

Mark 10:2-16
October 7, 2018

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

We live in a world – a beautiful, awesome, majestic, breathtaking world. Earlier in the week I was at a preaching conference at Luther Seminary in St. Paul (Minnesota) and attended a workshop called preaching and poetry. As an exercise, we were asked to list one word and then quickly come up with seven words to describe that word. Fresh off our worship service last week geared toward creation, apparently that was still fresh in my mind, as I chose that very word. Creation. And then I came up with 7 words to describe it: beautiful, alive, abundant, good, gift, glorious, God's. We were then given 3 minutes to quickly write a poem with those words. I don't consider myself a poet by any stretch of the imagination; yet, this was a wonderful exercise to stir the creative juices and help me realize – maybe I'm not as bad a poet as I thought. Maybe there is hope for me yet. Here it is:

Creation
Beautiful and alive as you look down from above
Creation
Good and glorious because it's a reflection of you
Creation
Abundant are its gifts of grace, mercy, and love
Creation
Not mine or yours but solely God's who created me and you and everyone
too

As I sat and looked at the seven words I had listed and then the poem I had written, I thought to myself – hmmm! This isn't really the picture of creation we so often see and even I was a bit surprised these words are what came out; especially, after the last couple of weeks of division that has so dominated the airwaves, newsprint, and internet. This isn't a picture of creation as God intended it. Hurling names and insults at people. Pointing fingers. A woman in tears. A man outraged. But it moves well beyond what we have witnessed the last two weeks. We have become so polarized that there seems to no longer be any common ground to stand on. It simply seems someone must be right, and someone must be wrong. It's our/my way or the highway. We are intent on proving the other wrong and we simply create more division, distrust, and animosity toward one another.

This, ultimately, was what those religious leaders were doing as they approached Jesus and asked him about what Moses said on the topic of divorce in the law. It's apparent they haven't been listening to what Jesus has been teaching and doing the last several chapters and it's not just these religious leaders - so before we go and point a finger at them, we must not forget those disciples, who we may identify more with, that scolded people for bringing children to Jesus so that he could lay his hands upon them and bless them. It seems none of them have been listening to Jesus' teaching about servant leadership, which begs the question have we been listening and watching to Jesus' teaching and way of leadership? That is, leadership and discipleship, for that matter, is not about personal gain, well-being, security, and self-preservation but servant leadership is about the other. It is about protecting the vulnerable. It is why Jesus opened the kingdom of God up to the Syrophenician woman and healed her demon-

possessed daughter. It is why Jesus healed a deaf man and then fed the multitudes in the wilderness or healed a young boy possessed by an evil spirit and then, while the disciples were arguing about which of them was the greatest, Jesus took a young child in his arms and equated welcoming such a child is none other than welcoming him and the one who sent him into the world. This is what leadership looks like in God's kingdom. In fact, this is a picture of the world God created. Where all are equal. Male and female. Black, brown, and white. Straight or gay. Rich or poor. Young and old. There is no division. There is no injustice. There is perfect harmony between Creator and created; and, also, perfect harmony, love, and unity between the relationship we enter with one another.

And let's not forget where Jesus is going. He has begun his journey toward Jerusalem. Twice in the last 3 chapters, among those teachings and healings above, he predicted his death and resurrection. Again, this is servant leadership in action. This who he is and it's who God is. One who came not to be served, but to serve. Had these religious leaders been listening and observing, their question would have been filled not with the intent of trapping Jesus. Of merely trying to secure their positions of power at the expense of another. No, had their eyes been focused on what Jesus had been doing and ears opened to what he had been teaching their question about divorce would have been geared toward why Moses wrote this law in the first place and how they, as leaders, could stand with the women and children left by the wayside, often with little chance of survival after being discarded like a piece of property for any number of reasons. Or those disciples, if they would have been listening more intently and watching Jesus more closely, would have opened up their own arms for these children being brought to Jesus and possibly even some of those same women cast aside and left

vulnerable in the wake of divorce. It seems in both cases, the hardness of their hearts was getting in the way of seeing the kingdom God had created and Jesus was ushering as Jesus saw it.

In so many ways this seems to be at times where our nation finds itself. Not only in the political realm; but, also in the civil arena of our communities and lives and yes, even within the church. Directing questions that try to entrap another to defend our cause. To justify our actions. To preserve our own agendas and interests. The results – more division. More pain. More left feeling their voices are unheard. More focus on maintaining the status quo rather than proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and following the way of Jesus Christ in standing with the vulnerable, sick, poor, widowed, imprisoned, hungry, and marginalized.

This is a difficult passage and divorce, in one way or another, has probably affected each of our lives. It brings about devastation among families. It rips away at relationship and love as God intended it at the dawn of creation. It leaves many vulnerable. Perhaps, due to the costs associated and perhaps one spouse dependent upon another for income. And I can only imagine some of us here today, having gone through a divorce, watched a child go through a divorce, or parents go through a divorce feel the sting of Jesus' words. I know of many of my colleagues who have wrestled with these verses and even watched my own brother many years ago before his death struggle with the difficult decision, heartache, and struggles as he got divorced. Or an encounter a while back with someone I had met recently afraid to share with me they were divorced from fear I would treat them differently and look upon them with shame, which saddened my heart greatly. They apologized after my response must have been quite different than what they anticipated as by their reaction I could tell somewhere in

the past someone within the church had scorned them and exasperated an already traumatic, life-changing, and in my eyes a justifiable cause of why the healthiest and best course of action in this relationship was the dissolution of this marriage and the freedom and safety it would bring for this individual. They were the vulnerable person reeling from the hard heartedness of their former spouse.

It's no wonder this scene is followed by another scene of Jesus welcoming children. He's intent on making his point that God's kingdom may very well come first for those who have previously stood on the edges of society. His servant leadership takes him to the fringes wherein he encounters, sits with, eats with, touches and blesses, and shows up for and stands with the victimized, powerless, weak, looked down upon, scorned, shamed, and voiceless ones. And this servant leader embraces them in his arms and heals them back into their proper place in community. This really is what Jesus' answer to these religious leaders is all about. He brings it back to creation as God intended it and relationships with one another as God so desired to be in relationship with God's creation and relationships with one another.

This is the creation and the relationships we long and hope for. And there is hope. While we place our faith in the promise that God is at work every day, every minute, every second bringing forth reconciliation, healing, wholeness, life, and the goodness of all creation we also are vessels of God's reconciliation, peace, healing, and unity. We are the hands and voices to bring hope to the hopeless. We are the feet to stand with the powerless. We are the ears to hear the hungry, abused and assaulted, and the children longing to be embraced in arms of love and safety. In a world in which is often dark, dreary and divided. Ugly and

unequal. Wrought sunder with hearts that are hard and death dawns anew each day. In this world, there is hope. In this world, there is healing. In this world, there is goodness. In this world, there is a Savior. In this world, there is righteousness to be found. In this world, there is life to be had. In this world, there is a God who is not absent, but stands right amid its brokenness and says better days are yet to come. Love will conquer hatred. Reconciliation through the cross will devour division. This is the world God created. This is the world God intends all people to have access to. This is the world I and I can only guess you, too, envision, hope for, and trust God is continuing to bring to fruition. This is the creation I long for when I penned that poem.

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