

Acknowledging Brokenness

Mark 10:2-16; Gen 2:18-24

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In my family, as in most Latino families, food is at the center of everything we do. If you are sad, you are encouraged to eat; if you are happy, you are encouraged to eat. If we are celebrating, we eat; if we are in pain, we eat. If there are painful conversations to be had, we eat first.

So, in many respects, I feel that this sermon would be better delivered, if we had food to go with it.

This morning, this sermon is not meant to solve anything or to give simple answers; rather, it is meant for us to consider this: We are family. Therefore, we need to reflect upon what that means in the context of this community of faith.

In our Gospel Lesson this morning, Jesus is *on the road again*. He is en route to Jerusalem -- walking, unwaveringly, to meet his cross and his destiny. Just now, that road has taken him beyond the Jordan River and across the boundary between what is known and unknown, familiar and unfamiliar. In the Gospel of Mark, we see Jesus going beyond boundaries, both geographical and social, perhaps this is what Jesus was trying to do in this topic of divorce.

We must first recognize that divorce in the first century was not at all the same social phenomenon that is in the twenty-first century. For most of history, marriage was not about romance or love; rather, it was viewed as a legal transaction, the exchange of property--women being part of the property.

There were two schools of thought about divorce in Jesus' day. Both believed a man had a right to put away, dismiss, or divorce his wife. One school was very strict - a man could do this only if his wife was unfaithful. The other was more lenient - a man could do this if his wife displeased him in any number of ways, like burning the husband's dinner. Either way, the consequences for the woman were devastation—familial and public disgrace, economic hardship and limited opportunities for her and her children. So, it seems that Jesus' words were not

intended to set up a standard to marginalize and judge, but to protect women who were vulnerable before the law.

Further, it is interesting that Jesus doesn't say that a man who puts away his wife and marries another commits adultery in general. He says that man commits adultery against his wife. In the ancient world, if a man was unfaithful to his wife, he was considered to have committed adultery not against her, but against her father and her family, the ones that in essence gave her to him. But now, Jesus says this is against her. So, concern for the woman—in this case—*the little one*—it is paramount here.

Further, it may be that Jesus wanted to assure men and women that, in fact, God blesses our marriages and wills for them to flourish, and that every time a marriage is broken, it causes damage to God's beloved.

Therefore, what I wanted to share with you this morning, [and this is perhaps the moment in this sermon when food would come in handy], is the acknowledgement of our pain. Whether it is through divorce or other experiences in life, there is an element of brokenness that we have difficulty dealing with. We have difficulty talking about it. But we are a community of faith - we are different – and here is where these conversations can take place.

Those of us who got married - we got married thinking that our marriage is going to last forever. Today, we live at a time when we can get divorce whenever there are irreconcilable differences, and sometimes divorce is the better option.

I must confess to you, that I cannot compartmentalize my own life from this subject. My parents got divorced when I was 8 years old. And, in my opinion, that is the best decision those two human beings have made throughout the course of their entire lives. Both living in a marriage full of violence - this was the better option. Good for them. Today they are both happier for it. I'm sure many couples who have divorced feel the same way.

However, it is not the final destination, but the journey I want us to consider this morning. Existentially, it tears you apart from someone you expected to spend the rest of your life with. Difficult situations such as these lead us through a difficult journey. Sure, at the end, often things turn out good. Many move on and

are better for it. However, in the process, these experiences have the potential to put us on the edge of humanity. Whether it is divorce, the loss of a love one, a life-threatening diagnosis or similar experiences, we are suddenly in a vulnerable position.

We have just hit a big bump in the road of our live journey. There are bumps on the road that, while we feel them, we know we can keep going. But there are bumps that require that we get out of the car, assess the situation, and decide if we should get back on - or we should wait and call for help.

When that happens, Center Church family, what kind of a community are we going to be? Would we be a community where we can *talk about it*?

It is almost certain, that at some point in our journey, we will be that person who cannot proceed and needs to call for help. Are we willing to embrace each other's pain? To walk with one another, to meet each other at the lonely places where life sometimes will leave us?

Life may leave us feeling like we have failed. Like we have lost—like an outsider—marginalized. But, whom does the Kingdom of God belong to? According to Mark, - to the marginalized by tradition, ritual, ethnicity, race, religion, gender, or perhaps, marital status.

I wonder if Jesus is calling us back to the created order is not simply to hold up an ideal vision of the perfect relationship, but to remind us that to be human is to be in relationship, and in this case here, at Center Church, relationship with one another in this wonderful community of faith.

I wonder by Jesus challenging the Pharisees in the interpretation of the law, he inspires us to seek justice over the law - justice and compassion over tradition. To speak out for those *little ones* on the sidelines.

I would be remiss if don't share with you this morning, a story I read a couple Sundays ago in *The New York Times*. A priest/minister who was known for his advocacy against gay marriage, is assigned to a parish where many of the members were gay couples. The pain in the statements made by some members was palpable - and I ended my reading with a prayer for that congregation. My

heart was heavy to learn how that community had been essentially assaulted. William Placher wrote, “practices that drive away rather than welcome, that set strict limits to the grace of God rather than marvel at its superabundance - such practices are not in accord with the practices of Jesus.”

The road to Jerusalem takes Jesus beyond the usual boundaries, so that he may bring the Gospel to all people. Ultimately, when he gets to Jerusalem, he himself will be dismissed, put away, and taken beyond the boundaries of the city to be hung on a cross. All of this, he endures in order to witness most fully and profoundly to God’s mercy, love, and Grace to all people.

May we, as family members in this community of faith, be open to talk about our pain. May God give us the courage to listen to one another. May God give us the courage to talk about it. Regardless of where we stand on the many issues that life bring our way, may we point our brothers and sisters to the God of mercy, and may we come to know God’s mercy for ourselves. Amen.