

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



6 OCTOBER 2024

PENTECOST 20



KIDS IN KINGDOM MODE HELP JESUS
TO DEAL WITH OUR BROKENNESS

Pent 20 - Mark 10:2-16



WORSHIP AT HOME

This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.

Set aside a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are. We join with them all.

Prepare a space in the house; find a comfortable chair, light a candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.

WE GATHER

GREETING:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you all

And also with you

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION:

As a minister, as a family member and as a friend I have been involved in too many divorces and breakdowns in relationships. Two come to mind. A friend of ours had an affair and his shattered wife called me for help. I did not want to be involved. And when I did get involved, it was a very draining and stressful experience, but nothing like the stress both of them felt. Eventually they were reconciled, principally because of their Christian faith and actually became stronger in their marriage relationship and faith – but I would not recommend you strengthen your relationships in that way!

The other broken relationship was of a couple I married and one of the partners walked out, leaving the other partner and three small children behind. That other partner asked for my help. But departing partner had no commitment to come back into the relationship and they were never reconciled. They did both get on with life but not as partners.

In today's Gospel Jesus is 'tested' by the religious authorities about his views on divorce. If you read the text carefully it is not a simple prohibition on divorce. It has a few surprises. Today we will explore this area of brokenness in our human relationships and see where a faithful response might lead us.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Welcome to this place:

**where children and seasoned citizens sit side by side,
where heaven and earth embrace in peace,
where God has been, is, and always will be.**

Welcome to this place, as we gather with all of God's children:

**where we find God's love,
where we hear the tender voice of Jesus,
where the Spirit teaches us new songs.**

Welcome to this place, where all is made ready by our God:

**where we bring our hunger, and find food;
where we bring our brokenness, and find healing;
where we bring our very selves, and find acceptance.**

(c) Thom M. Shuman

HYMN TiS 491: Father welcomes... Robin Mann 1949-

PRAYERS: ADORATION, CONFESSION & FORGIVENESS:

ADORATION

Lord Healer and Re-newer - God of wonder, God of glory, God who became one of us, God who was broken for our sake, God who mends the broken,

we stand before you in awe of your gracious giving, loving and renewing!

All thanks be to you! Nothing in all of heaven and all of earth can separate us from your unquenchable love for us and the Creation! How marvellous you are!

You are eternal love and powerful creator and yet one who willingly surrendered that position and power, to rescue us from our shattered human failure and brokenness.

Astounding is your love and relationship with us – so astonishing that we find it hard to accept and be transformed by it. Transformed into the fullness of humanity you intend for each one of us.

And as we think about so much brokenness in our own relationships, we ask for your gift of healing for all your children; that we may be granted the same mind which was in Christ Jesus, and the same faith in your reconciling love, that he lived and died for.

Amen

CONFESSION

Lord Healer

We confess to many forms of brokenness in our own lives and the life of the world – brokenness, which despite our best efforts, we find impossible to mend in our own power.

Divorce and breakdown in relationships

Resentment

Bitterness

Pride

Self-centredness

Hurt of others

War – between people, family members and nations

Self-aggrandisement

Hate

Violence – of Body/Mind/Soul

Rejection

Greed

We so confess

silence

Grant us minds and hearts to forgive others who have hurt and broken us, and minds and hearts to accept the healing and wholeness of our own brokenness and sin.

In Jesus' name

AMEN

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

My sisters and brothers in Christ you have confessed your sins to God. Therefore, in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I assure you that you are forgiven. You are set free from your sins by the power of Christ, who raises you up to new life in the Spirit. To

the only God our Saviour, who so graciously forgives and sets free, be glory, majesty, power and authority, before all ages, now and forever. AMEN

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD: Lisa Saffin

Your Word, Oh Lord, is a lamp to our feet;

A light to our path

HEBREWS 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason, Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you."

MARK 10:2-16

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.⁹ So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."

¹⁰Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹²and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

¹³People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

The gospel of the Lord

Praise to you. Lord Jesus Christ

HYMN TIS 236: Jesus hands are...

Margaret Beatrice Cropper 1886 - 1980

SERMON:

Doesn't it strike you as strange that the last four verses from this reading from Mark are included at this point in the Gospel?!

They appear, to have very little to do with the previous 10 verses of the reading? Those verses have a heavy emphasis on Marriage, divorce and re-marriage, whereas these 4 verses are about children - 'little ones' and their proximity to the Kingdom. What's the connection?

Let's explore why Mark put these encounters together.

The first 10 verses are a pastorally difficult passage on divorce and re-marriage. Undoubtedly, they still raise issues which could re-open old wounds and stir feelings of relationship failure. It was a deep pastoral issue back then and it still is. Every family on earth experiences brokenness in one form or another and statistics tell us that many of our relationships end in brokenness. Both Mardie and my family have had marriage breakdowns, which were very difficult for all involved. So, let's take a closer look at how Jesus deals with his 'testing,' on divorce.

Jesus actually surprises with a verbal attack on the Pharisees when they air the view that Moses allowed divorce. He says:

'Because of your hardness of heart' Moses made allowances for you!'

Note, not a 'command,' from Moses but merely, reluctantly, 'allowed!' – we could think of it as a 'harm minimization procedure!'

BUT Jesus immediately re-directs the discussion from one on divorce and the permissibility of re-marriage, to a discussion on the foundational understanding of marriage itself we have just read (v6-9).

Those 3 verses highlight the gift of God's love at the centre of all our personal and intimate relationships. There is nothing more precious than this in all of creation. God is love and the source of all love. It is that glue which makes two, one!

As a result, one might think, all followers of God, including all Christians, would live lives that reflect this gracious gift of love at the centre; including all our marriages.

Of course, we know that is not the case, and even the disciples of Jesus didn't 'get it'. 'They asked him again about this matter.' For them marriage was about obeying a set of LAWS, not LOVE. It is at this point that we hear these daunting words on divorce from Jesus to the disciples

"He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹²and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." (v10-12)

Sounds very harsh, don't you think!?

BUT listen carefully to what Jesus is suggesting to his 1st Century male disciples.

¹¹*“Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her;”*
This would have been a surprise to the disciples. Jewish Law did not declare such an action as one of adultery. According to Jewish Law, when a divorced man marries a woman she becomes his property and, strictly speaking, he could not commit adultery against her. She belonged to him.

So, this declaration by Jesus is contrary to the gender bias in the Jewish law in favour of the male. Instead, Jesus raises the dignity of the woman by stating, that in divorcing and remarrying the man does, in fact, commit adultery.

And then in verse 12,

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

Again, Jesus challenges the Jewish Law and in doing so raises the status of the woman, albeit in a negative sense, by envisaging a situation in which a woman might initiate a divorce – BUT that was something NOT ALLOWED under Jewish Law. Only males could initiate divorce!

So, what is Jesus doing here?

First, acknowledging that there is injustice, brokenness, inequity against women reflected in the actual DIVORCE LAW of the time. Women treated as property. Women Used. Women marginalised. Women brutalised. Women legally excluded from ‘common law’ justice – no rights at all. AND I am talking of 2000 years ago, but I suspect RIGHT NOW we still have a long way to go for genuine justice and equity to be within the reach of all, regardless of gender, in relation to the issue of divorce.

BUT Jesus also recognises that over and above the issue of gender bias in relation to women and divorce, there remains the issue of relationship breakdown in his world and the world at large.

That is why he came!

However, it is also true that Jesus offers a pathway out of our brokenness. A pathway to deal with brokenness in our lives and the brokenness of the world, in all of its forms, including that of the breakdown within marriage. It’s a pathway to Jerusalem and to a cross. But also to resurrection and new life!

A personal illustration – I shared this story recently, but it bears repeating.

Mardie and I find ourselves in a wonderful but challenging time of life as we support our daughter and son-in-law to ‘get into’ their new home. As it happens, they have been ‘burnt’ by the extraordinary escalation of costs in their building project. Financially it has been and still is a huge stress for them. Such that, they have had to go to the bank of ‘Mum and Dad’ to get help. Mum was happy to oblige but Dad not so happy.

Carrying this ‘burden’, I went to West Bentleigh Primary to pick up our youngest grandchild after school (a task I undertake regularly). Standing in the courtyard surrounded by classrooms - the dismissal bell rang – and that was when the miracle happened.

The area around me was suddenly, dramatically transformed, it happens every day, but that day somehow it was super special, for me. Where parents and grandparents were standing around chatting the scene suddenly changed astonishingly.

Children happened! Children happened!

Cartwheels and yelling and chasing and jumping into mum's arms and kicking balls and excited chatting and showing off work and general pandemonium. You know what I mean!

But, O my Lord, on that day for me it was the pandemonium of uninhibited joy, burgeoning life and inspirational freedom and of joy and trust. Oh yes, all that!

As a consequence, I felt a huge release, a freedom, a spirit filled moment when I knew the money didn't matter at all - but this did! And this does – this is Kingdom stuff. The building blocks of God's Kingdom! This is God's Spirit alive in the world. This is the pathway – the pathway which knows no barriers which are not surmountable when trust and joie de vie and the love of God are revealed in human form – on this occasion, in a school yard, of all places - no less – and by kids!! Kids!! Proclaiming the gospel by being themselves by relating with joy, trusting and living out loud!

And there's the connection! Divorce and brokenness over and against kids and living the Kingdom

Jesus sees the Kingdom alive in the kids.

Despite the disciples' political correctness (reflecting that children were of absolutely no value back then - they had no status, no rights, and their presence was a nuisance.)

Jesus, however, urgently desires to meet these 'little ones' – these kids – why?

In them he sees the uninhibited marks of the kingdom: love and trust and joy and freedom and joie de vie and fun!

Little wonder that Jesus declares

“It is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs” (10:14).

Charles Cousar comments on these verses as follows

In fact, the rule of God belongs to persons like this—powerless, vulnerable, weak persons, who are often deemed a nuisance. In rejecting the children, the disciples have not just made a slight error of judgment—they have missed the whole point of Jesus' ministry.

Jesus sees in these kids how one encounters the kingdom of God. As powerless ones who are incapable of staking out any claims and demands – powerless to do anything, other than to be open to and to receive his free gift of acceptance, life and love and live it out.

Cousar continues:

The rule [or reign] of God comes as pure, unadulterated grace, to hungry people at the crossroads and in the byways of life who are invited to attend a scrumptious banquet, and to children without status. They have no excuses to give, no dowries to offer, no bargaining chips. They are [simply] eager to be taken up into Jesus' arms and be blessed.

So, whether we are successful or unsuccessful at our marriages, and relationships, whether we have managed to achieve the profound union God intends or from “hardness of heart” have wound up in a divorce court, the receiving of the kingdom like a little child still holds.

Oh my friends, it still holds!

Spread like a banner over all relationships is an affirmation that God loves us limited human beings in a limitless divine way. Oh, we may fail in love; after all, we are "only human." But we have a God who forgives our failures, who loves us in spite of our limits to love in return.

The kids 'get it!'

So, my dear friends, never forget this incredible picture of otherwise rejected children welcomed and given a blessing by the Lord: a picture that sustains both the happily married and the painfully separated."

Whatever our status, whatever our successes, whatever our brokenness, grace and love and blessings beyond measure are on offer.

Let us pray

Lord Jesus, keep loving us, keep loving us in a way that is better than the way we love you. We cling to faith in your limitless love for us limited beings. All praise be to your name, Eternal Love. Amen.

HYMN TIS 590: What a friend we have

Joseph Medcott Scriven 1819-1886

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: Prepared by Marg Davis

"As we prepare for our prayers for others, we light this candle to remember all those who are part of our church community but who are not at worship with us today."

Light the candle.

Let us pray.

Loving God as we bring our prayers before you today, we give thanks for our blessings and offer our gratitude that we live in this wonderful country

Let us pray

We pray for those who do not have the advantages that we often take for granted and we ask you to bring comfort to those in troubled regions, in overcrowded cities, and on land which does not produce enough to feed its people.

In our prayers we remember our brothers and sisters of your worldwide church and we thank you for the church in Australia. Help us to work for friendship and unity across all denominations. We pray for all who lead, and enable, Christians to gather for worship.

We pray for the earliest indigenous occupants of our land and for all who have gone before us who settled this land and we also remember those who are new to our country. Help us to have open hearts and enable us to embrace all our differences.

Compassionate God: - We pray for innocent people who are displaced and for all who are caught in war-torn regions that are tragically and all too rapidly, increasing in number.

We pray for leaders throughout the world and for all in positions of authority. We ask that with your guidance they may govern wisely and justly.

We give thanks for all who keep us safe - on the roads, in our homes and in the many places where we gather.

We pray for all who work as caregivers - for the old and the young, for residents in care facilities, the lost, the hungry and the homeless.

We pray for those who grieve for loss in death, in illness, in relationship breakdowns, in employment and for those whose lives are not working out the way they had hoped and dreamed

We pray for the members of our community- our families, friends and all those we love. We pray for each other and for ourselves and we pause to name those known to us personally.....

Help us to listen so we may become the people you have called us to be.

Dear Lord in your mercy....Hear our prayer(References: *Let Us Pray and The Fig Tree Worship Resource*)

LORD'S PRAYER

Let us pray together, the Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.
Amen**

HC HYMN TiS 534: Love is his word

Luke Connaughton 1917-79 alt.

DISMISSAL:

We will go from this place,
**to sit at the side of those forgotten by the world,
as we are welcomed by their grace and God's holy presence.**
We will go to wherever your children gather,
to be blessed by their love, as they echo Jesus' gentle voice.
We will go with our hunger, and be fed;
we will go with our brokenness, and be healed;
we will offer ourselves, and be accepted by the Spirit,
who lives and works in every person we will meet.

© Thom M. Shuman

BLESSING:

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

The deathless joy of Christ Jesus will uplift you,
the everlasting love of God will embrace you,
the inner warmth of the Spirit will encourage you, today and ever more.
Today and evermore. Amen!

WORD OF MISSION:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

RECESSIONAL HYMN TiS 779: May the Feet

May the feet of God walk with you,
and his hand hold you tight.
May the eye of God rest on you,
and his ear hear your cry.
May the smile of God be for you,
and his breath give you life.
May the Child of God grow in you,
and his love bring you home.

Aubrey Podlich 1946-

POSTLUDE

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other
congregational information on the church website.

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Presider: Rev Ron Townsend

Music: Peter Hurley

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Tuesdays, 9.30am-2.30pm

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