

“Jesus Interprets the Scriptures”
Mark 10:2-16
Sunday, October 4, 2015
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

Opening.

Some people seem to know the Bible really well. You know who I’m talking about – the folks who memorize lots of verses, and know lots of Bible facts. But does it ever seem to you that some of these folks are actually ignoring major themes of the Holy Scriptures?

The “Walking Bible” evangelist had a Scripture reference for everything. Once, while he was in the pulpit, preaching a very long sermon about his favorite sin, a fly flew in his mouth.

“Give us a scripture for that!” someone yelled from the balcony.

“Sure!” said the evangelist. “How’s this: ‘He was a stranger and I took him in.’ ”

In today’s reading from Mark we see that Jesus interprets the scriptures very differently from the Pharisees. He argues for greater equality and radical hospitality. He speaks on the theme of divorce, with an eye towards greater equality for women. He talks about children and their inclusion. Always, he keeps in mind the great sweep of scripture, from the story of creation in Genesis, to the story of the saving acts of God in the Exodus, to the stories of the prophets and the kings and the tensions between peace, justice and power.

I. Scripture and broken relationships.

Concerning Jesus’ topic of divorce: We could each name at least five broken relationships in our lives. Most of us could name a lot more if we stop and think about it.

The Bible is filled with stories of broken relationships. From Cain and Abel to Peter and Paul, throughout biblical history, relationships are strained and often broken. Jesus has many broken relationships in his own life. He was no doormat. You remember him driving out the tax

collectors and the money-changers from the Temple (Mt. 21:12-17; John 2:13-22). You remember his run-ins with Jewish and Gentile leaders in every community he preached in. He was angry with those who criticized him for healing on the Sabbath (see Mk. 3:5). And in Matthew 23:17 he called the Pharisees “blind fools.”

You remember the ultimate broken relationship: Jesus going to the cross.

We have to conclude that broken relationships are a part of life.

Divorce is sad. It is a topic that probably hits home with every person in this room. If we are not divorced, ourselves, we are close to someone who is. A friend, a family member. The parents of our children’s friends. Our neighbors. Divorce pervades our society. Roughly half of today’s marriages end in divorce. This is certainly not anyone’s hope on their wedding day.

Divorce is the breaking of a relationship between two people. But it goes farther than that, doesn’t it? A divorce affects two families...all the friendships the couple had together... If the couple is a part of a church, it affects the whole church family.

I remember years ago in the church I grew up in, in Clare, Michigan, a man had an affair with another woman in the church, eventually divorced his wife and married this new woman. My parents were friends with the original couple. Their kids were friends with me & my brothers & sisters. Their whole family used to drop by our house or we’d drop by their house -- unannounced! We’d share meals together. We’d support each other thru the ups & downs of life.

Then the affair and the divorce happened. Now my folks were pressured to make a choice. Whose side were they going to be on?

Whose side are they going to be on?!? Whose side?!? They’re on neither side! They are heartbroken! They love both their friends – as a married couple! How can they choose sides?

I won’t go into all that ensued. Years of pain that healed over time. Everyone is civil to

each other now. Even friendly. But it was never the same. Divorce changes the whole community. Broken relationships are sad.

II. Scripture and Jesus' interpretation of reconciliation and wholeness.

In Jesus' day, divorce was devastating for women and children. When a man decided to divorce his wife – and it was always the man who decided – she was left with no home and no means of support. His reason could be as flimsy as “she does not please him” or he “dislikes her,” as it says in Deuteronomy (24:1-4). This is, in fact, the line that the Pharisees pull from the law of Moses in their argument with Jesus. It's ok for a man to divorce a woman – as long as he gives her a certificate! A certificate!

But as we know, in Jesus' day – and in many parts of our world still today – women are treated like property to be traded. Give her a certificate of divorce and hand her off to the next guy – this is the behavior the Pharisees are condoning. In divorce, the woman is left vulnerable to the charge of adultery, as we see in Matthew 5:32.

Jesus finds this way of interpreting divorce law hard-hearted. Jesus says no – treat women with respect. Treat them like human beings, made in the image of God, as it says in Genesis 1:27 (sa 2:24). Jesus' interpretation protects the woman, and lifts up the kingdom vision of mutuality in marriage.

The institution of marriage is different today, of course. There is more mutuality. Women are no longer property, at least in this country. Still, when we enter into Christian marriage, our hope and our vows are for a lifetime. We talk about marriage as a symbol of Christ's love for his church. Divorce is certainly not the hoped for outcome.

Ronald J. Allen, a professor at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana, has a helpful take on this topic. Allen uses the term “realm” to refer to God's kingdom. He

writes:

“It appears to me that the dynamics of some marriages are realm resistant and that the purposes of the realm may be better served by freeing the couple to live into other relationships.”

“The dynamics of some marriages are realm resistant...” We live in the in-between times. God created the world, and it was good. Exercising our free will, we broke our original relationship – with God.

God has a plan for future wholeness. Jesus brings a glimpse of that future wholeness into the present. But it is incomplete. And so, sometimes marriages fail. Sometimes the dynamics of a particular marriage are resistant to the workings of God’s kingdom. Divorce may be the best choice in such circumstances.

Jesus interprets scripture as moving towards wholeness. All broken relationships will one day be made whole. Jesus preaches that broken relationships are being made whole – now! – because he has inaugurated the future kingdom of God, in the present. Jesus invites us to see what our relationships would look like if we lived fully into that future kingdom; if we lived out God’s future good plans for us now, today, in the present.

Broken relationships happen. From the beginning of time. From Adam and Eve in the garden to our modern times, broken relationships are a part of the human dilemma.

What do we do about it? Jesus teaches and preaches about reconciliation, equality and radical hospitality. His approach to interpreting scripture is to remind us of the totality of God’s Word.

Ultimately, brokenness can only be reconciled by God. That’s why he sent Jesus, to reconcile the world to himself, as it says in Colossians 1:20.

As we celebrate World Communion this morning, we are reminded of Christ’s

reconciling work on behalf of the whole world. Charles James Cook, a professor at Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas, writes:

“...we offer to God the totality of our lives – the darkness and the light – and it is blessed, made holy, and returned to us as the presence of the living Christ. We symbolize this in the gifts of bread and wine. Thus, it is Christ working in us and through us that eventually makes reconciliation possible. What we were unable to accomplish before is now a possibility. We do not have to do this all on our own.”

Some situations are impossible to reconcile. We know that all things are possible with God (Mt. 19:26, Mk. 10:27, Lk. 1:37). But some things are impossible for us, as human beings, to fix. We trust in God. We leave it in God’s hands. We pray. We spend time in God’s Word. We worship his name in the company of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We share in Holy Communion. We serve God’s kingdom the best we can by sharing his love whenever we get the chance.

And we leave broken relationships in his hands.

Closing.

I knew a pastor who had a collection of broken cups. He said whenever he broke a cup, he would add it to his collection. The broken cups reminded him that God loves us in our brokenness.

Sometimes things get broken. Sometimes we can’t fix them.

In God’s time...in God’s infinite, eternal, never-ending time...all brokenness is healed. All things are reconciled. Through Christ, God reconciles our broken relationship with him and our broken relationships with one another. As you come to the Table this morning, put your trust in him. Amen.