

Pastor Roy's Sermon from October 4, 2015

Mark 10:2-16

Throughout the Bible there is always tension between *law and grace*. Law points the people of faith in a holy direction. As time passes, the relevance of the particular laws changes. There are ceremonial laws relating to whether a person is clean or unclean, most of which we do not find meaningful today. Even many of the laws that govern how the tribes of Israel kept law and order are not sensible to us today. In times of great stress and change, the law was emphasized by some. But others emphasized grace and radical trust in God's mercy regardless of one's ability to perfectly follow the law. For those who knew and followed the law there was a sense of security. But there were abuses. They picked and chose which laws were important to follow. They naturally chose the ones which were easier for them to follow. *Yet those laws often alienated a number of common people, often those at the bottom of the social ladder.*

Jesus day was such a time of stress and change for the Jews. He believed in the Law. It was there to help the people of God remember God. But the law was not the essence of faith. It was too easily manipulated to help the strong be stronger and make the weak weaker. Jesus proclaimed that *everyone is weak* and everyone needs to repent, to confess, to stand before God with openness and great humility. Everyone needs grace. All have broken the law. In fact, *Jesus made clear* that those who thought they were better than the crowds were in the most danger of losing their spiritual lives. Those who knew they were broken and needed help, they were in the best place to receive it. The Good News is that Grace trumps Law every time. Law can save us from a great deal of pain and suffering. So we must mind the law. **But the law does not determine our relationship with God. Grace determines our relationship with God.**

A side note on **suffering**. We are reminded in Hebrews this morning that Jesus was made perfect in his suffering. So suffering is not punishment. Suffering is what happens when we live on earth. Sometimes our choices lead to suffering, but often suffering simply happens. In every case, suffering can and will make us stronger. Suffering invites us to trust more deeply, to wait for God, to hope in God. But suffering also demands of us honesty, and can force us to set aside misunderstandings about faith and God. If we are unable to be honest in suffering, we will be crushed by suffering. Jesus was made perfect in suffering. So are we made perfect in suffering.

On to the Gospel. Mark 10 contains law and grace. Some religious leaders are trying to trick Jesus into saying something untruthful. Is divorce lawful? Of course, it was lawful. Jesus makes clear that though it is lawful, divorce is to be avoided. The relationship of marriage is a powerful relationship and when it ends it leaves behind a great brokenness. Among the wealthy of Jesus' day, there was a casual air around divorce and it almost always benefitted the men. This casual attitude toward divorce trivialized the importance of family and the Spirit's power to work in relationships. Further, there was no safety net for the women left behind by divorce.

So in today's Gospel lesson, the institution of marriage is held up. The Law on marriage is that it holds the keys to great joy and great sorrow. Within it, the weak must be protected and all should have the chance to be built up in love and faithfulness. When that is not possible, there is the tragedy of divorce. There is mercy there too. It is fitting that the Gospel lesson does not end with the law on divorce and adultery, but the example of the children. He tells his disciples to stop chasing away the children, but that kingdom belongs to the little children who do not hold grudges, who do not judge with twisted motives, who do endlessly try to impress the wrong people, who receive with joy rather than defensiveness. They are open to the gifts of God. May we be and do likewise. Amen.