

Job 1:1, 2:1-10 Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12 Mark 10:2-16 Ordinary Sunday 27 Year B Scott Malcolm

I was 11 when my parents got divorced. It was 1971.

My brother and I were at boarding school in Dunedin, my parents in Invercargill.

At the beginning of the year Mum and Dad dropped us off at John McGlashan College.

At the end of the year Mum and her boyfriend picked us up and we went north to Ruakaka.

I didn't see my Dad again until 1976, when I was 16, and then not again until just before he died in 1992. He was 56 and I was 33.

In Mark chapter 10 Jesus talks about my parent's divorce, he talks about divorce in general, he talks about the divorces that you and your families may have been a part of. He talks about divorce as only Jesus can talk about anything; with redemptive idealism and compassionate justice.

He does not allow us to escape the pain, hurt and responsibility that this breaking of intimate human relationship causes, but he also lifts all of us who have experienced this kind of fracture in the human world, to a place of hope, healing, and justice, no matter what you might have heard the church says about the matter.

Let's listen to how Mark paints the picture; Jesus is on the road south, heading for Jerusalem. He becomes engaged in a debate with the Pharisees. It is a matter of a practical interpretation of the law. The legal grounds of divorce. As it was being interpreted only the rights of men were important. Jesus in his argument, does something challenging. He points to another part of the scripture to highlight the deficiency in the Pharisees argument. They quote Moses and the Mosaic covenant, as recorded in Deuteronomy. Jesus quotes Genesis and the creation account, as recorded in Genesis 2.

But the quoting of two different and opposing views in the scripture is not to disprove one with the other. It is not to swap one legalism for another. That a wife can be put away with ease to having to remain married forever, that is not what Jesus is doing.

Jesus wants rather to address the understanding of the inequality of men and women. That in the Genesis account, men and women were created equal. In the Mosaic covenant, they are not!

We must be very careful to see what Jesus is saying here. He heightens the importance of the marriage relationship; however, you understand that. He says this is a relationship between equals and should not be treated lightly, should not be broken easily. It recognises that divorce

or separation is a profound spiritual and social tragedy, and I don't think anyone who has experienced it would argue with that.

Separation or divorce is a tragic break down between equals.

But Jesus also acknowledges that divorce and separation are realities, realities in which the fundamental issue of justice must not be missed. As equals, Mark has Jesus suggest they must both take responsibility and accountability for the death of the marriage, but in Mark's day it is without doubt the women who were at the greatest disadvantage, by far.

Mark is reminding his readers that marriage is a union of equals, a revolutionary idea. He wants to say that marriage is not disposable, and that divorce should not be easy. In a perfect world it shouldn't occur. But it does and when it happens, people must be treated justly.

Jesus is still heading south, but now we notice that the conversation is no longer a debate with the Pharisees on the road, but a discussion with the disciples in the intimate setting of the home. How appropriate for a discussion like this, the place where these relationships are worked out, were the only people with less rights than the women of Mark's day also lived, the children.

Jesus has talked about equality in the most fundamental of human relationships, about justice, and now he enacts that justice. After speaking about the consequences of the breakdown in marriage relationships, however you understand those, he enacts justice, by gathering the most vulnerable, the least powerful, the most unequal, into his arms and blessing them.

These are those who have nothing in the power stakes, the most effected by the economic, social and spiritual breakdown of the relationship in divorce, and Jesus blesses them.

Jesus way is the way of equals. Men, women and children. This drives at the heart of all elite political and religious power bases. At the very core of patriarchal family structures, at the very centre of the home where this discussion is being held.

Mark says, Jesus way is the way of equals, anything less than this is not ideal.

But he says, this is not always the reality, so when this happens, justice must be done.

In this instance.....women.....and children..... must be blessed.....

For it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs.