

27th Sun OT – Mark 10:2-16

According to Deuteronomy, divorce was permitted. The only difficulty for most interpreters were the ***grounds required***. Teachers like Shimmel were very *strict*, while others like Hillel were astonishingly *lax*. In his reply, Jesus sided with neither. He prohibited divorce altogether, arguing not from Mosaic legislation but from *the original plan of God*, when God created man from woman and made her his helpmate. The Church calls this the Natural Law.

Here Jesus defended ***the woman who had no rights*** according to the laws of the time and he forbade his critics to play loose with an institution that belonged to God's original creation. Such teaching was risky for Jesus as he travelled through the territories of the much divorced King Herod.

Matthew's Gospel was to allow divorce on the grounds of unchastity. Paul permitted a believer to separate from an unbeliever. Neither allowed divorce for the hardness of heart which Jesus condemned.

Let's quickly look again at the Book of Genesis from which Jesus takes his quote. Technically it is from the second creation story in chapter 2. Your bible will note this passage as the ***Second Story of Creation***. Most Christians will be surprised that there are not just one but two creation stories. The first creation story starts at the beginning of Genesis chapter 1. "God created man in his image, ***in the divine image*** he created him; ***male and female*** he created them." (Notice man was not created first, nor was female created from any parts of the male.)

Jesus chose the second creation story, probably because it is the oldest, from the Yahwist author/s. The first creation story came later with the priestly author who also collated the final form of the bible and put their version first. When we decide on which quote to use from the Old or New Testament we can also decide which to use only if we are allowing the ***Scriptures to inform us or speak to us***.

Jesus' second conflict was with his own disciples who wanted to send away children who had been brought to him. Like women of the time, children had no legal rights. We know that to receive a child in Jesus' name, is to receive Jesus himself. Their powerlessness, dependence and vulnerability are a symbol of ***greatness in the kingdom***. Mark challenged the lax Roman world to

respect women and children as Jesus had done. Maybe that is why Jesus chose the second reading from Genesis.

Notice why the Pharisees were interested in this law of Moses, "...they were trying to trap him." In other words, they were using the Scriptures for their own devious purpose rather than allow let the Scriptures speak to them. Another example of the Pharisees' abuse of Scripture was is in John's gospel when they brought ***the woman caught in adultery*** (and conveniently left the man) to trap Jesus in his words.

From *Catholic Women Preach*, Susan Ross writes, "...a clue to understand (Jesus' prohibition against divorce) comes in that last comment (that he) makes about ***being like a child***," because she writes, "Children flourish with love and recognize authenticity...Jesus may have had in mind was a child's openness and especially a child's response to being loved unconditionally, which is how God loves us...The Pharisees were really asking about conditional love."

In her closing words she writes, "If we are to read these passages generously...we must read them in the most loving way possible, since what they are all about is ***love***; *God's love* in sharing life with us, our experience of *finding someone to love and who loves us*, the *love of the parents* in looking over their family, the *love of Jesus* in being with us...(rather than) the tendency to try and find exceptions or loopholes to the love of God which, as St. Paul reminds us, surpasses all understanding."

That is why there is no more powerful example of God's love than a faith community, where all are welcome, to worship and celebrate together God's love for us as we struggle each day to model that love for others.