

10.6.2024 Pentecost 20

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Genesis 2:18-24; Psalm 8; Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12; Mark 10:2-16

“God leaves nothing out of our control”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today’s gospel takes place in the hill country of Judea where certain Pharisees approached Jesus, testing him with a question about divorce. They perhaps wanted to test Jesus’ orthodoxy, hoping he would contradict the Mosaic law so they could charge him with heresy.

Jesus, however, shifted the whole discussion from an academic and legal question about divorce, revealing God’s purposes for genuine human community. Jesus began by disarming their question with another question, “*What did Moses command you?*” To which they replied, “*Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.*” Jesus’ response reveals humanity’s sinfulness, “*Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you.*” Jesus recognized Moses’ commandment for what it was, a human invention in which the men of that time could divorce a woman for nearly any reason. The Pharisees had asked Jesus, and he spoke plainly. Notice their language, “*Moses allowed a man to write a certificate,*” which gave men control over the certificates of divorce, treating women without many rights of their own. In his answer, Jesus was championing the rights of women in an ancient male-dominated society.

Jesus quoted Genesis, “*From the beginning of creation, ‘God made them, male and female,’*” meaning that both men and women were created equally by God of equal status before one another and before God. Jesus’ quoting of Genesis, “*For this reason...the two shall become one flesh*” clearly speaks of God’s purpose in marriage that two people become one flesh, sharing one life together.

According to Jesus, God’s arithmetic of “one plus one” equals not two, but one shared life together. Jesus stated God’s intention for marriage and for human community – people brought together by God live in a new human community created and sustained by God.

Many of us may feel a bit uncomfortable with this gospel text. It’s inclusion in today’s texts is meant to help us see God’s higher purpose for human community. The issue of divorce is but only one of many issues that human beings continue to struggle with in human community.

Today’s reading from Hebrews is paired with this gospel text for a purpose, reminding us that God has made human beings “*a little lower than the angels,*” crowning us with glory and honor.

According to God's arithmetic, this extends to all mortals. Jesus' proclamation, "*For God so love the world,*" declares the wideness of God's love for all people in this world, and yet we continue to divide humanity into many groups. God's arithmetic sees only one human family, all created a little lower than the angels, and yet we crown some with more honor than others. We subject some to discrimination and dishonor, rather than struggling with God's higher purpose of love for all people in this world.

The gospel text about divorce is a sign of our human sinfulness, one of many human sins. Sinful selfishness persists in all human relationships. God created human beings in God's image, making us a little lower than the angels, crowning us with glory and honor and subjecting all things to us, and yet we continue to misuse the crown of glory God has given to us. We possess intellectual knowledge and spiritual wisdom and yet we choose to create not peace, but destruction and war. We have been given free will by God, and yet we choose to remain enslaved to sin. Made in the image of God, we have disfigured this image in demonizing our neighbor for their difference from us.

The writer of Hebrews is correct: God has left nothing out of our control, yet it is we who have not always used our power for good. We are enslaved to a selfishness that leads to all manner of broken relationships, in marriage, society, civic life, and among the nations. We are enslaved to our technology, to systems of greed, racism, discrimination, and exploitation.

Yet Hebrews reminds us that God has spoken in many and various ways through the prophets, yet we have not always chosen to listen to God's prophets. God has spoken to us with a Son, who is the reflection of God's glory and very being, yet we continue to seek the glory of human leaders. We trade the image of God for an ephemeral image created by media pundits and political leaders. We make our Christianity fit into our politics rather than allowing Christ the pioneer and perfecter of salvation to free us from all that limits and controls us.

We cause endless suffering rather than suffering with and loving others. Jesus has called this whole world brothers and sisters, and yet we continue to write certificates of divorce, articles of war, laws of discrimination, regulations of exclusion against those with whom we cannot live in community. And so, we never achieve the role for which God created humanity.

And yet, I have been heartened lately. We have seen the tragic images of devastation left in the wake of Hurricane Helene. In such moments of tragedy, I have been heartened by people coming together to help brothers and sisters in need. I have seen glimpses of people forgetting

their political, ideological, and social divisions to work together for the common good of all. Amid such tragedy when people ask, “Where is God?” I have seen people embodying the sacrificial agape love of God for others. The words of Hebrews, “*What are humans that you are mindful of them?*” also asks, “What does it mean to be human?” We have been created with glory to lift others with hope when they have lost everything. We have been created with honor to restore human dignity to those who have suffered losing their dignity.

Why does it always take tragedy to wake us to our real role as people created by God to be brothers and sisters to one another? “*For God so loved the world*” implies that amid everything that happens to us on this blue orb called Earth, natural disasters, earthquakes, storms and floods, and human made disasters such as wars, oppression, and discrimination – all of these things are not out of our control. When will we learn that we have control over how we respond to and treat our neighbors? We have been created and endowed with gifts “*a little lower than angels*” so that we might respond with mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and love for our brothers and sisters who suffer no matter who they are, where they are, or how they are.

God always meets our hardness of heart with love. Can you put aside the “isms” in your life of ideology, politics, economics, and nationalism to love your brothers and sisters as Jesus loves you?

God leaves nothing outside of our control, yet we choose to live out of control. We divide the world into ever greater numbers of factions and warring nations, yet according to God’s arithmetic, billions of people equal one beloved human family.

There are many opportunities to help others. Lutheran Disaster Response is coordinating relief efforts. Please see the ReMarks for details, and the Gathering Place for information.

Look to again to Jesus Christ. He is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. He is the brother who stands between us all, calling us sisters and brothers. Trust in him with childlike faith, and you will see others as children do, as brothers and sisters.

With Jesus, nothing is ever outside of your control. Amid life’s storms and tragedy, he sustains you. He gives you strength to live as a brother and sister for others. Amen.