

Pentecost 20(B)

1. Just as jarring as losing an hour of sleep is Jesus' seemingly uncompromising teaching on relationships, in particular marriage but also the relationship with those most vulnerable and dependent in our world, represented in the figure of the child.
 - a. It would be easy to forget that we are still working our way through the teachings Jesus has about his destiny that awaits him in Jerusalem, and the call to not just follow him but align ourselves with the God who loves us all the way to the cross and tomb.
 - b. In other words, we remain within the set of teachings that has to do with the community formed on the way to the Cross—and to the renewal of the world.
 - c. If all we hear is judgment about our own relationship choices – or those around us – then we are missing the point.
2. **That being said, there is no escaping the confronting message from Jesus' lips**
 - a. Commentators remind us that marriage in ancient societies was shaped more by family and political agreements than what we might think of as love
 - b. It wasn't all transactional, of course; it was a relationship that reflected God's intentions in Creation, as Jesus acknowledges. And it's worth mentioning, other intentions of Creation included the absence of violence and the peaceable kingdom of all created things.
 - c. Marriage was a kind of mutual benefiting relationship that was an image of community, even society.
 - d. When marriages break down, it becomes a sign of broken relationships more generally.
 - e. It is not because marriage is the most sacred relationship of all as some argue; rather, it is a sign, a symbol and sacrament of a larger reality, namely, the relationship between God and us, and our relationships with one another.
 - f. Life with Jesus is concerned with God's good purposes in Creation, and divorce represents a disruption, just as welcoming the children represents the proper order of things, where the vulnerable among us are welcomed and cared for.
3. **Divorce is a disruption, Jesus contends, and it should not be the norm for a community seeking to live the way of the cross which is the way of life.**

- a. Those of us whose lives are touched by divorce might feel the pinch of Jesus' teaching
- b. But, again, the concern here is not simply about the marriage relationship but how our world is awash in relational breakdowns: the wars, violence, and injustices in our society are all disruptions to God's purposes for us.
- c. The renewal and healing of the world by Christ's Cross and empty tomb involve the transformation of our relationships and communities into relationships of mutual care and flourishing – something that involves everyone: married, divorced, or unmarried
- d. Like welcoming the little children, the reign and purposes of God bring about a different social order, one where our many failed attempts to relate to one another are healed and transformed
- e. Until the final consummation of God's dream for us, we are instructed not to make relationship disruptions the norm, but rather seek the grace of God and work hard on staying connected.

4. Conclusion: as the community shaped by Christ's cross and empty tomb, our life together is to reflect the healing and mutual care of which Jesus speaks

- a. Does this mean we all have to like one another? No. It means however that there is something deeper that connects us than our opinions or personalities – it is the very life of Jesus
- b. Does this mean we should exclude divorced people? Obviously, not. It means however that we strive to be peace makers and community builders whenever and wherever relationships break down
- c. It's a tall order, but if we are to practice being Christ's body in the world, we are to be that sign, symbol, and sacrament for a renewed and healed world.