

## **Communion Meditation**

**Mark 10: 2-16**

**Home Moravian Church, October 6, 2024 (Worldwide Communion)**

Recently I've had fun talking with our 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade Sunday School class about the Garden of Eden. We spent a couple of Sundays just creating it (which means it took us longer than God). We drew the garden on posterboard, and made a human out of clay. Then we read in the Bible that God, having made a man, decided that it wasn't good for that man to be alone, so God started making animals, hoping one would be a suitable companion for the man.

Naturally, we re-enacted this effort, making animals out of clay and discussing the merits of each as a suitable companion. The dog ran a very strong campaign, but in the end we agreed that the most suitable companion for the first human was another human, bone of bone, flesh of flesh, heart to heart.

On this foundation—the principle that “it is not good for the human to be alone”—is built the institution of marriage: a union of two who, in our Moravian wedding liturgy, promise to “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ; ... love one another, be faithful to one another, bear one another's weaknesses and limitations, forgive one another, cherish one another in joy and sorrow, pray for and encourage one another in all things.” In this way, they live together—again quoting our wedding liturgy—as “heirs of the grace of life.”

And yet, as we all know, some of these unions falter and break.

Ancient laws spelling out legal ways to dissolve a marriage remind us that policy is a record of our past mistakes. Laws are often created to manage a problem that has already

happened. And divorce law reflects very human problems: We love imperfectly. We hurt one another. Not everything that is broken can be fixed.

Yet these truths do not make union less worthy of our best efforts and our holiest hopes.

To summarize today's text and its context: The Pharisees test Jesus with a legal question, possibly to entrap him in the same royal wrath that led to the death of John the Baptist.

According to Mark, John was killed because he challenged a royal divorce and remarriage in Herod's line. If the Pharisees can get Jesus to make the same mistake as John, that might take care of their Jesus problem. But Jesus answers their spitefulness with holiness. That a law exists to manage the consequences of human frailty does not make the ideal of union any less holy. Marriage is part of God's design for human good.

Now: Why am I preaching *this* text today? Two reasons.

One: It came up in the lectionary. Nothing in Moravian polity requires that we preach the texts assigned by our lectionary each Sunday, but it's a good practice; it gives all of us a broad acquaintance with the Bible, and it encourages pastors to preach on texts beyond their easy favorites.

Teachings against divorce are naturally troubling to faithful Christians, because, in one way or another, divorce touches all our lives. We are children of divorce, divorced ourselves, married to divorced people, parents of divorced children. Our Moravian Covenant for Christian Living regards divorce as a consequence of human frailty, noting, "We recognize that persons of sincere faith and with good counsel may still decide or be forced to divorce." Even as Jesus holds up the ideal, he acknowledges that Moses—the guy on the ground who had to lead all those fractious people of Israel through the wilderness—*Moses* wrote a commandment to help his society manage the complications of the human heart.

It is not good for a human to be alone; but being together with other humans can hurt, too. There is a space between our actual lives and our holy ideals, but fortunately, that space is full of grace. It's also a space in which we can learn a lot about ourselves, if we humble ourselves to the learning. We learn something about ourselves from every relationship to which we give ourselves.

But here's the other reason I chose this text to preach: Today is Worldwide Communion Sunday, and I'm thinking about how the holy ideal of union applies to the church. How it's not good that a church should be alone. How, nevertheless, the church breaks itself into pieces, even as Jesus cries, "What God has joined together, let no one separate."

Has the church not been joined together by God? Paul thought it had. "In the one Spirit," he wrote in First Corinthians, "we were all baptized into one body."

Yet churches do separate. If it never happened, no one would have written laws to manage the separations. Policy is a record of our past mistakes, and policy also prepares us to manage the pain and complication we are likely to encounter in the future.

Churches separate over all kinds of things. Rev. Dr. Bill Leonard, founding dean of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity and a lifelong Baptist, says that Baptists are the only organism that multiplies by dividing. It happens, of course, in all denominations. One congregation becomes two, or more, because of anything from a family quarrel to a theological challenge. The United Methodist Church has been working very hard these last few years on legal ways to create two denominations out of one, in order to accommodate different views on marriage.

But in some ways, Christians are more unified than in the past. Again I cite Rev. Dr. Leonard, who in church history class observed that in the present era, on any given Sunday, a

church on one side of the street might be baptizing a confessing adult by full immersion while a church on the other side is baptizing an infant in a sprinkle of water, and *no one's head is getting cut off*. That represents a big step forward from the sixteenth century.

Our eighteenth-century leader Count Zinzendorf, who taught our quarreling ancestors in Herrnhut, Germany, so much about living with each other, dreamed of bringing all Christians together into one great ecumenical union. The response he got from established churches was that when he showed up to preach, there was sometimes a padlock on the door. But since then, the church worldwide, in all its manifestations, has learned a lot about working together in the holy union that is the body of Christ.

But here's the thing. Did you notice that separation is also part of the story? Listen again to the text: "For this reason *a man shall leave his father and mother*." Before union, separation. To pledge oneself in holy union to another requires spiritual growth, maturity, change. As painful as it is, separation is also part of the natural order, creating a space in which we can reflect on our past, learn about ourselves, and move toward new union. Fortunately, that space is filled with grace.

And it is Jesus who leads us through it. It is Jesus who leads us from separation to union. As it says in our Moravian Ground of the Unity, "We believe and confess the unity of the Church given in the one Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior.... As the living Lord and shepherd, *he is leading his flock* toward such unity." And as a preview of that unity, Jesus leads us to this table of holy communion.

Just as he did in the story we talked about last week, Jesus closes this conversation by putting his arms around a child. "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it," he says. Children who will grow, children who will learn, children who will

move, as they mature, from separation to union. Jesus calls us to be like those children: humble, ready to learn, ready for relationship, open to whatever we can learn in every relationship; open to the leading of Jesus; someday to be embraced in unity by Jesus. Jesus, still lead on. Amen.