



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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October 18, 2009

20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 10:2-16

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Genesis 2:18-24

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 139b

Second Lesson: Ephesians 5:21-6:4

Gospel: Mark 10:2-16

### **Kingdom Attitude Adjustments**

Regarding marriage

Regarding children

We've been reading through a section of the Gospel of Mark where the Holy Spirit had Mark talk to us about what it means to be a disciple or a follower of Jesus. He talked to us a few weeks back about "anyone who wants to follow after me must pick up his cross and follow me." This morning we see Jesus picking up his cross in a sense and enduring two temptations toward his mission or two attacks on him that come from outside and from inside his circle of followers. And as he answers these questions and meets these challenges perfectly, which he does in our place because you and I aren't perfect, he really teaches us some areas about where we need to grow in order to be his followers or his disciples; two areas where we need attitude adjustments as we live in his kingdom and seek to serve him in response to the love he has shown us in taking away our sins.

They are places that really come pretty close to home. They are in the home. They are in our view of marriage and they are in our view of children. Two separate events in his ministry, but both dealing with the home, are grouped together for us by Mark as he talks about challenges and taking up our cross and following Jesus. So this morning we will focus on these attitude adjustments that you and I need.

The first cross that Jesus had to face was a question that wasn't just a question for information. We are told that it was a test that these Pharisees that were following after Jesus brought to him. It was a test not to find out the answer. It was a test that was designed just to trip him up, because they thought no matter how he answered it, they could turn the people against Jesus. If he says divorce is okay for any and every reason, they'll accuse him of being soft on divorce and what God had said in the Old Testament about marriage is for life. If he said you can't divorce, they'd say Moses allowed it, so then he would appear to be setting aside the Law and they could attack him. They evidently thought they had a good question that would trip Jesus up.

But notice what Jesus does. He takes them back to the Word of God and says, "You have the question. Here is where you go for answers to your questions. What did God say?" What did he say through Moses when they asked if it's lawful for a man to divorce his wife? He tells them Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away. It's true, that's in Leviticus. It's there that you could write a

certificate of divorce and send your wife away. That had kind of grown and changed over the years so that the teachers of the Law at Jesus day said that if your wife cooked a bad meal, you had every right to write a certificate of divorce and send her away. That isn't exactly what was in the Law of Moses, but it was in common practice at that time.

Knowing the sinful nature that lurks inside each of us, can you imagine how men took advantage of that when they saw someone they thought was more interesting or appealing than their own wife? They used it just as an excuse to, instead of having an affair, write a certificate of divorce, get rid of their wife and go spend their time with someone else. Our sinful nature convinces us that a lot of foolish things are good ideas. So you can see how it would play havoc with this.

So the question comes and Jesus says, "What did Moses say?" "He allowed you to write it." "Do you know why he did that?" Jesus says. He did that because your hearts are hard, because you are sinful. You have a sinful nature. That's why God told Moses to write this Law; part of his civil law for the governing of the children of Israel because it was a theocracy where God himself was the king. This part of it was part of the civil law. God knew that as sinners there would be marriages that end in divorce because we are sinners. We sin. That's who we are. That's what we do. So things would stay without chaos in the kingdom he was ruling over, the earthly kingdom he was ruling over, he had Moses write that they could have the certificate of divorce.

But he says that's not how God intended it. That's not what he wanted it. That was a realization that since the fall into sin, people are sinful. But he says to go back to the very beginning and see what God says about marriage. He made them male and female. And he said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." That's what God said about marriage when he instituted marriage. Marriage is a blessing that comes from God in Genesis 2. It was a part of his plan for his world. Husbands and wives would be united in marriage. It doesn't say anything about men being united in marriage. It doesn't say anything about women being united in marriage. It says "a man and a woman." That's God's plan.

Genesis 2, which is right before Genesis 3; Genesis 3 is the fall into sin. If there never would have been sin, there would still be marriage. It was part of God's plan for a perfect world that husbands and wives would unite and spend their lives together. If there would have been no sin, there would be no divorce and no separation. Jesus says, "What God has joined together, man shouldn't separate," because when it does, it involves sin.

God says in Scripture that when a spouse breaks the marriage bond by adultery or by desertion, the other spouse can seek a divorce and not be sinning. Jesus doesn't go into that detail here, but he gives us that word through some of his other Scripture writers. But even in those cases, there is still the sin of desertion. There's still the sin of adultery. When marriage ends except by God ending it through death, it involves sin.

So you can understand why Satan works hard in the home, because it is an area where he can turn a blessing of God into an area where we sin against each other. That's why I think he works so hard to get us to fight and argue, parents and children, husbands and wives, because this was a part of the blessing God had given a perfect world and he wants to just mess it up.

He does it in a number of ways. One of the ways he does it is he gets us to despise the gift of marriage as though it's just a human custom, just a rule of law of the land and to deny this truth that it is a blessing that God gave a perfect world. If we start viewing marriage that way, that marriage is as long as we both shall love instead of as long as we both shall live, Satan starts winning.

I think he does it another way. Satan attacks the gift of marriage by at times telling us that certain sins are worse than others. Did you ever notice how we do that? God says if you commit one sin, you are guilty of breaking the whole Law. He says that as plain as day. You and I can understand it, just like we can understand that it's daylight outside. We have that head knowledge, but we still try to rank sins, don't we? Usually here is how we rank them. The ones I don't think I'll commit are the worst, right? Murder, that's terrible! I'd never kill anyone, but if you killed someone, you're horrible. God couldn't really love you! Do you ever think that way?

God says if you commit one sin, you are damned to hell. When Satan gets us to think that certain sins are worse than others, he's doing it to trip us up in sinful pride so that we don't think we would have committed that sin. But it's kind of a false argument because if every sin condemns us to hell, wouldn't this be a little bit like saying to someone who lost a loved one that was decapitated in an auto accident, "Well, at least their arms weren't also cut off." If your head is cut off, you're dead, right? Does it really matter if your arms are then cut off or not? That's like saying, "You committed this sin, but at least it's not that sin." You're still damned to hell. Are you less damned to hell because you committed this sin that I think is not as bad as the one God says is just as bad? That's kind of foolish, isn't it?

Satan no doubt at all has gotten us as a society to look at divorce differently than we did a number of years ago, right? There's no denying that. But the fact of the matter is that when we look at it now and we see someone else who is caught up in this sin, if we look down our nose at them and say how terrible they are and that's awful that it happened, Satan has just tripped us up in the sin of pride. So we need to be on our guard against every attack of Satan when it comes to the gift of marriage, to keep us from looking down on those who have fallen into this sin, and instead love them in Christ and show them that it is sin, but Jesus took that sin away. We need to work so that they know God has forgiven them, and lead them to repentance, which is sorrow over sin, and trust that God takes that sin away. That's what God calls us to do. Satan calls us to look down on those that commit a sin that we think we wouldn't commit.

Be careful. Adjust your attitude so you see sin for what it is, not something to feel superior or inferior about, but something to take to the cross of Christ and there find full and complete forgiveness.

The disciples recognized this as a conundrum, didn't they? They kind of realized what Jesus was saying was different than what the teachers of the Law had said, so they asked him some more questions about it. And Jesus said that if someone says, "I don't want to be married to this spouse anymore so I can go be with that spouse," even if you get a legal certificate of divorce, it still is adultery in God's eyes. It is still sin that needs to be turned away from and taken to the cross of Christ for full and complete forgiveness.

That's the message that Christ came to this earth to bring us. That's why he lived in our place perfectly in all the temptations. All the temptations regarding marriage, regarding family, regarding pride, he was perfect in every one of them because you and I are not. That's why he went to the cross; to take all the sins that you and I commit in these areas to the cross so that they might be punished because God has said the wages of sin is death. But our God, in his awesome unfairness, sent Jesus to hell instead of us when he endured the agony of hell on the cross. So now we stand forgiven for our sins. Satan, as the accuser, will tell us God can't love us anymore. God, in his Gospel, says "I love you no matter who you are, no matter what you've done. And I take away your sins. I've done it. It's complete." God just says to us to believe it and rejoice.

We don't know how long the next part of the text takes place after the discussion on marriage, but I don't think they were one right after the other. There was probably sometime intervening where people now started bringing their children to Jesus. This temptation of Jesus, this cross he has to bear because he is carrying out his Father's will, comes not from outside, not from those who are openly his enemies. It comes from those closest to him, his disciples, right?

People are bringing their children to Jesus. We are not told that they are sick. It doesn't say they were brought there so that he would touch them and heal them. Maybe some were. We don't know that. It sounds more like they are bringing their children to Jesus because they wanted Jesus just to bless them, to speak some sort of blessing on them, touch them. And they recognize Jesus as someone from God. Perhaps many even realizing he is the Savior of the world, and they wanted their children to be close to him also.

If you remember, as we have been reading through Mark the last few weeks, this was a time in his ministry where Jesus often went off by himself so he could teach the disciples. They went away from the crowd. He was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time where he is going to go to that cross, and he was spending a lot of the time talking very plainly to the disciples. "We are going to go to Jerusalem. I am going to be betrayed. I am going to die. On the third day, I am going to rise again." He kept saying that plainly over and over. Maybe they were so used to now getting away by themselves that the disciples thought they were doing Jesus a favor by kind of shooing

these little ankle biters away from him so that he would have more time to teach them and not be distracted by them. Maybe they were doing it for what they thought was a good and godly reason. Maybe they were doing it because they just thought children weren't worth the time of Jesus. When it says that Jesus became indignant, you kind of get the idea that he's not real happy that they are shooing them away. They are doing it for not a very good reason at all no matter how noble their intentions might have been. Jesus is upset and he says, "Let the little children come to me. Unless you receive the kingdom of God like one of these little children, you are not going to enter it." The question then becomes, what does that mean to receive it like a little child?

A little child will listen and trust their parents. When they skin their knee and mom tells them it's going to be alright, they might not believe it right away, but they trust mom is going to take care of it, right? They'll do what it takes to make sure they get better. They trust that. They believe that. They humbly submit and humbly trust and don't think they know it all. That happens as we get older, right? We think we know it all and that we have a better idea than even God himself.

Receive the kingdom of God as a little child I think means to humbly set aside our own knowledge and simply say, "God, you've said it. I believe it. I trust you are always going to act in my best interest even though I can't see it right now, even though it hurts." That's what I believe it means to receive the kingdom of God like a little child.

That's trouble for you and me at times because we see things happening. We see God's promise that nothing will come into our life that is more than we are able to bear. There are times when things come into our lives, or they seem to come into the lives of people time and time again, and we want to scream at God, "Good Lord! Why do you think I can bear so much? Enough already!" Those thoughts are going to come. It's going to happen when we face the effects of living in a sinful world.

Now, receive the kingdom of God like a humble child says, "God, I don't know why you are doing this, but I trust you still love me. You've taken away my sins. And you will be with me." Have you ever noticed that at some of these times when those struggles are the greatest, when that stress is the most, where God has blessed us with loving families, where we are loving families and not attacking families, we come together and unite and we can face more together than we could face on our own? That's one of the blessings of being a pastor. You get to see that at times. You get to see the blessing that God has intended in husband and wife and in children as a family. Together we encourage and strengthen one another.

Some days you wonder if siblings are ever going to do that. They are so busy picking at each other and fighting with each other, you wonder if they are ever going to really love each other and support each other. I've been there in hospital rooms where I am certain that siblings that at one time picked and fought with each other over whose clothes is whose or stuff like that, hugged each other and supported each other and encouraged each other. That's one of the blessings our God intends for us.

So you and I need to work to treasure that blessing. You and I need to work to strengthen that blessing that our God has given us and not just set it aside and not just take it for granted. That's how Jesus at times picks up his children, you and me, in his arms, puts his hands on us and blesses us, through the families he has placed us in. That's an incredible blessing from God.

Another thought that comes to my mind when you look at this is another area where the devil might attack specifically our congregation. We kind of look at this "let the little children come to me and do not hinder them" and we think, how could those disciples do that? I think we are pretty good at bringing little children to Jesus in our congregation. We devote a lot of time and energy to it. We devote a lot of resources to it, a lot of volunteer hours, and a lot of funds to it. And the Lord has blessed us with a very successful ministry to children because his grace and his Gospel are brought to them continually. But I kind of wonder, if Jesus came to us today, he'd probably say to us, "Well done good and faithful servant." But then he'd probably also remind us, "You know what? I didn't say to just minister only to children or once they get confirmed, that's it, stop devoting resources or funds to them." I think he'd maybe tell us, "I want you to minister from cradle to grave, not just cradle to white gown and red carnation."

And I wonder if he wouldn't say, "Let everyone come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." I'm not saying to cut back on what we do for children, but I'm asking if we can do more for many others? We devote 67¢ of every dollar to minister to those from age 3 to age 13. That means we've got 33¢ for the other 60-70 years of life.

Attitude adjustments regarding God's gift of marriage, children, family are things you and I are going to need until God calls us out of this world to heaven. Satan will use all these things to try to trip us up. When you do get tripped up and when you do sin, flee to the cross. When your friend or neighbor gets tripped up and they do sin, don't look down your nose at them. Grab them by the hand and lead them to the cross and let them see God's love for them. Then treasure these incredible blessings God has given us.