

Opening Prayer

GOOD and generous Lord, You have once more brought the year full circle, through planting and growing and ripening to harvest time, and autumn.

We thank You for the sun and the wind, the rain and the dew, the minerals of the earth and all the plants that grow and all the beasts and birds of farm and field. We marvel at Your wonderful ways of bringing food from the earth for man's good.

Dear God, help us to use Your rich gifts as You want us to. Teach us to share them with our neighbor when he is in need. Make us see, in the marvelous succession of sea sons, and in the growth and ripening of our crops, the merciful, generous hand of Your divine providence.

Help us to realize, too, that if we keep Your commandments and live according to the inspirations of Your grace, we shall also reap a plentiful harvest in the autumn of our lifetime: a harvest that we will be able to enjoy forever and ever, where no rust can destroy, nor blight spoil any least part of it. Amen.

What God Has Joined Together . . .

October 4, 2009

Mark 10:1 - 15

¹Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.

²Some 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.

⁴They 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, ⁸and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

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

¹³People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴When 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. ¹⁵I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted.

Thanks be to God.

After hearing the words of our scripture reading this morning, it would only be natural to conclude that today's sermon would be about divorce and remarriage. Well . . . it's not. Stop for just a moment and remember that we've been following several weeks of teachings from Jesus that concern serving people, welcoming those who have been disenfranchised and marginalized by society as explained through the imagery of children - an imagery that is repeated again at the end of our reading today. Why? What is Jesus purpose for drawing our attention again to these images? We will see.

We've been called upon during the last week to recognize just who Jesus is; not only our perception of Jesus as a great teacher, but the realization the He is, as Peter stated so confidently and with conviction just a few Sundays ago, the Messiah. "You are the Christ!" The disciples were called on to affirm their understanding of Jesus, and Peter got it right. We, too, are called on daily to answer this question for ourselves and as a witness to others. In addition, we've been warned that we must keep our minds on the things of God, rather than the things of man; ensuring that we foster our lives, our relationships and our ministries with what God has given us, not with what we ourselves have deemed important, else we be equated, like Peter, to Satan himself. When we allow ourselves to be distracted by the world, Jesus knows that the evil one is not far away. Peter, having gained The Master's favor, attempted to reprimand Jesus following a

teaching on the fate of the Son of Man. "Get the behind me Satan", he calls out to Peter; "You do not have your mind on the things of God, but rather the things of Man."

Through our relationship with Christ, the risen Messiah, God has once again joined mankind with the Kingdom of Heaven. We begin a new life, a life routed in faith. However, still being in our human form, it is natural that we should stumble and fall. We are selfish beings, worried about our own needs, all the while ignoring the needs of others; not just the needs of those hundreds and thousands of miles away where we can place them "out of sight and out of mind" but we also ignore the needs of those closest to us. We fail daily to meet the needs of neighbors; those in our places of business, our communities, our extended families and even those within our own homes. In failing to meet these needs, we inadvertently cause others to stumble and in turn weaken our relationship with Christ. It is easy to point a finger at the fundamentalist conservatives who insist on quoting scripture to further justify their bias and their hatred towards the LGBTQ community. But don't we also find ourselves at the pitching end of heartache and pain. I have so much pain in my heart for those who have made me feel less than I am in the eyes of God; for those who have robbed me of life, experience and happiness because of their inability to see the Kingdom of God as something bigger than their limited world view of reality.

Just as I expect them to learn to love and accept, so I must learn to accept and forgive. The bible has been used for centuries to hold back those who do not "fit the mold" of society. Blacks, Hispanics, woman and gays have been oppressed by society while uses God's Word to defend themselves. It isn't all about me, nor is it all about you. It is, however, all about God' Kingdome breaking forth in our Nation, our communities, our ministries, our relationships and our lives.

Last Friday, October 2, would have been Mahatma Gandhi's 140th birthday. I believe I've mention his view concerning Christianity before, but I find it worth mentioning again today. Gandhi once said, "I like your Christ, but not your Christians, they are so unlike your Christ" and so for hundreds of years it has been this way. Right back to time that Jesus himself walked the Earth. In our inability to forgive we are being equally unlike Christ as those who wheel the scriptures as a Sword of Heartache and Destruction rather than a Sword of Truth; the truth being that God love us all. Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong; they are weak but He is strong.

Who belongs to Jesus? The little ones, the same little ones we have heard so much about during the past few weeks and the same little ones we hear about in our scripture reading today. These images again are representative of those who have been forgotten and set aside by society; the marginalized and disenfranchised, if you will.

After Jesus and the disciples had arrived in Jordan, a few of the Pharisees came to test Jesus. They asked Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" This is the introduction of our scripture reading today. It isn't Jesus' response concerning divorce I want to look at, but rather the "nugget phrase" at the end of His response to them. Karen Moore, one of my fellow Emmaus students, describes locating the "nugget phrase" in a scriptural text as a sort of spiritual rock hunting experience. "Once the nugget is found," she states, "it is important to examine it like a jeweler examines a gem; turning it and holding it up to the light, bathing it in prayer and asking God for [its] practical application in this modern world." Oh if only we all looked at God's Word in this way; if only everyone took the time to discern God's Word for their lives, to bath it in prayer and to examine its application in our world today.

But I digress, back to our *nugget*. Christ's pinnacle to His response concerning divorce was this, "What God has joined together, let no one tear apart." Isn't that beautiful? "What God has joined together, let no one tear apart?" To even think that any man would be as bold as to even attempt such a disassociation seems futile on so many levels, yet we see it being attempted every day. People blow up abortion clinics and murder abortion doctors in the name of Christ. A boy in gym class is pelted with rocks by his classmates and forced to listen to the manifestation of their ignorance as they shout "faggot" at him; the sound of which hurts more deeply and more

harshly than the actual stones themselves. A young mother and her boyfriend sit on the front row of a funeral chapel, her newborn baby being laid to rest as the officiating pastor points his finger at the young couple insisting that it is *their* sin that caused the death of this child – “Repent and be saved,” he barks, “if you ever want to see your child again.”

God is in charge of so much more than just the “Thou shalls” and the “thou shall nots” of everyday existence. Christianity is not about judgment; it’s about shepherding, nurturing and guidance. Our Christian walk is about being joined to the Father through our hope in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. The Christian way of life is about being joined to the Father through our acceptance of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the Spirit of a loving, merciful God who wants relationship and reconciliation with His people, not about reaction through unnecessary roughness.

When Jesus states, “What God has joined together, let no one tear apart,” He is speaking not only to our earthly relationships; our marriages, our holy unions, or partnerships with one another, but he also speaks to our relationship with Him. Who was Moses to offer permission to grant a certificate of divorce? No one really, just a man, but it was offered in response to a hard heartedness that the people possessed. It didn’t make the marriage any less genuine or important in God’s eyes. If you have ever found yourself in relationship with Christ Jesus, no man has the right to take that from you and to be quite honest, no man has the ability to take that

from you. Your union with the Father through Christ Jesus is no less genuine in God's eyes than is the union given to the white, upper middle class, heterosexual male that dominates most of our modern mainstream culture today.

For those who say, "Hate the sin and love the sinner . . .," I say you better be talking about yourself, in fact you better be talking about ALL of God's children, not just a marginalized few. For those who say, "Well, we all have sin in our lives." I say Amen! . . . Nothing could be truer – "For all have sinned and short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) And let me also say that just as anger in of itself is not a sin, but rather it is our reaction to anger that causes sin, so homosexuality, in and of itself, is not a sin. Heterosexuals, homosexuals and bisexuals alike can live enslaved to a world of lust and passion, or can seek first to Glorify God in all that they do; to Glorify God through their time, talents, finances and their own committed relationships. Serving one another, whether it is our partners or the disenfranchised, we do so as a reflection of our service to Christ Jesus. In Mark 9:37, Jesus reminds us that "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." So not only is our service to others reflective of our relationship with Christ, but it is also reflective of our union with God.

At the end of our reading this morning, we read that "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."

The fundamentalist conservatives would have you believe this morning that some of you here today are not worthy of entering into relationship with God. Those who identify as LGBTQ are just as worthy of God's love and grace as any. Here Jesus warns that by purposefully placing yourself between Him and "[these] little children" you are in danger of missing out on the Kingdom of God. We are called to assist in, "The Kingdom of God breaking forth," not to aid in destroying a culture of people who do not "fit the mold."

The LGBTQ community has made great strides in the realm of social justice and has a long way to go to find their way out of the margins of mainstream society. However, know this. The LGBTQ community has never been forgotten by God. God does not marginalize His people; God does not disenfranchise, He welcomes the gays, the bisexual, transgendered and the intersex; God has not cast you aside, He welcomes you in. I am not speaking only to those who identify as LGBTQ this morning, to assume so would be as equally distasteful and miss-interpretive of the power of God's

love as those who say that only heterosexuals are deserving of relationship with God. Many of us, LGBTQ and straight alike, have been hurt by our families and been made to feel less than by our brothers and our sisters; not only our brothers and sisters in creation, but also our brothers and sisters in Christ. "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, Red, Yellow, [Gay, Straight, Bisexual, Transgendered, Intersexed], black and white, they are precious in his site. Jesus loves the little children of the world."

He has placed us together as a community of faith to remind us that we are not alone. We have come from various backgrounds, various faith traditions and with various experiences. But God reminds us each Sunday of His unending commitment and promise to love us, protect us and to never leave us. God will pick you up when you are down, God will give you strength when you are weak and God will remind you that you are important and worthy when the world tells you that you are not. "One God, One Love," this is the word given to us last week by God through our brother J.R. These four little words not only speak volumes, but affirm centuries of Christian teaching, doctrine and theology. "What God has joined together, let no one [*No One*] tear apart." "One God, One Love."

Do you know the one true God today? If not, I encourage you to get to know Him, He already knows you. There isn't anything in your life that can be kept a secret from God. He knows your every thought, your every

action and He knows your every pain, hurt, sorrow, joy and exaltation. In spite of all of this, God loves you anyway. Why? "One God, One Love!" Don't let the world tell you that you can't, because you can. Don't let your family and your friends tell you that you are not able, because you are. Don't let mainstream culture tell you that you are not loved . . . you are loved! "One God, One Love!"

I would like to offer you a time of personal reflection and prayer this morning. God has a plan for each and everyone one of us here today. Could we take just a moment to listen for God's voice this morning? As Bobby plays a little music, I would encourage you this morning to reach down, deep within your heart and ask God to speak to you this morning. There are those here this morning, including myself, would love to pray with you today. If we could, let's just take a moment together. . .

[Invite] [Encourage] [Pray]

Closing Prayer:

Let us pray.

Lord our God, you are the source of all good and the origin of all we are and do, receive our humble thanks for all your gifts. Enable us to respond to your loving kindness with the generous commitment of our lives to the service of your Kingdom. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen!