



Oct. 7, 2018 Mk. 10:2-16 & Gn. 2: 18-24

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Link to [Beck](#) (paywall) other [Beck](#)

Stone, Naomi. [The Heart of the Beloved](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [The Struggle to Trust](#)

SETTING THE SCENE:

On and on we go, with more challenges, more questions. Not only does it not stop, it gets even more intense. The Pharisees now see that Jesus is undermining all their teachings and understandings of who God is and how God wants to relate to humanity, and humanity to relate to each other. It is a sort of evil possession in the way that the power structure clings to their hard-heartedness. Their way to God was mean and small. Jesus' open-heartedness reveals God's heart to those who were able to receive it. It's no wonder that he once again uses the vulnerability and openness to the new of a child to make his point.

Mk. 10:2-16

2 Some Pharisees came and **tested** him by asking, "Is it **lawful** for a man to **divorce** his wife?" 3 What did **Moses** command you?" he replied. 4 They said, "**Moses** permitted a man to write a **certificate** of **divorce** and send her away." 5 It was because your **hearts were hard** that **Moses** wrote you this law," Jesus

replied. 6 But at the **beginning** of creation God 'made them **male and female**.' 7 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become **one flesh**.' So they are no longer two, but one. 9 Therefore what God has **joined** together, let man not **separate**." 10 When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. 11 He answered, "Anyone who **divorces** his wife and marries another woman commits **adultery** against her. 12 And if she **divorces** her husband and marries another man, she commits **adultery**." 13 People were bringing little **children** to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw this, he was **indignant**. He said to them, "Let the little **children** come to me, and do not hinder them, for the **kingdom of God** belongs to such as these. 15 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not **receive the kingdom of God** like a little **child** will never enter it." 16 And he took the **children** in his arms, put his hands on them and **blessed** them.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Jesus identifies the source of our problems as a "hard heart". He contrasts that with the heart of a child. How "soft" is your heart these days?

PRAYER: Open hearted Jesus, you once again meet with people who want to use their small version of God to control others. They want power over others and want God to back them up. You want power with others and back them down. You reveal that all whom God creates are loved by God. Help me relax into your understanding of God so that my heart will be open and warm. Amen

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

TESTED: Those who were in charge of interpreting the law were fond of using their specialty to set traps for Jesus. Under the guise of an honest question they set him up to condemn himself in front of the people. Jesus refocused the discussion by asking them a question about the law instead.

How does this method work for Jesus? Is this a method that you could use in similar circumstances? Does this have the potential to set the situation right? How?

LAWFUL: Laws set the 'norms' for behavior that enables a society to function. In times where mutual trust is lacking, people rely more heavily on laws to enforce behavior.

Examine your feelings about having something being lawful. Unlawful. When do you support something being lawful? Unlawful?

DIVORCE: Divorce was rigidly controlled because it broke up political alliances, economic arrangements, and clan relationships in Jesus' day. It often set loose blood feuds that endured for generations, and brought shame to the 'house of' whomever. In a shame-based system, this was devastating.

Are there any of these same dynamic's in divorce today?

CERTIFICATE: Moses, the arbiter of the law, permitted divorce and the decree of divorce to protect the woman. She could remarry if she had a certificate of divorce. Otherwise, she often was forced into prostitution to survive. There were two schools of thought warring over how to decide; one strict, the other lenient.

What are the Pharisees indirectly accusing Jesus of in this question?

HEARTS WERE HARD: Some translations use the word stubborn in this sentence. Hardness of the heart is more culpable because it involves a consistent refusal to be compassionate.

What happens when we harden our hearts about someone or something?

BEGINNING: Jesus reaches back to God's original intention when creating humanity for his response. Those challenging Jesus, think they know God's mind on all things, and Jesus reveals that they do not.

What does this response do to the 'authority' of the questioners? Have you ever had a hardhearted questioner appeal to some 'authority' in order to put you down? What was that experience like for you

MALE AND FEMALE: Jesus lifts up the equality of the human couple when he looks to see God's mind on the subject of human relationships.

What does this tell you about Jesus' understanding of God's purposes? What does this tell you about the Pharisee's understanding?

ONE FLESH: Genesis explains the creation of the human in several ways. In one of those ways, God discovers that it is not good for the human to be alone. In order to correct this, God creates the couple from the same flesh.

What do you think of when you hear those words, of the same flesh? Who do you think of today when you hear those words?

JOINED / SEPARATE: In this world of either/or thinking, we often polarize our thoughts and feelings. This can be the seedbed of much suffering. Jesus is revealing God's mind to us in this discussion of human relationships.

What does it mean to have something 'joined' by God? How do you know when this is true? Not true?

ADULTERY: Adultery was a complicated thing then as it is now. A man could have several wives, and even make use of a prostitute, without committing adultery in Jesus' day.

How is Jesus challenging this system of thought in making this statement about adultery? What does this do to the status of marriage? Women? Men?



CHILDREN / CHILD: Jesus, once again, uses the defenseless image of a child to reveal God's mind to the people.

Why do you think it is so difficult for people to accept Jesus' understanding of God and God's kingdom? Is it difficult for you today? Why?

COME / RECEIVE: No one is insignificant in God's creation. The very fact that they exist means that the God feels that they are important. Jesus models this by receiving all that come to him.

What does this tell us about the people who brought their children to Jesus? What does this tell us about the disciples?

INDIGNANT: To become indignant is to become exasperated over someone's meanness or refusal to be just.

What makes this word appropriate for this situation? Do you reveal your heart when you become indignant over something?

KINGDOM OF GOD: God's kingdom is where God's will is done completely.

What does this text reveal about God's kingdom?

BLESSED: God is the only one who can bestow a blessing. We can only pray that God will bless someone or something. Such prayers are thought to be particularly effective when spoken by someone of importance

What is Mark telling us when he says that Jesus blessed the children?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mk.10: 2-12 // Mt. 19:3-9; Mk. 10:4 //Dt. 24:1-4; Mk. 10:6 // Gn. 1:27; Mk. 10:7 // Gn. 2:24; 1 Cor.6: 16; Eph. 5:31; Mk. 10:11 // Mk. 5:32; Lk. 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:10f; Mk. 10:13-16 // Mt. 19:13f; Lk. 18:15f; Lk. 9:47; Mk. 10:15 // Mt. 18:3;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Gen. 2:18-24; [Ps. 128:1-6](#); Heb. 2:9-11; Mk. 10: 2-16;

Revised Common Lectionary: Job 1:1; 2:1-10; [Ps. 26](#); Heb. 1:1-4; 2:5-12; Mk. 10: 2-16

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

Mk. 10.1-16: Marriage, divorce, and children (Mt 19.1-15; Lk 18.15-17). 1: Jesus' travels bring him into Judea, the region of Jerusalem. 2-9: As in 2.25-26, it appears that after a challenge from the Pharisees (v. 2), the original clever retort (v. 9) was

supplemented by a scriptural and legal argument (vv. 3–8). Here a rigor greater than that in Torah is held up for emulation: the commandment allowing divorce was given because of hardness of heart. Mark insists that the prohibition of divorce (Deut 24.1–4) goes back to creation (Gen 1.27; 2.24), a legal move not unlike Paul’s critique of the law (Gal 3.17). The prohibition of divorce appears in many early texts of the followers of Jesus (Mt 5.32; 1 Cor 7.10–11) and may derive from Jesus himself. Some interpreters argue that it was introduced to protect women from being abandoned without support, but there is nothing in any of these texts to suggest this. Further, the Qumran sect also prohibited divorce with the same scriptural argument as here: marriage was ordained at creation (CD 4.19–5.2). Among his followers the prohibition of divorce might have addressed the situation of those who were separating for celibacy (Mt 19.10–12; Lk 18.29–30; 1 Cor 7.5). The same may be true for the affirmation of children in vv. 13–16 (contrast Wis 4.1–9). 11–12: Biblical law allowed only men to initiate divorce (Deut 24.1–4), but in this period Jewish women, in accordance with Roman law, also initiated divorces, as Mark and Paul assumed. 13–16: Perhaps the disciples spoke sternly to those bringing children because they were still concerned with distinctions of status; see 9.34. Receive the kingdom of God as a little child, without regard to one’s position in it; perhaps also without insisting that it come to one by merit, but simply as given, just as children “receive” their upbringing. Pgs. 81-82. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

This is a bit less surprising when we realize that in the Galilee of Jesus’ day only men could apply for divorce. It was not an option for women. This is less surprising when we consider the early history of Israel, as seen in the book of Genesis, where men were allowed multiple wives. This is still the case in some parts of the Middle East. In fact, the system as it existed in Jesus’ day allowed for men to have multiple wives, but only in succession, sort of consecutive rather than coterminous polygamy. (Of course, in royal circles, exceptions were made, as seen in the case of Herod, who had more than one wife.) So when Jesus was talking, answering questions from Pharisees, the conversation was about options available for men. Now here’s the question. What do you think he was getting at? What was his target here? His answer, when we look at it from this point of view, seems to emphasize the equality of women with the men. The passage he cites, which is from today’s first reading from Genesis 1, emphasizes the partnership between the couple. The individuals find themselves completed in the union of the two. In effect, it was a recognition of the full personhood (in our terms) of each partner in the marriage. There was no room here for multiple wives. [Fr. Robert Beck](#)

But being intellectually humble also means taking an active stance. It means seeing your worldview as open to improvement by the evidence and experience of other people. Being open to improvement is more than just being open to change. And it isn’t just a matter of self-improvement — using your genius to know even more. It is a matter of seeing your view as capable of improvement because of what others contribute. [Michael Patrick Lynch](#)

A paper I wrote on the creation of man and woman called [Words Create Realities](#).

[In overvaluing confidence, we’ve forgotten the power of humility.](#)

In the Hebrew Scriptures, God's covenant love seems to morph from a bilateral covenant ("You do that and I'll do this") as in the covenants with Moses and Noah to a totally unilateral covenant (with Abraham and David), when it becomes clear that we humans will never keep our side of the agreement yet Yahweh always has and always will....What God does in biblical history (and wants to do in our own lives) is to lead people beyond the idea of a bilateral contract in which we must earn, deserve, and merit, to an experience of pure, unearned grace, a unilateral or "new" covenant with an Infinite Love Source. Richard Rohr

The gospel tells us, "*But to those who did accept Him He gave the power to **become**...*" (Jn 1:12). It tells us that, by entering into a relationship, we can become something we are not now. In that relationship we will receive a good we do not now have, but which we desire. Fr. Jonah Wharff

[It is safe to love.](#) Yes, it is safe to be vulnerable because we are in loving hands. It is safe to surrender because we fall into light, not darkness. It is safe to be weak because the strength we need is found when we give up on our own power. It is safe give up the hurts we cling to because these lose their force when we are in love. It is safe to trust, to let our loved ones be free, because a power beyond us loves them more than we do and ultimately takes care of their safety. It is safe to give ourselves over without fear because, as faith teaches, in the end, all will be well. And it is safe to live our lives with daring because God, as Julian Norwich assures us, sits in heaven, smiling, completely relaxed, his face looking like a marvelous symphony. The world is ultimately safe. It is safe to love.

In creating the world the first time, He gave existence to things; but the second time, He places His own existence in it. And this loving action that proceeds from the Father through the Son to the Spirit is so eminently a work of love that it is attributed to the Spirit.-- The Holy Spirit - is holiness, love, a kiss, a gift, union, consummation, and perfection. "The Theology of the Spirit" Emile Mersch

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON DIVORCE:

The marriage and divorce institutions of the West are derived from ancient Hebrew and Roman sources. In Jewish law, a wife did not have the right to divorce her husband, but she did have the right to remarry if her husband divorced her. This is recorded in

Deuteronomy 24:1: "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her.. he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house...and if she goes and becomes another man's wife...."

In the Roman Empire, marriage was not a legal formality; a man and a woman simply began to live together in a permanent household. The only legal requirements were that the parties be citizens above the age of puberty and that they have the consent of their families. Both the husband and the wife possessed property separately. Either could put an end to the marriage; the law required only a clear indication of the intent to divorce, such as a formal letter.

The early Christian emperors of Rome began to bring marriage and divorce under the authority of the law. JUSTINIAN I, the lawgiver of the 6th century, sought to impose the church's view of divorce but had to back down because of public protest. In the eyes of the Christian church, marriage was indissoluble. Canon law, as it developed during the Middle Ages, became the law of the Christian countries of Europe with respect to marriage and divorce; under it, divorce was not allowed. Separation--"divorce from bed and board"--was permitted in the case of adultery or extreme cruelty; it was also permissible if one of the partners had left the church. A marriage might be annulled, however, if any of the rigorous requirements of canon law for a valid marriage had been violated; partners were then allowed to remarry.

Canon law concerning divorce could be summarized by the phrase from the marriage ceremony: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). When Martin Luther and other Protestants broke away from the Roman church in the 16th century, they adopted a different view of marriage. Luther called it "an external worldly thing, subject to secular jurisdiction, just like dress and food, home and field." The Protestants, therefore, permitted divorce on specific grounds, such as adultery, cruelty, or desertion. In England a different tradition prevailed. Legal divorce was instituted after HENRY VIII broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, but it was obtained through Parliament rather than through the courts. Every divorce required a separate act of the House of Lords. Divorce was therefore expensive and accessible only to the rich and powerful. This system of legislative divorce continued in England until 1857, when Parliament established the Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes.

Cecrops, the first king of Athens ca 1580 BCE is thought to be the first one to make marriage --one man - one woman. Before that connections had taken place at random and marriages were in common, making it impossible for people to know who their fathers were. It was then that children were named after their fathers. (The myth has it that Cecrops was Athens first king. Cecrops was not born by anyone but grew up from earth. Cecrops was no ordinary man, he was half man from the waist-up and half snake from the waistdown. He lived on the top of a rock hill that he named Acropolis)

DIVORCE IN THE UNITED STATES

The early American settlers brought with them three different views on divorce: the Roman Catholic view that marriage was a sacrament and that there could be no divorce; the English view that divorce was a legislative matter; and the Protestant view that marriage and divorce were secular matters to be handled by the civil authorities.

LIKE A LITTLE CHILD

Now consider the characteristics of a child from your own personal experience--the traits of growth, playfulness, feeling, and trust. Ponder whether any of those qualities need to be rejuvenated within yourself. Assess the state of health of your inner child. Augustine saw the inner motives of the partners that constituted the reality of marriage. In *The City of God* (6.9) he derides the pomp (and the obscenity of pagan marriage rites). Legal marriage is necessary, to secure property rights and legitimacy of inheriting offspring. But the spiritual reality of "one flesh" can only be the product of the partners *fides*, making each a trusty (fidus) companion. Thus the church council of Toledo (499 CE) recognized the validity of what we call "natural law marriages" -- which is what Augustine's union would have been if he had met the two *internal conditions* of the first hypothesis above. Roman law at the same time recognized concubinage as a form of monogamy. **It was not until the 5th century, after Augustine's death, that the church began to validate marriages on its own**, stepping in to replace the diminishing authority of the state in the Christian empire. The preeminence of the bride's father in Roman marriage yielded gradually to the authority of the priest.

Can you recognize the gospel scene unfolding within yourself? Perhaps you have decided to try to change an attitude or a habit, but you encounter frequent failures in the process. An inner voice nags, "You should give it up. You can't do it. You should keep the old way anyway; it is easier and safer."...there is a name for the disease that these nagging inner voices inflict on our child. It is called "Should Fever." It describes all the things we or other people think we should be in contrast to what we can and want to be. It saps the strength of our inner child, and when left unchecked it can bring on a mortal illness.

Gill, Jean. *Images of Myself*. Paulist Press, NY. 1982. Pages 39-40.

Divorce is also permitted if the husband finds some other objection to her (Dt. 24: 1-4) (See other conditions mentioned in Dt. 22:13ff) and gives her a divorce document (get). The wife is permitted to remarry, but if her second husband divorces her because he "dislikes"

her or he dies, making her a widow, her first husband is not permitted to remarry her because she has been “defiled” by another man, even though he is also legally a husband. Streete, Gail Corrington. The Strange Woman. Louisville, KY. Westminster John Knox Press.1997. Pg. 39.

In chapter 6, “Jesus, Divorce, and Sexuality: A Jewish Critique by Amy-Jill Levine (Page 133ff) we find much to help us understand the divorce question from a Jewish perspective. She quotes “Families in the New Testament world by Carolyn Osiek and David Balch: “Divorce was commonly practiced in all ancient Mediterranean societies... Though it was more likely to be initiated by the husband a wife too in most situations could initiate divorce, though sometimes only through the intervention of her father or male relative responsible for protecting her honor and that of her family of origin. Adultery and infertility were the two leading causes of divorce, but there need not be a cause; mutual consent with family approval sufficed.” Pg. 62.

Le, Beau, Brian F. et al ed. The Historical Jesus Through Catholic and Jewish Eyes... Harrisburg, PA. Trinity Press International. 2000.

In the Jewish understanding of the human person, the heart (*leb*) was the very core of the human being. The heart was known only to God. In one’s heart a human was open to God or closed to God. In effect, Jesus’ reply to the Pharisees was that if they were to take advantage of the provision of Dt. 24:1 and divorce their wives, they were no better than Pharaoh of old, who also was heard of heart. Collins, Raymond F. Sexual Ethics and the New Testament. NY. Crossroads. 2000. Pg. 27.

When the sun rises and casts its light on the world, it reveals both itself and the thing it illumines. Similarly, when the Sun of righteousness rises in the pure intellect, He reveals both Himself and the inner principles of all that has been and will be brought into existence by Him. St. Maximos the Confessor

If we enter into the Reign of God, we allow ourselves to be drawn into this dynamic rule or guidance of God's love. Everything in all of creation has been made to exist because it's drawn into being by love. Each of us is drawn out of nothingness by the love of God. So, when the love of God prevails everywhere, in every person, throughout all of creation, we will have the fullness of God's Reign, God's love overseeing everything. The Reign of God means that everyone would have a full human life, where all of us would be sharing with one another, not trying to grasp and hang onto something just for myself. The Reign of God is the dynamic love of God, spreading through our lives, through our world, through our universe. [Bp. Thomas Gumbleton](#)

...the Kingdom of Heaven, the time when God’s way of love will embrace all the people of the earth, when everyone will live a full human life -- the reign of God, God’s life and its fullness shared by all. [Bp. Gumbleton](#)

At some moments we experience complete unity within us and around us. This may happen when we stand on a mountaintop and are captivated by the view. It may happen when we witness the birth of a child or the death of a friend. It may happen when we have an intimate conversation or a family meal. It may happen in church during a service or in a quiet room during prayer. But whenever and however it happens we say to ourselves: "This is it ... everything fits ... all I ever hoped for is here." This is the experience that Peter, James, and John had on the top of Mount Tabor when they saw the aspect of Jesus' face change and his clothing become sparkling white. They wanted that moment to last forever (see [Luke 9:28-36](#)). This is the experience of the fullness of time. These moments are given to us so that we can remember them when God seems far away and everything appears empty and useless. These experiences are true moments of grace. Henri Nouwen

On retreat I once wrote in my journal, “How good of you, God, to make truth a relationship instead of an idea. Now there is room between you and me for growth, for conversation, for exception, for the infinite understandings created by intimacy, for the possibility to give back and to give something to You—as if I could give anything back to You. “You offer me the possibility to undo, to please, to apologize, to change, to surrender, and to grow. There’s room for stages and for suffering, for mutual passion and mutual pity. There’s room for mutual everything.” This is good religion, worthy of free, intelligent, and mature people! Richard Rohr

ADDITIONAL READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2005. Pgs. 148-152.

Gill, Jean. Images of Myself. Paulist Press, NY. 1982. A GIFT:Page 65; EMPATHY IN SHEER PLACES: HE WON’T LISTEN: Page 66.

Hays, Edward. The Gospel of Gabriel. Easton, KS. Forest of Peace Books. 1996. **The Little Children Come to Jesus**: Pg. 137-8.

Freeman, Sean. The Thomas More Bible Prayer Book. Chicago. Thomas More Press. 1976. **Children**. Pg.109-10