaching on divorce. This teaching uses divorce as a springboard to remind us God intends for all of us to live in just relationship with each other.

That means looking within, holding everyone to the same expectations and invitations, opening our hearts through grace.

And realize, the law does not define what is right and life-giving...we are to rise above a law which sets forth a minimum not a maximum of integrity and justice for us!

We are called to right relationships that are just and called to commit ourselves to them.

Yet, we all know there are times when Jesus calls us to leave relationships because they are harmful or abusive or unloving...."cut it off/tear it" out from last week's scripture lesson.

Jesus is calling us to a higher standard than what may be culturally or legally allowed.

God calls us to live our lives beyond what laws expect of us. Laws don't bring justice, people do!

It's awe...not law...

we are to aspire to and ascribe to in our lives!

And...

Isn't it amazing how if the sin...the failing...isn't yours, it's much easier to condemn it.

Isn't it amazing what we perceive as our failings and what we let escape our attention and fall off our radar screen?

Isn't it amazing how we use someone else's "failings" as a way to keep people out... out of our lives and responsibilities and even out of our churches...

use "sin" as a way to keep people out rather than bring them in...

resisting seeing how our own "sin" ...  
our own failings make us all much more alike  
than we are different?

Forgetting the church is a place for the broken who have eyes to see and ears to hear and a deep desire for more in their lives.

If any of us is to walk in integrity with our God we must see our own failings....realizing God's emphasis is not on our "sinfulness" but on our awareness.

a God who calls us to turn our lives around, re-turn... and truly live free and able....

calls us not because we are sinless, but because we are not hopeless/lost causes.

Because God is gracious, loves each of us so much just as we are, and wants good things for all of us!

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Job confidently looks beyond circumstances to find meaning in his life... a meaning based in right relationship with God.

The psalmist finds himself on "level ground" in his life...a time when he is able to look within and walk with integrity and resist evil-doers and hypocrites...seeking to be redeemed during moments of self-awareness and inner strength.

And the Pharisees?

It was a man's world. It was against a backdrop of extreme patriarchy Moses gave a new instruction.

Just as an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was a huge step forward in the justice world of the Old Testament,

Moses' decree requiring a man to have a certificate of divorce was a huge step forward in its time.

It allowed a process, time for the woman.

Previously, men could divorce their wives...of whom they had many...divorce for any reason, at any moment,

and she had no recourse...and often nowhere to go...and the children?

Women could be charged with adultery. Men were not charged.

Women and children were as property.

There was no just relationship, no mutual value, no rights...in the law.

Moses said there must be a process and a reason...
and a woman declared free.

Jesus' called this a good step because our hearts were hardened...stuck, frozen as if what is legal is what is right.

A first step but only a first step.

Jesus recalls at creation God's intention of mutuality, respect, relationship...making male and female, all people, equals in God's sight.

This is God's deepest desire for us...just relationships of mutual respect and dignity.

The Pharisees framed this as a man and woman.

But this teaching of Jesus' is not limited to male-female relationships. Or limited to marriage relationships!

To tear apart a relationship is indeed painful to God and to us. There are few good reasons do so....

but there are reasons...as Jesus pointed out in last week's lesson:

no relationship, no habit, no mind-set or choice
should ever be allowed to rot our lives and kill us off and bring us to a hellish
existence...separation, isolation.

This is outside of God's intention for our well-being.

Jesus says there are no excuses for **not** responding to such situations.

Nothing can keep us from God and the fullness of life except our own denial of the way things are
and then continuing to choose poorly!

The story goes on, with the disciples,
Jesus surpasses Moses' understanding and calls forth yet another huge step
forward in justice...

do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Saying both men and women can divorce but neither one can do so on their own, or
else it is nothing more than adultery.

Just as it takes two to be in relationship, it takes two to go out of relationship... a
conversation (in non-abusive relationships).

Such a decision is no small thing and cannot be made by one party outside of
conversation with the other...without mutual agreement.

Jesus elevates women's value and their God-given right to be on an equal plane
with men.

And for the second time in just a few chapters,
Jesus follows teachings on right relationships between adults with an invitation to
treat children

with the same dignity and respect with which
we ought to treat adults.

Right relationship...our heavenly lives depend upon it. Jesus says so.

You see...power over, manipulation in relationship is often a mask for our
sadness...pain that has nowhere to go and so comes out as anger...or depression.

Hope feels blocked, we act out at the other,
and the suffering (of both parties)
takes on a life of its own.

We know from the teachings of Jesus this is not God's desire for any of us...to
suffer...faith isn't about enduring suffering.

Faith is about reframing our suffering...
seeing it differently.

Perhaps today's lesson is about how we can reframe suffering, the suffering of an
adult world
of problems...reframe it with a child-like faith.

What differentiates the faith of a child and that of adults?

What are the qualities of a child-like faith?

Children are...Trusting. Dependent. Vulnerable.
Playful. Direct.

Yes. But all these qualities lead to one thing:

Kids aren't defensive...they accept things and move on expecting something good
to happen next.

They don't expect pain and so they haven't built up walls...walls of ideas and
resistance...
walls around situations.

And so, they remain open

to a new thing happening,
to good coming from bad,
to new approaches to every situation,
to asking new questions of life.

WOW!!!

It never would occur to a child that it is anyone's intention that they suffer. And
so, even when they do, they hold it as temporary.

They do not blame, they engage life. They look to life.

It's so simple for children. It's so hard for adults.

We carry grudges.

We vow never to get burned again.

We keep asking the same old questions of life
over and over again.

We spin our wheels and get angrier and angrier.

We blame and shame.

What makes it so difficult is that to be child-like we have to unlearn being adult-like.

We adults often have to unlearn something in order to learn something new.

The disciples had the idea that Jesus was going to be a David-type king. They had to unlearn that.

They thought the people clamoring around Jesus needed to be kept away or brought to order. They had to unlearn that.

They thought that Jesus came to free them to live in their own land. They had to unlearn that...Jesus came to offer freedom within your own life.

They had to unlearn so they could learn a new thing and a new approach to life.

What do you have to unlearn in order to come to life less defensively with a curious and open mind?

What are you defensive about...your weight, your right to have things, your right to be the boss at home, your right to remain non-committal, your right to take care of others, your right to be angry, to leave or stay?

We've become too complicated.

Perhaps we need to focus less on what we've learned, how we've been burned, and focus more on how to use our child-given imaginations as we approach life.

And, all the head-learning in the world won't help you face a tough situation that has a lot of suffering in it. What will help?

Imagining a new response to what's happening in your life...a new way to be in what's happening.

Re-set. Re-adjust. Re-start. Re-focus...
as many times as you need to.

It's imagination, not education,
that gets us through the suffering, the problems.

And education and therapy may help you see what you have to unlearn, but how do you do it, re-do it?

You have to start being different
by seeing yourself differently...
the way God does. Think on that...

How do you get the energy to respond to life differently?
It begins by imagining life can be different...
a spiritual approach. It's a leap of faith.

Can you imagine a different life in the life you have?

Maybe begin by imaging Jesus...imagining Jesus in your life, standing by you in the midst of the problem...
as you are tempted to argue, to defend with selfish pride, to divorce yourself from people, literally and figuratively.

*How would you respond differently to your life
if Jesus was right beside you?*

Too tough to think of Jesus standing there while you are “acting out” as an adult isn't it?

Then begin by imagining Jesus inviting you to come close enough that he could support and comfort you,
even when others would prevent it.

Imagine yourself Jesus on Jesus' lap remembering
*he wants your life to be full of the joy of a child,
to be just, to be full of trust in the providence of God moment to moment.*

Providence of God? That's when God's timing and your timing come together...
it's when God's deepest longing for you and your longing for yourself meet in daily relief and freedom.

You are free to imagine a different life for yourself.
Jesus says so. God wants it for you.

Jesus is calling us to be impish children, not well-behaved by adult standards.
Fully engaged.

Jesus is calling us to come and to trust and to be open to **new solutions to old problems**
by letting down our defenses long enough
to ask a different question of life
and find a new answer, an unexpected one.

Are you angry, suffering? Your faith is in pain.

Take two children to play, and call God in the morning.

Re-mind, re-connect, re-invigorate, re-acquaint, re-move,
re-awaken, re-vive, re-frame, re-group, re-pond,
re-member, re-imagine, re-frain, re-new, re-purpose, re-lax, re-align, re-purpose,
re-group, re-deem, re-store, re-ally!