

Introduction to the day

Today's gospel combines a saying that makes many of us uncomfortable with a story we find comforting. Jesus' saying on divorce is another of his rejections of human legislation in favor of the original intent of God's law. Jesus' rebuke of the disciples who are fending off the children should challenge us as well. What does it mean to receive the kingdom of God as a child does?

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray: Sovereign God, you have created us to live in loving community with one another. Form us for life that is faithful and steadfast, and teach us to trust like little children, that we may reflect the image of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

FIRST LESSON: Job 1:1; 2:1-10

This passage is part of the prologue of Job. The righteous man Job is severely afflicted as the result of a wager between God and the satan (here not the devil, but "the accuser"). Job responds at first with great patience, but the rest of the book will show him lamenting and protesting.

PSALM: Psalm 26

Your love is before my eyes; I have walked faithfully with you. (Ps. 26:3)

SECOND LESSON: Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Quoting from the psalms, this passage from Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus, the one through whom God created everything and who sits at God's right hand, is also the one who experienced human suffering and death in order to blaze the path of salvation for us.

GOSPEL: Mark 10:2-16

Jesus announced and enacted in history the new reality of God's surprising activity. These two stories demonstrate this new reality: Women and children are accepted and valued, not dismissed as inferior to adult men.

GOSPEL MESSAGE - Relationships over Rules

This gospel reading is one that hits everyone's ears as uncomfortable. Divorce has touched the lives of most listeners in some way, whether it's themselves, parents, siblings, children, colleagues, or friends. We all know and understand the sting of pain that divorce can cause. Holding this pain and naming its vulnerability in our lives might just be exactly what Jesus is getting at in his reply to the Pharisees.

The Pharisees are testing Jesus once again. "Is it lawful . . . ?" Lawful, yes, but if that's the sole focus, we miss the point. It's not primarily about the law; it's about relationship. In Jesus' response to the Pharisees, he draws his listeners to the Creator and to relationships. Jesus points to Genesis, where God sets the intention for relationships to be filled with love, respect, and accountability. The law is there because we human beings fail to comprehend the value of relationships.

Jesus' seemingly absolute prohibition on divorce is not meant to justify staying in a harmful or toxic relationship—quite the opposite. He is challenging the Pharisees to understand the damage that is caused when we discard another human being. This hurt is the opposite of what God intends for our relationships.

Jesus continues to draw his hearers into the power of loving relationships by welcoming children and blessing them. One way to interpret his words is that one must receive the kingdom of God the way one receives a little child. How we treat each other matters to God. God invites us into relationships to see the belovedness in one another, to uplift each other, and to care for one another. When a person is vulnerable like a child, this is exactly when we are to share grace and love, not the sting of law.

THE PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Challenged by God's Word in Christ, let us pray for the church, the world, and the whole creation.

God of our ancestors, we give thanks for the church in all times. May we listen for the prophets of this age who bear messages that stir the church toward renewal and justice. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Creator of every creature on earth, direct our lives toward the renewal and sustaining of cattle, birds of the air, animals of the field, and those who share our homes. Reveal the ways we can work alongside creation for the health and well-being of all. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Sovereign God, we give thanks that you are mindful and benevolent to even us, mere mortals. Accompany us when hardness of heart gets in the way of justice between people and nations. Endow leaders with minds for justice and hearts for compassion. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Restoring Lord, grant healing and wholeness to those who are sick and suffering especially Linda Boland, Ken Fulford, Sandra Gagnon, Shirley Glickman, Walter Hobden, Donna L. Hoffman, Bill Lorbetzkie, Glenda Panke, Marilyn Schneider, Danny Schultz, Doug Sell, Debbie Thom, Keith Weckwerth, Denita Wolfgram, Elaine Yourth, Harold Yourth, Stephanie Yourth, and those in long term care facilities and senior residences. We name out loud or in the quiet of our hearts those who need your healing touch. (pause). Work through medical professionals to diagnose, ease pain, and give life to all who seek their wisdom and experience. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Unifying God, humans were created for relationship with the earth, its creatures, and one another. Forgive us when division threatens companionship, mutual support, and unity among us. May your love inspire us to build supportive communities of faith where all are cherished. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

God of resurrection, you prepare a place in the kingdom through Christ's death and resurrection. We give thanks for the saints who have taken their place at your heavenly banquet. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the saving grace you freely give, both now and forever. **Amen.**

BLESSING

Almighty God, Father, ✝ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. **Amen**

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

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