

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, 7/10/2012

Mark 10:2-16

This morning's Gospel reading was controversial when the incident first happened and it is still controversial today.

Some biblical scholars liken this reading to walking through a paddock of thorns. It is a veritable minefield.

Many families and friends today have been affected by divorce.

They have endured the pain of the breakdown of the marriage along with the hurt of the divorce and the divorce settlement.

Some Christians, however, still see, in this reading, grounds for controversy.

Let us, then, venture together to see if there is any good news for a world that is broken and in pain.

It begins with an encounter between Jesus and Pharisees who are busied with the issue of divorce and wanting Jesus' view.

They set out to trap Jesus in his words and so undermine his credibility.

Jesus responds to the question with a question, "What did Moses command you?"

The Pharisees, Jesus and the people around them know the answer: Moses allows a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.

Moses allows this because of their "hardness of heart".

The 'hardness of heart' occurs in all of us, among those who are married, those who are divorced and those who are neither.

This hardness of heart leads to sin and according to John "if we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us".

Marriage at the time of Moses was not an egalitarian model of marriage and divorce.

It is a system where men had all the power, where there was no equality among the sexes and where the woman was regarded as a possession of the man to be dealt with as he liked.

Many marriages were arranged between the woman's father and the groom along with his father.

Jesus' response goes back to creation where there is equality between man and woman and in marriage the two become one flesh and if God has made them one flesh, God alone can separate.

Jesus envisaged in the Kingdom of God there would be no divorce because the two had become one flesh and were no longer two but one.

In thinking like this remember two things: first, life expectancy was not what it is today so that a marriage would not be expected to last twenty years before death parted the couple and secondly, that Jesus and the early Christians were expecting the end of the world as they knew it and that the Kingdom of God would prevail.

This Kingdom of God would be like a second Eden in which there would be complete equality among the sexes and in marriage the two would become one flesh.

This would take us back to a time when there were no power games, where there was equality among the sexes, where neither party could damage the other, where the love of God and for each other would prevail.

In creation, God made them male and female, delightfully different, wonderfully equal and to be one flesh.

Here there would be no hardness of heart, no games and no secrets.

Jesus' message then is one of compassion, of God's love for us, and our love one for the other and a remembrance of the time before hardness of heart prevailed, before power games and before secrets.

Realistically, we know that some marriages are dead from the start and others die along the way.

We know that some have married the wrong partner for the wrong reasons, while others have a right to escape a marriage that has become a threat to their safety or sanity.

There is, however, still God's compassion and love for us irrespective of the circumstances.

This is the good news for a broken world that is in pain.

God calls all his children home to the wedding feast where we will find ourselves united one with the other and with Christ forever.