

From the God-Child's Point of View **Job 1:1, 2:1-10; Mark 10:2-16**

Mark 10:2-16

From there Jesus went to the area of Judea across the Jordan. A crowd of people, as was so often the case, went along, and he, as he so often did, taught them. Pharisees came up, intending to give him a hard time. They asked, "Is it legal for a man to divorce his wife?"

Jesus said, "What did Moses command?" They answered, "Moses gave permission to fill out a certificate of dismissal and divorce her." Jesus said, "Moses wrote this command only as a concession to your hardhearted ways. In the original creation, God made male and female to be together. Because of this, a man leaves father and mother, and in marriage he becomes one flesh with a woman—no longer two individuals, but forming a new unity. Because God created this organic union of the two sexes, no one should desecrate his art by cutting them apart."

When they were back home, the disciples brought it up again. Jesus gave it to them straight: "A man who divorces his wife so he can marry someone else commits adultery against her. And a woman who divorces her husband so she can marry someone else commits adultery."

The people brought children to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus was irate and let them know it: "Don't push these children away. Don't ever get between them and me. These children are at the very center of life in the kingdom. Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in." Then, gathering the children up in his arms, he laid his hands of blessing on them.

Hear ends the reading. *Through these human words, may your holy word be heard.*
Amen.

In an interview last month in the *Dallas Morning News*, Anglican archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu of South Africa was quoted as saying, "*The media tend to inundate us with rather unpleasant news. We have the impression that evil is on the rampage, is about to take over the world. We need to keep being reminded that there is a great deal of good happening in the world. Ultimately, good prevails.*"

His words have haunted and angered me this past week because I could not muster a sense of good prevailing at all in our world; evil seemed to have the upper hand these past days beginning on Monday with the slaughter of Amish school girls in Lancaster County, PA, then the revelation that Representative Mark Foley was instant-messaging what one national commentator described as "yucky" comments to Congressional male pages. Closer to home, there was more "rather unpleasant news": a 45 year-old Clarence mother of four is strangled while jogging alone on a bike path; a

local dentist is accused of molesting not once but over a period of time, one of his young patients. These events certainly were not the only unpleasant news stories of the week but that so many involved children cannot escape one's notice. Ultimately, good prevails?

When more misery hits Job (In chapter 1 of Job, we learn that everyone of his employees have been murdered, his source of income destroyed by fire, and all his children, while at a party, are killed by a freak tornado storm) with the onset of ulcerated sores and scabs, his practical wife duly asks him to curse God, be struck dead and be done with it all. But no curse comes from Job's lips. "We take the good days from God, why not also the bad days?" he says.

The misery of divorce – whether directly or through family and friends – still oozes and festers for many. Like lightning that burns precious dreams and expectations, like a thundering wind that brings down the roof on your future, divorce wrecks havoc every which way, and has for centuries and in all cultures. Jesus does not deny the reality of divorce but his words on the subject are nonetheless hard, tough. Rather unpleasant news, wouldn't you say, for those of us conditioned to think of Jesus as loving, open and accepting? In his book The American Religion, Harold Bloom claims that we Americans have one predominant faith and that is that God really, *really* likes us and is just thrilled to be with us on any occasion. "We are," Bloom says, "basically good people in the embrace of a completely permissive God." So, in his hard-line response to the question on divorce and remarriage, Jesus' comes across as pretty legalistic. Where's the warm and fuzzy Jesus we love to love so much? "Anyone, man or woman, who divorces and remarries is committing nothing less than adultery," Jesus says. Wow! Is Jesus having a bad day, or what?

Maybe . . . you see, he's walking up to Jerusalem, the city where his disciples and friends will divorce themselves from him through betrayal; to Jerusalem, where he will go to court and be arrested, and then hung up to die. The shadow of the Cross stretches towards him. And now his biggest critics, the Pharisees, once again try to embroil him in a testy debate to see what side of the socio-politic religious fault line he takes on one of the hottest topics of the day. Does Jesus advocate easy, "no fault" divorce as many of his fellow rabbis did? For *any* cause, as one group argued?

Remembering that in the setting of this story, in a society where women are considered chattel, the property of their father or husband, even brothers – in a time when women rarely owned property, marriage was a guarantee of support for women and their children. Hear in these hard words the tough position Jesus takes by putting himself clearly on the side of the weak and powerless. And he does so not by arguing the law, and for gay men and women, bi-sexual and trans-sexual people and their families, this is not a debate on who can marry whom but rather why marriage at all. Jesus does not debate what is right or wrong but points to what is intended. And he makes his appeal by going back to the beginning of all things: the order and beauty of creation as told in Genesis 1. You see, Jesus reaches through and past the law of Moses to the very Beginning.

These words on divorce and remarriage from our Lord have caused pain for so many people. I know that it has in my life and in the life of many of my closest friends. But, Beloved, it is hardhearted for anyone to use these words of Jesus as a weapon against anyone, even themselves, who, for many reasons, has decided to end their marriage or who has remarried. Separation of all kinds, particularly marital separation, hurts to the bone. Why? Because in some way we know, deep inside us, that divorce and betrayal it is not what is intended for any of us. And it is to this deep hurt and vulnerability that God-in-Christ comes. What Jesus says here is not a once-and-for-all, “God said it, I believe it, that settles it” final word about divorce and remarriage. There are no words of curse from Jesus: he does not condemn divorced people. Rather, this is his response to a legal question put to him by his fiercest critics, all of whom are trying to pin on him the scarlet “B” for blasphemer.

Hear the good news, the blessing, in this text: Jesus comes down hard and swiftly on the side of the weak, the vulnerable, the defenseless: those without the support of the social and economic system, those without a voice and vote. God intends that we be together, and stay together, in faithfulness with one another, even during the bad days. Unity and community is God’s desire for us, and marriage is one of the greatest expressions of that intention and desire of God. Without commitment to one another, especially during “the bad days,” there is little order, chaos gets headline coverage.

Is it any surprise, then, that this text on marriage and divorce ends with an encounter between the God-Child and a group of children? Children, that mystery and art of two flesh becoming one. We don’t know who are the people pushing the children forward. And we don’t know why they are wanting Jesus to lay his hands on them. They may have heard of his power of touch to heal skin diseases, help the cripple walk and work, open the eyes of the blind, stop hemorrhages. Maybe some of the children were ill or living on the street. Maybe they were orphaned and scared, living off the emotional crumbs of extended relatives who saw them as another mouth to feed. Or was their mother recently given a certificate of divorce because her husband found someone “more pleasing to the eye”? [This was a legitimate reason for a husband to divorce his wife.] Why did they come pressing for a blessing of peace and prosperity?

We don’t know the answer to any of these questions, but we do know for certain that Jesus became indignant when his disciples started shooing away the children. It is here that Jesus speaks a “once-and-for-all” word that continues to echo throughout the years. He commands, yes, commands, “Let the children come to me. Don’t ever get between them and me. Never put in their way anything that makes it difficult for them to know my love or to receive what I want to give them – blessing! These children are at the very center of life in the kingdom. Mark this: Unless all of you accept God’s kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you’ll never get in.” What the God-Child wants us to grasp, to know in our bones and in our flesh, is that entrance into the Commonwealth of God is not about earning our way in. It’s not about keeping any law or living up to legal obligations. It’s not about being right or wrong. It’s not even about whether you’ve been hurt by another or you’ve hurt someone by a broken promise. Life in the Kingdom is about taking a gift, receiving God’s blessing of wholeness and new beginning as easily

as a child slips his hand into yours to cross the street, taking this blessing as willingly as a child takes a small present from you hand into hers.

Jesus wants to give to all his blessing especially to the weak and vulnerable, those who have been hurt and seek healing, those who have hurt and seek forgiveness. And he commands his followers to do the same and by doing so to be a blessing in the world. Doing this, indeed, ultimately good will prevail.

With anticipation,

Elena Delgado

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