

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

There may be no other passage more difficult to preach on than this one. The difficulty of the text may simply be the word “divorce.” I suppose a raise of hands would reveal what I suspect to be true...all of us in one way or another are experiencing or have endured or witnessed the wounds created by divorce be they physical, mental, or spiritual. Wounds of exhaustion, anguish, anger, frustration, fear, loss, grief, maybe even guilt, etc.

As Lutherans we approach a biblical text through three theological lenses. First, *solus Christus* (Christ alone) which insists that the purpose of Scripture is to reveal Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. Scripture is to be interpreted through the lens of Christ’s death and resurrection for the salvation of all. Second, *Sola gratia* (grace alone), which affirms that we are saved by grace alone. There is nothing a person can do through his or her action that will create a right relationship with God. Only God’s grace can do that. Finally, *Sola Fide* (by faith alone), which affirms that, through the hearing of God’s Word, the Holy Spirit ignites faith (trust) in God within us.<sup>1</sup>

These lenses remind us “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23 NRSV). Christ met the world in all its brokenness. He entered the muck and the mire. He walked with the vulnerable. He ate with sinners. He extended the love of God to all people. Grace upon grace came through the Word made flesh. John 3:17 reminds us, “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that world might be saved through him.”

Jesus is doing exactly that in this passage. He acknowledges indeed Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and divorce his wife. He also acknowledges it was because of humanities hardness of heart. Human relationships are rooted in the goodness of a loving God. Human relationships are to share that mutual love with one another. Human relationships are to give life. They are built on trust. They are to “promote, value, and respect the human dignity of each individual; protect all from physical, emotional, and spiritual harm; demonstrate mercy, compassion, and justice for all, especially the “least of these”—those who are most vulnerable in relationships and in society.”<sup>iii</sup> Relationship’s breakdown for a variety of reasons. People are left vulnerable in the wake of a broken relationship.

Divorce was not uncommon in the Greco-Roman world or in the Jewish tradition. Greco-Roman customs allowed either a man or woman to request a divorce for virtually any reason. Marriage was viewed as a contract and not as a covenant. It was entered into most cases for reasons other than love such as financial stability and social privileges. Within the Jewish tradition, only the man could request a divorce and the reasons for requesting a divorce again were numerous. For example, if he was bored with his wife, if she no longer satisfied him or could bear children, or if her dowry (her financial inheritance) ran out. For this reason, for the “hardness of heart” of allowing one spouse to maintain power and control over another, Moses allowed for a “certificate of dismissal,” which was of utmost importance. It protected the spouse left by the wayside. Without this, a woman would be destined to ridicule, scorn, shame, and struggle for survival.

Certainly, this passage, as Matt Skinner states, “does not offer a legal loophole to commit adultery. That is, his strongest words are against those who initiate divorce as a means to get something else, sacrificing a spouse to satisfy one’s ambitions or desires.”<sup>iii</sup>

Yet, looking at this passage through our Lutheran lenses, we see the need for the law Moses gave. We see the intent of a life-giving relationship at the dawn of creation. We view the brokenness that separates us one from another. We see the vulnerability of humanity. We see yet again Jesus meeting the world there. Offering salvation through his cross and resurrection. Rescuing us from sin. Jesus Christ continues to be there with open arms, to welcome the broken and vulnerable, the little children, those cast aside. Jesus continues to forgive and restore our relationship with God. May we reach out to the vulnerable just as Christ has done and continues to do. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> *A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*; Copyright © 2009 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org)