

Pentecost 20B Lectionary 27 10/06/2024

In my study groups this past week, it was a challenge to discuss what some call as the big “D” word, divorce. Jesus chooses to take on the difficult issues that people face. Some of you may have experienced divorce personally or most likely it has been in your family.

My grandfather divorced my grandmother in 1952 after finding work out of town and another woman. My grandmother was left to raise 5 kids on her own and that is not easy, let alone in that day. My mother then went to live with a family for her senior high in high school and be their nanny. She did not speak to her father for a number of years. When she got married, she felt it was time to welcome him back into her life.

All of us make mistakes. I have said that relationships are the most difficult thing in life. We are dealing with ourselves and then how we interact with another human being and some on an intimate level. Since we are broken people, when you put two broken people together, no matter the level of relationship, there will be unhealthy choices made.

In the end it is about navigating changes in our lives and then how that affects our relationships with others. Communication and trust are key in any relationship. We will never be perfect at these, but the more we practice them, the healthier our relationships will be.

When these are not working is when we often see divorce occurring. Relationships can be broken as I have already stated as we are already broken people. The minute we say it could never happen to me, is when we need to be concerned.

I believe we would all say that divorce should not be the first choice, but there are times that it can be the healthiest choice. Forced relationships do not work. Above all they are not healthy for the couple, let alone the people around them. Unhealthy relationships are not healthy models for children.

So, this is what we have learned. But what does Jesus have to say about. First of all, he was not teaching on it at first in our Gospel lesson for today, but was actually being tested by some Pharisees. They were always trying to test Jesus about the law. They had been finding out that Jesus felt the law was important, but it was not to be used as power and control over people. The law was given to help people live together in community.

When the law was given, it was in the time of the Old Testament. The law was quite patriarchal. Women and children were seen more as property. Basically, the men were in charge and could do almost anything they wanted.

The Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Jesus turned it back on them and asked them what did Moses command you? They said a man could write a certificate of dismissal and divorce her. Jesus told them that Moses wrote this because of their hardness of heart.

Jesus reminded them that God made males and females and two of them could become one flesh. And that no one should separate them. Jesus went on quite bluntly and said that whoever divorces their wife and marries another has committed adultery. The same for whoever divorces a man and marries another has committed adultery. Jesus was radical again in saying a woman could divorce her husband. This was not the law the Pharisees knew.

Then Jesus uses a child again as an example for his teaching. Children and women were looked at as the least in society and were vulnerable. People were bringing children to Jesus in order that he might touch them. The disciples sternly told them that Jesus did not have time for this and to leave.

Jesus said no, bring them here to me. He said the kingdom of God belongs to the children. If you don't receive the weak and vulnerable then you will not enter the kingdom of God. Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them.

His disciples were corrected, and I wonder if the Pharisees were still around to hear this proclamation. Jesus is saying that all are welcome in the kingdom of God. For people contemplating, going through or have been through a divorce, I can only imagine that it is not easy. It is a vulnerable position to be in. Any broken relationship is emotionally difficult and often takes a physical toll as well. One broken relationship can affect all of your other relationships in some way.

Over the years churches have pointed fingers and maybe even shunned people who have experienced divorce. This is not where Jesus is. I do not believe that Jesus likes to see broken relationships, but he knows that they are going to happen. God has given us guidelines to help us be in relationship with human beings and Jesus has tried to say over and over again that even though we don't always follow them, that we are still welcome in the kingdom of God.

This is the message that I believe needs to come from churches. We are called to support those who are experiencing brokenness in relationships and in a vulnerable situation. It is not our place to judge. The rhetoric that I am often hearing today is not supporting the vulnerable. It often only supports those that have more power.

As a church and followers of Jesus, we are called to listen to what people are saying and this includes those who are claiming to follow Jesus. This also means that we are called to listen to ourselves and observe what we do and who we hang out with. Jesus is challenging his followers even today to lift up the vulnerable, those who are experiencing brokenness in their relationships.

We can use words of love and concern and not judgement. We can model what it means to be people of support by listening and not taking sides. Jesus is asking us today to continue sharing his message of love and grace.

I believe that we have some in our country who want to go back to what the Pharisees were looking for. Which is a patriarchal household, where the man is the one in charge. I believe Jesus was trying to teach his disciples as well as us that all people are welcome, especially the vulnerable. Males and female are equal in God's eyes. In any relationship, it is about working together.

In Jesus day it was the women and children. But even the fact that Jesus said a woman could divorce her husband was probably not what the Pharisees or his disciples were expecting to hear. Because of the insecurity of some white men, many in leadership in Christian churches, want to go back to this Old Testament model of the family. This is what is being held up as what God wants.

I believe that Jesus in today's Gospel lesson is saying no that all are welcomed equally into the kingdom of God. He is even saying that men and women are equal. Jesus is calling us to lift up the vulnerable. I believe when insecure white men want to have the power, it makes others such as women, children, and today many others vulnerable. We are called to lift them up and go against the old patriarchal system.

The D doesn't have to be big. It happens in our brokenness. The church is called to be a place that will welcome in love all who are broken, you and me.

This is how Jesus defines the kingdom of God as welcoming all people equally and especially the vulnerable. What are we going to do and say to lift up the vulnerable?

Let us pray, Gracious and loving God, you sent Jesus to clarify what it means to live in your kingdom. Our humanness always seems to get in the way. Jesus reminds us again today that all are welcome in your kingdom and especially the vulnerable. May your Holy Spirit help us to model this welcome through word and deed. Help us to live forward into your kingdom and not go back to the Old testament ways which Jesus has redefined.

In Jesus' name, Amen

— 451 — 2025 Presidential Transition Project Goal #3: Promoting Stable and Flourishing Married Families. Families comprised of a married mother, father, and their children are the foundation of a well-ordered nation and healthy society. Unfortunately, family policies and programs under President Biden’s HHS are fraught with agenda items focusing on “LGBTQ+ equity,” subsidizing single-motherhood, disincentivizing work, and penalizing marriage. These policies should be repealed and replaced by policies that support the formation of stable, married, nuclear families. Working fathers are essential to the well-being and development of their children, but the United States is experiencing a crisis of fatherlessness that is ruining our children’s futures. In the overwhelming number of cases, fathers insulate children from physical and sexual abuse, financial difficulty or poverty, incarceration, teen pregnancy, poor educational outcomes, high school failure, and a host of behavioral and psychological problems. By contrast, homes with non-related “boyfriends” present are among the most dangerous place for a child to be. HHS should prioritize married father engagement in its messaging, health, and welfare policies. In the context of current and emerging reproductive technologies, HHS policies should never place the desires of adults over the right of children to be raised by the biological fathers and mothers who conceive them. In cases involving biolog- ical parents who are found by a court to be unfit because of abuse or neglect, the process of adoption should be speedy, certain, and supported generously by HHS.