

First Trinity Lutheran Church
October 8, 2006
Genesis 2:18-24
Mark 10:2-16

The Amish Got it Right

The events that happened this week are almost unspeakable. Who among us not grieve for the families of Anna, Marian, Naomi, Mary Liz and Lena, the Amish girls that were shot to death this past week? This combined with the many stories of children and young adults in the last couple of weeks going to school, minding their own business, who were attacked, sexually threatened, and in some cases even killed. Last we also learned of another congressman's inappropriate sexual advances with young adults working on Capital Hill. Congressman Foley stated that although he takes full responsibility for his actions it was a member of the clergy who sexually molested him when he was a child. I'm sure there were some good news this week and certainly many things to celebrate but these very tragic situations are heavy on my mind.

My contacts on Capitol Hill tell me that things are in a real mess. Democrats don't talk to Republicans and visa versa. Even the news correspondents Bill Moyers and Keith Olbermann got into the act by airing a stories stating that war in Iran and Syria is imminent and PSB showed a special TV show that focused on crimes committed by politicians past and present. These stories are not new but when one connects the dots it can get a bit overwhelming.

As background to all this, today people of the Christian faith gather all over the world for worship this weekend and they will be reading Genesis 2, Hebrews 1-2, and Mark 10. We could talk for hours about how to apply these readings to our lives, in some cases we would be agreement and in other cases we may total disagree, but I could sum it all up in one simple yet profound word. But before I share that word with you let me preface it with this. The Amish community has got it right! They reached out to forgive the man who killed their children. Asked by reporters why would they do such a thing the response, without hesitation, was this is what Jesus would do. Forgiveness. Forgiveness is the common thread in today's readings in light of our life's situation. Forgiveness. I could simply sit down and end the sermon here.

Some of you may cheer, because the sermon will be rather short, but let me spend a little time sharing with you how I got to this point of saying we can all sum it up with forgiveness.

In Genesis Adam says, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." He immediately recognizes his deep connection to the new human being standing before him, a connection that God has woven deeply into the fabric of their lives. For us in the United States and the west we focus only on the individuality of Adam and Eve-the union of a single man and a single woman that the ancient story seems to represent.

And it's easy for us to carry that individualistic notion of marriage into Jesus' teachings about divorce, too. When Jesus talks about divorce in today's Gospel, our cultural and legal perspective tempts us to hear him talking only about a man and woman: two individuals who entered into covenant with each other-and we are tempted to hear that the pain of divorce involves only them, at least for the most part.

But in Jesus' time, marriage and divorce were not just about the man and the woman. They were about two families representing many generations, property, honor, and status. Divorce was not just an individual event; it was a risky break of confidence that could lead to family feuds, shame, and hardship for numerous people. The hardness of heart Jesus speaks of seems not only to point to the potential suffering of the woman, who must return in shame to her family of origin; but it also points to the suffering of two entire families and the greater community.

Being "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" is a profound statement about how interconnected the whole human family really is. And how divorce, as painfully necessary as it can sometimes be, ultimately tears at the fabric of this human family and affects all of us. And here is where today's teaching about divorce touches our world and our church. Divorce is not just about a man and woman. It's about all of those places where we have become hard of heart and have failed to recognize each other as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;"

It's that hardness that we struggle with as we watch the painful realities of conflict between Palestinians and Israelis and has spread now to Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and Syria. It is that hardness as we reckon with hunger and disease in so many parts of the world. It is that hardness as wealthy and poor become further divided. It is that cold heartedness that breeds fear and then brings war and terrorism to us and to our sisters and brothers around the world. And as we struggle, too, with abuse that we often heap on the earth, divorcing ourselves from our deep ties with the natural order and the heritage of a healthy planet we ought to be leaving for our children.

Jesus stands up to that pain and longs for that deep connection that God intends for all of us. It is that hope we celebrate together when we gather to pray and when we break bread together. It's a hope that Jesus witnesses to in his life, and that Christ brings to us through the resurrection. And that hope is the good news that runs like a thread through today's readings.

We are a family, a people, and a world that suffers from divorce of all kinds. I tend to see this is as much bigger arena than the break between a man and a woman. I tend to see a theme here of broken relationships. Whether it be a divorce of a couple, a parents rejection of a child, a parent being rejected by their children, a death of a spouse, or a pastor's broken relationship with his/her congregation, there is loss, there is pain, there are dreams destroyed and hopes crushed. But, in someway all of us experience broken relationships. I tend to think of verse 15 of Mark 10 not as a formula for salvation, but a projection for life. Jesus knows that broken relationships can come early and it is in his loving arms we can find the hope and the blessings we need to live. Entering the Kingdom as a child is our hope. Otherwise, the brokenness of life makes the kingdom far off. And it is precisely that world that God in Christ enters-and not just with a hope to ultimately end divorce, but with a mission to heal all of us who suffer from it; to heal our hardness of heart, and to help us recognize once again that we truly belong to each

other, we belong to the world we call home, and we belong ultimately to a God who has, for all eternity, refused to divorce us.

The letter to the Hebrews reminds us of something that our whole faith speaks of - it reminds us that here, on this earth, Jesus was made like us born as our brother to walk as we walk through this life. Jesus was one with us, able to sympathize with us, able to identify with us, able to rejoice with us, able to suffer with us, and, because of what he suffered and suffered in faithfulness, he is able to intercede for us before God his Father, God our Father.

The signs before us today -- the bread and the wine, they remind us of how he came to be our Savior; they remind us of what his love and his faithfulness cost him. On the night of his betrayal Jesus took bread and broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, This is my body, given for you, and he took the cup and gave it to his disciples, saying, This is my blood, which is poured out for you. The next day, out of love for the world, Jesus died. The scriptures tell us that when Jesus died he assumed the burden of our sin - that he took upon himself the penalty for sin - doing so that we might live and be one with him and one another before God our Maker, before God - our higher power.

Perhaps you recall how in one of the superman movies, the evil Lex Luther launches a missile which explodes near one of the California fault zones. The resulting earthquakes create turmoil over a wide expanse of territory. As Superman flies over the area, making a visual inspection of the damage, he sees an accident about to happen. The earthquakes have caused a five-foot section of a railroad track to be twisted out of shape and a packed passenger train is roaring down towards the destroyed section of track. There is no time for the train to stop - even if the driver sees the ruined track. Superman, however, has just has enough time to fly down and stretch his body out to form the missing section of rail, and he thus saves the lives of the several hundred passengers on the train.

Jesus performed a similar act of salvation. He too stretched out his body to save us; He stretched it out on the cross. The difference between Jesus and Superman is that Jesus is not some human like alien from another planet who performs heroic deeds; he was fully human and suffered alongside us.

Today in his memory we break bread and share a cup, the bread he called his body broken for us, the cup he called his blood shed for us. In the breaking of the bread and the lifting of the cup, we recall how God loved us so much, that he came among us and became one with us, and then suffered and died for us, so that sin and death might no longer reign over us. As he shared in our death - so we share in his resurrection, the resurrection granted to him because of his love and faithfulness.

I am sure most of you have seen Waterford Crystal. It is beautiful to look at. The only problem is when you drop it; it shatters into a thousand pieces and no matter how hard you try to glue the broken pieces back together it never looks as beautiful as before it was dropped. I know this first hand when as a child I dropped and broke one of my mother's Waterford crystals. Glue just didn't work.

Sometimes we get the idea that as human beings we are like leaded crystal. We are lovely until we make a mistake - and we all make them. Then life shatters into a thousand pieces and can never be put back together just right - never put back the way God meant it to be. I think a much better analogy compares human life to the children's toy Silly. Silly putty can be pulled apart, rolled into little balls, flung against the wall, or smashed flat. Like Silly Putty we can always be scraped back together again, forgiven, reworked, remolded, and reshaped into someone that is even more beautiful than before.

God believes in us, God believes that no matter how big our divorces are; no matter how big our messes are we are not beyond God's help. God loves us, and God, in Christ, has

come to forgive us, to scrape us back together again, and mold us into something even better than that which we were before.

We give thanks today because we can be what God wants us to be. God has made us his family, a family that stretches around the world, a family that is called to love as we have been love, to forgive as we have been forgiven, to give as we have been given too.

As we share today in our family meal we give thanks to God that we are not alone. That we have both each other and the Spirit of Christ among us, the Spirit of him who was, who is, and who shall ever be one with us, and one over us, and one under us, one who truly loves us.
Amen