

Man and Wife  
Sermon for the 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Sermon Text: Mark 10:2-16



*And Pharisees came up and in order to test Him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"<sup>3</sup> He answered them, "What did Moses command you?"<sup>4</sup> They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away."<sup>5</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.<sup>6</sup> But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'<sup>7</sup> 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,<sup>8</sup> and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh.<sup>9</sup> What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."<sup>10</sup> And in the house the disciples asked Him again about this matter.<sup>11</sup> And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her,<sup>12</sup> and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."<sup>13</sup> And they were bringing children to Him that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them.<sup>14</sup> But when Jesus saw it, He was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.<sup>15</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."<sup>16</sup> And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands on them.*

Adam and Eve stood together in Cain's empty fields. It was a place that was soaked in stillness, remembrance, and deep pain. Neither of them will ever forget that the blood of Cain's brother cried out to God here. They will never forget that on this day, they lost two children. Adam turned to Eve and his eyes mirrored the deep feelings that he had for her. He asked a question that wasn't a question but a confession: "What did we do wrong?" Both of them remembered longingly the moment he looked her in the eye and confidently said: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." (Genesis 2:23) They were words that recalled a time when the world was still full of trust. In this moment, standing in Cain's field, both knew that trust was lost. They knew that the fate of man would now be different.

The marriage of Adam and Eve was made in heaven, yet they lived on earth. When two people marry in the church, they also believe that this marriage was made in heaven. Yet such people are confronted with human challenges here on earth. Husband and wife meet at a point in time where everything appears to fit perfectly together. They find each other attractive, enriching, inspiring, and exciting. This is how two lives become one. Yet all these things aren't made in heaven and are based on human feelings that very quickly fall victim to the demands of daily life. Habits lead to lack of respect, lack of respect leads to distrust, and distrust leads to suspicion. In the end, love is exchanged for hate, especially when people get closer to one another, and the other's flaws become clearer. Before marriage, people think that the marriage was made in heaven and that God sent them an angel. But after a short time, they are confronted with their own flaws and the flaws of the other person. They realize that they aren't angels, but normal people with normal flaws. These flaws hurt and in living together, the couple fail themselves. The reasons that once brought them together lose their meaning and have the opposite effect.

And what then? The Law of Moses offered one solution in the form of a certificate of divorce. This was, in a sense, a temporary solution to prevent the worst from happening. According to the Law of Moses, a wrecked and broken marriage could lead to divorce at the request of the husband. It is good to ponder this aspect of the Law of Moses because it makes clear that there is such a thing as a wrecked marriage. When Jesus commented on the Law with the words: "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment", He wasn't just addressing those who lived in a broken marriage, but to all of us because we all have the same characteristic – that our hearts are separated from God and we can't know God's Holy Will either in marriage or in everyday life. Actually, it's not just about divorced people here, but about human nature itself. When two people live together in marriage and give themselves to each other, the loss of trust and other hurts are all the more painful because they were more closely united to one another. All this can lead to even deeper pain, which is why the people were granted the right

to write up a certificate of divorce. The certificate of divorce that Moses authorized was a kind of makeshift solution. Yet in the course of time, this law was misused. What was first thought of as an exception became the rule. In the time of Jesus, there were even different opinions among the learned Rabbis. Rabbi Shammai, the strictest of them all, argued that only adultery was an acceptable reason for divorce. Whereas Rabbi Hillel thought that even burning the food could be an acceptable reason for divorce. And Rabbi Akiba went so far as to say that a husband's mere desire for another woman could justify a divorce. These interpretations benefited men and put women at a significant disadvantage. Women were at the mercy of men and had no say in their marriage, which often led to great suffering and insecurity.

Jesus questions this practice and at the same time, He severely criticizes the opinions of the rabbis and goes beyond the Law of Moses by asking the crucial question: What does God actually expect from us in marriage? This makes it clear from the beginning that marriage is not something that people can freely dispose of. Rather, God instituted marriage and it is not at man's discretion to modify or correct it. This divine order is timeless and unchanging, even when the societal norms change over the course of time. It is important to emphasize that the fundamental order of creation in which man and woman belong together remains unchanged, as God created mankind from the beginning, until death do them part. In every human relationship, and ultimately in marriage, there are challenges and crises, and even Christians aren't immune to troubles in their marriage. Jesus comments on the Law of Moses by saying: "Moses gave the law for the sake of your hardness of heart," which means that Jesus recognizes the condition of our hearts and sees that we are all affected by it. We don't live in heaven and that's why we have no right to condemn those whose marriages are broken. Jesus knows the reality of human relationships and feelings that can often lead to a downward spiral of suffering. Jesus doesn't deny that such situations occur, nor does He dismiss the people who find themselves in such situations. He gives them clear guidelines though: We shouldn't make divorce the norm, as this would close the way to repentance and reconciliation. Jesus dealt constantly with sinners, including those who had broken marriages, and gave them a chance for change and redemption (like when He met with the Samaritan woman in John 4). Jesus knows human nature and recognizes how easy and often we lose trust. For this reason, He emphasized that God must have a place in marriage. God, who exists at the same time outside of marriage, is nevertheless present in its midst. Only in this way can the complex entanglements be resolved, and forgiveness learned. If we want to build our marriage on the foundation that our husband or wife will make us happy, then we build our marriage on shaky ground. Without God, marriage is on unstable ground. Adam and Eve experienced both close connection with God as well as separation from God. In Jesus Christ, both come together again. True humanity and true God.

Especially revealing is the discussion that follows which Jesus has with His disciples about marriage. In the course of the conversation, it becomes apparent that the disciples also had difficulties with understanding marriage. They once more took Jesus aside and questioned if He really could have meant that marriage is irrevocably under God's protection. And Jesus first confirms their confusion. Yes, that's right, marriage cannot be dissolved. This puts a giant challenge before the disciples because they don't know what that can look like in practice. Then a scene follows that is already very familiar to us from the Bible: the blessing of the children. This story definitely has a connection to the topics discussed earlier. The disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus. However, Jesus uses this opportunity to make it clear that in God's affairs, we should all be like children. He underlines this with the words: "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." This section about children serves as a commentary on the broken relationships among people. Jesus wants to make it clear to us that in this respect, we may be childlike.

What we can learn from children is that they are completely dependent on their parents and that they rely upon them unconditionally. They can't do anything different; Jesus wants to make it clear to us that it can be the exact same in our relationship with God. It is in marriage and in our interpersonal relationships that we realize how dependent we are. We come to a point where we don't know what to do and we can't go any further. In such moments, we have no choice but to run into the saving arms of our God and let Him bless us. Amen.