

Gospel lesson

Again picking up in the Gospel of Mark from where we left off last week:



picture screencaptured from
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fH-4rt4QK0Q>;
credit: LUMO

Mark 10:2-16

(NRSV)

² Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

³ He answered them, "What did Moses command you?"

⁴ They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her."

⁵ But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you.

⁶ But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'

⁷ 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,

⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

¹⁰ Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.

¹¹ He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her;

¹² and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

¹³ People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them.

¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Jesus Loves Me">

UMH #191>

<Children's time>

Message: Such as These



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/walking-with-jesus/twentieth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/twentieth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

God of all people, the greatest and the least, as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

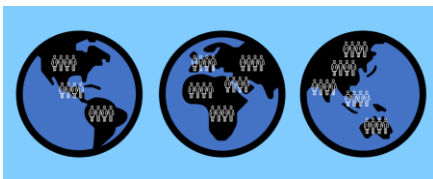
- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may care for all of your children with the grace You would have us provide to their situations. Amen.

We start "Walking with Jesus" today with "Such as These":

"May this celebration draw you [~~and your congregation~~] into the surprising and beautiful depths of what it means to worship as the Body of Christ in different places and yet all at once."¹

<Interactive Time>



picture from personal creation

Who do you know from around the world?

<Let them respond>

What are some customs they have (around the world) that are different than ours? <Let them respond>

Are they better or worse than us? <Let them respond>

¹ Theme summary taken from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/walking-with-jesus>.

Does God love them? <Let them respond>

Do they love God? <Let them respond>

This is World Communion Sunday. What does that mean to you? <Let them respond>

What happens to the gathered people in communion? <Let them respond>

As the body of Christ around the world, what do you think we might be inspired to do? <Let them respond>

Should we worry about whether or not the people we help deserve it? <Let them respond>



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/jtjm-job/>

In the Old Testament lesson, Job seemed to be doing all the right things; even God said he was blameless. There is great debate over why God permitted Satan to persecute Job. I tend toward the mindset that [God wants relationships built on love, not transactions], but the text can be interpreted in different ways.

One thing is clear, that Job's wife and friends judged Job wrongly, simply because they could not make sense of the situation. It makes me wonder about

the psalmist, who talks about “the worthless” and proclaims himself innocent even as he disdains hypocrites and sinners. It makes me wonder about us.

If even a great psalmist who praises God is blind to his own sin and misjudges others in relation to himself, I have to ask, “Where do we do that similarly today?” – for none of us are innocent.



background picture from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AS08-16-2593_remastered.jpg; one of the first images taken by humans of the whole Earth, from Apollo 8.

As we wonder about why God allowed the persecution of Job, we also wonder why God loves and honors humans so much; as written in Hebrews, “bringing many children to glory” through the suffering of Jesus. Christ showed us that God is willing to bear great suffering and loss to be in a relationship of love with us, without our earning or deserving it.

So how dare we ever simply dismiss those whom God loves? Jesus was all about caring for those who were vulnerable, stumbling, suffering. In the patriarchal society of biblical times, women in general were entirely dependent on male family members; being divorced meant being left destitute after having been promised support for life. It was cruel.

More than that, Jesus speaks of adultery. Marriage is a partnered commitment to support one another;

adultery is a betrayal of that relationship, a breaking of the partnership. It too is cruel.

That is not to say all relationships are healthy, or to be endured. The concern is that each member of a relationship be treated with care and grace. The needs of each party must be addressed for healing in whatever paths forward they take.



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-group-of-little-kids-at-a-refugee-campsite-19264361/>;
credit: Ahmed akacha

And relationships affect far more than just the direct members of them. Broken families struggle, with children often bearing scars from the parents' choices. We see this in dysfunctional homes as the next generation propagates mistakes of the past in new ways. We see this in the number of people who seek therapy in an attempt to break the cycle.

We see it in conflicts between cultures, countries, races. War in the Mideast escalates because children bearing scars from the tragedies [their parents and grandparents had to endure] lash out in angry hatred instead of seeking reconciliation in grace. The US bears scars from slavery and segregation even today.

Everywhere that is war-torn or devastated by tragedy, future relationships are being impacted by our response today. Are we teaching resentment or love?

Are we helping people to enter God's kingdom like little children, in trust and faith, or are we alienating them from it?

On World Communion Sunday, we think about our relationships not just locally, but internationally. As Christians, we are united through sharing of Jesus's body and blood. When we help people around the world in Christ's name, we further share God's good news of love.

Here are three examples of people showing the kind of care that Jesus showed for others:

- † The World Central Kitchen does more than just feed people in crisis; they listen to, learn from, and cook side-by-side with people impacted by the crisis. Through the relationships they build, they provide true comfort food.
- † Doctors Without Borders provide lifesaving medical humanitarian care on the ground and speak out about what [they] see. They heal bodies and ease the pain of horrific situations, restoring trust in humanity through the relationships they build.
- † UMCOR comes alongside those who suffer from natural or human-caused disasters to alleviate suffering and serve as a source of help and hope for the vulnerable. They nurture people and communities for recovery from overwhelming events, building relationships of love and caring through sharing

the love of God.

Those are three different groups with similar goals: to help people in need regardless of their merit. Jesus helped all people regardless of their merit.



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/walking-with-jesus/twentieth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/twentieth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-graphics>

You see, God's love is not transactional; we do not earn it. And it is not like pie, where there are only so many pieces to go around and then others miss out. Rather, God's love is infinite: we are blessed abundantly and called to share the love of God with everyone, regardless of their station in life or how different they look than us - especially when they open their hearts to Jesus.

For it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. On this World Communion Sunday, we remember that Christians all around the globe are heirs of the kingdom with us, our brothers and sisters in Christ. How are we nurturing our relationships with our siblings around the world? How are we working to reconcile with one another in our community? Are we faithful to our call, as God is to us?

Written by Matt Gaventa, "PC(USA) World Communion Sunday Liturgy," Presbyterian Mission Agency, 2016, page 2, <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/PGW16-World-Communion-Sunday-Worship-resource.pdf>. Reposted at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/walking-with-jesus/twentieth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/twentieth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-liturgical-resources>