

Sermon on October 7, 2018 by Jerry Howe

“You Have Got To Be Kidding Me”

Mark 10: 2-16

We are in a transition between a new consciousness and an old definition. The new consciousness will win but as with every human struggle to emerge from ignorance, there will be casualties long after the issue is decided. John Shelby Spong speaking about same sex marriage.

Have you ever had one of those weeks that from every phone call, Email, text, you go...You must be kidding me. One complexity and unforeseen problem after another from what started out to look like a very promising week.

So, this is the icing on the cake for me after a week of you must be kidding me, when I finally read today's Gospel. You have got to be kidding.

Here I am a gay man. Who has for the most part successfully avoided long term relationships in his life. Who knows all too well how this passage is used by others

to claim that the only marriages are between a man and a woman according to the one unerring truth, the Bible. I even had to call my long-time mentor John Harper to whine to him about what was I supposed to do with this Gospel.

So, let's roll up our sleeves and get to work.

First of all, in this Greco-Roman time there were something like 8 forms of marriage going on according to one source:

1.) The nuclear family. One man, one woman which we have in today's Gospel.

Where the bride's father basically sold her to her husband. If the bride couldn't prove she was a virgin she could be stoned to death.

2.) Man-Wives and Concubines. There were many religious men in the bible that were married in this way.

3.) Man- Woman and the woman's property. The first state in the US to make a slight change to this was Mississippi in 1839 which grants the right for a woman to hold property in their own name, with her husband's permission of course.

4.) Man-woman-woman-woman-woman. Polygamy.

- 5.) Somewhat as common as the nuclear family, the Levirate marriage. Man, and his brothers' widow. If widow has no son she must marry her brother-in-law and be subject to a sexual relationship with him.
- 6.) Rapist and victim. A virgin who is raped must marry her rapist. Rapist must pay her father 50 shekels for his loss of property.
- 7.) Male soldiers to prisoners of war. Even Moses ordered the woman and children to be killed but the virgins to be saved for the soldiers.
- 8.) Male slave to female slave. Of course, in this situation both were considered property.

So, you see I feel that many scholars pick and choose conveniently what they want to take from the context of today's reading. This maybe beyond true with number 6 the rapist and the victim from what has been going on in Washington DC this week.

The Reverend John Allen speaks the following: This teaching marks a turn to family ethics. The Pharisees question about divorce again serves as a foundation upon which Jesus makes a larger teaching that transcends the context of their specific query to make a larger point. In this case, Jesus

outlines an expansive family ethic rooted in an understanding that, with the family at the center of social life, intrafamilial ethics have vast political consequences. In discussing both marriage and children, Jesus imagines models of the family that are radically expansive relative to his context. Most notably, Jesus in teaching his disciples, speaks both of the conditions under which a man can leave his wife, *and* under which a woman can leave her husband. Even in the context of such a negative exhortation, the implication that women have agency in initiating a divorce is a departure from Greco-Roman norms of marriage in which the woman was regarded as property transacted from father to husband. This text raises key questions in how modern moral principles can be derived from ancient texts. In the case of this text, it seems clear that a simple prohibition against divorce will not function as a modern moral norm as the ethical implications of such a prohibition are unnecessarily physiologically damaging and restrictive. Additionally, the institution of marriage in the ancient world bears little resemblance to marriage in the modern world and is undertaken for largely different reasons and in a decidedly less patriarchal context. What this text *can* demonstrate though is Jesus' desire to empower women beyond their current social state. By evaluating Jesus' teaching relative to context and seeing the direction it moves, we can seek to move in a similar direction from our own context.

Seeking to empower women as equal participants in their social and romantic interactions in our modern context means improving access to birth control and healthcare, address issues of poverty which disproportionately affect women, and guaranteeing women equal pay.

The Reverend Allen makes many great points especially regarding the rights of women today. In today's world, at least in our society, most likely none of the eight forms of marriage makes any sense to us at all. Yes, there are many that would love to take us back to the patriarchal norm of Jesus time and also really in our own time. My Grandmother's would have been in their twenties when they finally had the right to vote in this country. When in 1920 the 19th amendment giving women the right to vote was ratified. California was the first state in the Union to implement a "no fault" divorce law in 1969. And Mississippi did not ratify the 19th amendment giving women the right to vote until 1984.

Then also what about the children into today's Gospel. Many scholars will talk about the innocence of the child but some scholars state that the significance of the children in the scripture is the fact that they are as marginalized in Jesus time as are women. And that the disciples wanting to keep them from Jesus is because they aren't worthy to be near him. Jesus blessing them is not about them being baptized at a young age but to remind us for a healthy society we must protect

children from all the abuses they can encounter and allow them to grow up healthy and well cared for.

So where does all of this leave us today? In our community and in our society, we marry because of love. We marry because we may also want to raise a family. We want our children to grow up in a loving home and have a wonderful childhood and childhood memories that will lead them to healthy and successful lives of their own as adults. But let us also remember that the concept of marrying for love and the modern concept of childhood are only within the last 100 years or so. And in many parts of the world the sense of childhood as we would define it still doesn't exist. And in parts of the world in some form or variations the eight types of marriage still do exist.

So, what is God asking us to do today in a world where every time I turn around I see or find another event that makes me say you have to be kidding me!

Today is New Song's 24th year of existence.

The joy and uniqueness of New Song is the macrocosm of the world we represent.

New Song has had progressive and liberal attitude towards marriage between a

man and a woman, a woman and a woman and a man and a man. Long before it became the law of the land. All who have shown us that love is love is love. That the definition of family is broader than in Jesus time. And that children can thrive in all of these varied forms of marriage. We, I am sure have those who have also gone through the hard times of divorce abuse and betrayal. And I am sure we have those amongst us that may have not had the ideal sense of a childhood.

But what I believe that God wants us to do as a community is to lead by example the power of his love.

That we learn and express affection for ourselves and our loved ones and our community in healthy and better ways. A caring touch. The sign of the cross we put on our neighbor's forehead as we go to communion.

That we show mutual respect for our beloveds in the supportive tone of our voice, in how we can agree from time to time to disagree but still know that our love for each other is enhanced by God's love for us.

That in our shared values as a community we can offer support to those in need when having struggles in their family or in their ability to make it through their day today life's.

That we find honesty in how we communicate with each other. Not by mocking or bullying or insinuation that you may be less than who you are. Honesty is extremely difficult.

And the power of trust in a healthy relationship. Once a trust is broken it can be hard to repair. Or it may just be irreparable. What can we do to continue to build trust in the way that God trust us to be his people in the world?

Finally, the Freedom to be who you are. The ability to find the times and things we enjoy doing together. As well as the time to do things that you enjoy independent of your beloved. The example is in weddings when the couples take their individual candles to light a main candle that represented their union and then they both blew out their individual candles. Today they will leave their

individual candles lit as well. To represent their togetherness and their individuality.

Personally, as I have prepared this sermon. I have thought about the roles models of relationships that have been in my life. The things that they got right and the things the didn't get right. From parents to grandparents to the relationships of friends and family. Relationship whether because we are married or because we have made our own family surrounded by friends are always a lot of work.

But how will you look at your spouse, your family, your created family from the context of how would God want me to lead by his example in love? Will we look at it from a new consciousness or an old definition? Will we be a casualty or a survivor? May we find the love and support of our community here at New Song, and the love and support of our beloveds as we learn to face the world through God's eternal love.

Happy Anniversary New Song, And all of God's Children say, Amen.

