

The Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost, PROPER 22
4 October AD 2009

Hebrews 2:1-13/ Mark 10:2-16

It has been my stated intent to preach through the epistle readings as much as possible. However given the times, it is as important as ever to clarify the topics presented in the Gospel reading assigned for this Sunday.

Said one man to his golfing partner, “what do you think of the institution of marriage?” Without missing his swing, the other fellow replied, “it’s okay, if you like living in an institution.”

The anonymous author of Hebrews spares no paper in his effort to prove from the Old Testament how the Messiah—Jesus is superior to Moses, the prophets, the priesthood and finally superior even to the mighty angels of God in heaven. If you know anything at all about God’s angels, you know that they are his “*ministering spirits sent to serve (for the sake of) those who are to inherit salvation.* (1:14) The angels are numerous, powerful, eternal, and they watch over us. They have always been held in very high regard because they are a sign of God’s on-going concern for humanity—a sign of how highly God cares for us.



In scripture, the first human impulse is to bow in reverence at the awesome sight of an angel. They respond commanding the suppliant to stand up and worship God alone; “*do not be afraid,*” they say. Angels are first and foremost messengers for God. The shepherds in the vicinity of Bethlehem were *filled with fear* when the angels of God appeared to them. Their message, the messiah was born.

Jesus is superior in every way to the angels, and to every prophet, priest and king. The writer to the Hebrews announces the Good News this way: “*In many and various ways God spoke to our fathers in days of old... but now in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... the heir of all things.*” (1:1) And by virtue of his superiority we do well to pay attention to him. Our Lord’s words this morning are awkward—not for him, but for us. If we have not lived through divorce and re-marriage ourselves, we all know those who have; children, relatives, friends, colleagues at work, and even my fellow pastors. No family is immune.

Regarding clergy, a divorce once meant you were finished. That is no longer always the case. As if the divorce of their pastor wasn’t difficult enough for the congregation, what do you do when he moves away but his much loved ex-wife continues to reside in the house owned by the church? It’s happened. The tradition of an unmarried priesthood is not something our Roman Catholic friends should jettison without very careful consideration. Human traditions like an

unmarried clergy can be changed. But where Scripture is “the rule and norm for faith and life,” divinely revealed doctrine is a different matter. You cannot change the words of God. The constitution of our denomination, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod binds us to scripture; and where God’s Word speaks with clarity we yield to its authority

In the chief reading we’re reminded that Moses was compelled because of *human nature* to regulate divorce. The formalities included the writing of a document which decreed that a woman was free of her husband, and that both parties were free to remarry. The law was needed because of hardened hearts, that’s when people dig their heels in and refuse to concede their positions. Nothing is said here about those who are in the right or the one whose sin precipitated the action.

Even though the law was firmly established from the time of Moses, there were many differences of opinion about. What better way to trap Jesus? Did you notice, our Lord does not affirm or nullify the Mosaic regulation? Without any judgment Jesus simply notes that Moses had to make an allowance because humans are sinners. But, in the beginning, at creation, things were different.

The Father’s intentions are clear. God breathed his Spirit into us, created us male and female; he created us with needs and desires and we find them fulfilled in one who is very different from us. *She* is different in appearance—a delight to the eye. He is strong, silent and sometimes moody. Each of them reason through issues in ways unique to their gender. And, when the attraction is working well, and the love is mutual, the two become one being, one family, “*one flesh.*” The Bible notes that they stand before one another naked and unashamed. The intimacy that binds them they may share with no one else. And, this is all God’s doing from beginning to end. It is holy. “*What God has joined together, let not man put asunder.*”

The disciples were a little confused. They ask Jesus when they’re alone about the matter. Without approving divorce, Moses regulated the dissolution of a marriage for the sake of an orderly family life and the community peace. Clearly Jesus does not approve of divorce, but he recognizes it. Marriage remains the only safe place where, under God’s blessing, a man and a woman may express their sexuality.

I wouldn’t call marriage an institution, nor would I call it a tradition. Marriage is God-given: it’s part of the order God placed into creation and it is found in every culture. I would call it a haven, a safe place. Within the marriage covenant a man and a woman can enjoy companionship, intimacy and family without fear, without shame or embarrassment. In the sanctity of the home husbands and wives are free

to be themselves, at liberty to speak their minds and raise their children. In marriage husbands and wives are truly gifts of God to each another. When the storms of life hit they “*hold fast*” (KJV says *cleave*) to each other.

But the gift of marriage can become a burden. The sins we find out in the world make their way into the home. The hardening of hearts leads to the disordering of family life. When things get bad sometimes the lesser of evils is the dissolution of marriage—even among Christians, sadly. But this was not God’s will at creation; it was not part of his plan; it was a concession only.

The one thing you and I know, is the one thing you and I need to make clear to the members of our family, to our friends, and even get it straight in our own minds; **Jesus loves sinners.** I might add: the fact that she had previously been married five times, didn’t stop Jesus from talking to that woman at the well. His love and forgiveness brings healing and renewal.

However much he may dislike what we do on an occasion, Jesus loves us like nothing else. He has pity on us. He died for our hardened hearts, for the wrongs we do to each other, for our broken promises, for our disordered lives. Like no mighty heavenly angel could, Jesus died to make us whole. The Bible says, “*he himself is our peace.*” (Eph. 2).

Yes, Jesus is superior in every way. No teacher or prophet had his insight into the mind of God. None ever gave their lives as an atoning sacrifice. None were ever raised from death by God. Only Jesus. May the guardian angels who serve our God, watch over your homes and keep them in his love always.

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