

**“God’s Command”**  
**Mark 10:1-16**  
**Pollocksville Presbyterian Church**  
**Sermon #116**  
**10.3.21**

**Mark 10:1-16 CEB**

**10** Jesus left that place and went beyond the Jordan and into the region of Judea. Crowds gathered around him again and, as usual, he taught them.**2** Some Pharisees came and, trying to test him, they asked, “Does the Law allow a man to divorce his wife?”

**3** Jesus answered, “What did Moses command you?”

**4** They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a divorce certificate and to divorce his wife.”

**5** Jesus said to them, “He wrote this commandment for you because of your unyielding hearts. **6** At the beginning of creation, *God made them male and female.* **7** *Because of this, a man should leave his father and mother and be joined together with his wife,* **8** *and the two will be one flesh.* So they are no longer two but one

flesh. **9** Therefore, humans must not pull apart what God has put together.”

**10** Inside the house, the disciples asked him again about this. **11** He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; **12** and if a wife divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

**13** People were bringing children to Jesus so that he would bless them. But the disciples scolded them. **14** When Jesus saw this, he grew angry and said to them, “Allow the children to come to me. Don’t forbid them, because God’s kingdom belongs to people like these children. **15** I assure you that whoever doesn’t welcome God’s kingdom like a child will never enter it.” **16** Then he hugged the children and blessed them.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Today's story reminds me of some passages that were constantly quoted to me in church growing up, but never truly examined.

Ephesians 6:5, for example:

*As for slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling  
and with sincere devotion to Christ.*

Or here's one I used to quote a lot when I was a kid trying to justify that God's love had limits:

*As it is written, "I have loved Jacob, but I hated Esau."*

*—Romans 9:13*

Oh, here's another one I heard a lot as a fundamentalist to keep the women from the pulpit or teaching a Sunday school class with boys over the age of 12:

*The women should be quiet during the meeting. They are not allowed to talk. Instead, they need to get under control, just as the*

*Law says.—1 Corinthians 14:34*

Of course, how could I forget Leviticus 18:22 saying how abominable it is for a man to have sex with another man.

These verses and plenty of others have been used as instruments of terror. Certainly, quoting without any respect or reverence to the Word, written and Living, does no one any good. And when these verses are used to justify slavery, forbidding women in ministry, and condoning homophobia should unsettle us. I certainly used some of these growing up. And I stand before you to repent of that. I

regret the things I mindlessly believed. I regret the harm I inflicted as someone who went along with the dangerous and heretical fundamentalist teachings that demanded blind obedience. Harmful beliefs that required us to accept everything at face value. No nuance. No context. No wrestling with the scriptures.

The verses that make up what we have today as the written Word of God were divinely inspired. And they were written in contexts at least 2,000 years ago. It's always important to know the context of everything we read, where the verses occur in the chapter, in the book, and in the Bible. Look in and around the verses to help get a picture of what's going on.

But, I suppose it's easy for me to say that as none of these verses I quoted from were ever used against me. I'm a male, so becoming a minister didn't present a problem. I am in a heterosexual

relationship, so I can be freely out while others must remain in the closet. I'm white, so I don't have enslaved ancestors in my family tree to my knowledge, though I have family members who fought to preserve the heretical and godless institution of slavery. But, I am the product of a second marriage. Growing up in a fundamentalist tradition, that didn't go over too well. And today's verses were certainly used as an instrument of terror against me one day. I remember the teacher telling us in youth group one Sunday that those who remarry after divorce are committing adultery. I replied to the teacher: So, you're saying I'm illegitimate? There was silence in the room. I went home and cried to my parents.

I had to learn a hard lesson that day. I had used the Bible as an instrument of terror and then I eventually stopped because it happened to me and I realized how horribly I treated other children of God. My own mother had to reassure me that I was wanted and

certainly there was nothing about me or of my parents' marriage that was illegitimate.

When we take the scriptures as is without considering the context or potential harm they may cause if used in the wrong way, then the people we have been commissioned to seek out and embrace are shunned and harmed. Mark 10:1-12 was used against me and I know it's been used against others.

I can't imagine the pain people have experienced, particularly women in abusive marriages, who have been "counseled" by a church member or even the preacher to stay with the spouse. I can't imagine the pain of being coerced to stay in an unhealthy situation and then being blamed for getting out of that situation and remarrying.

Simply prohibiting divorce is not an option. People get divorced every day. For the majority, it's for the right reasons: Abuse, falling out of love, financial infidelity, or sexual infidelity, just to name a few. I know people who divorced because they were in a harmful situation and I know people whose divorce was amicable and I know people who fall somewhere else in the spectrum. Divorce happens, but it doesn't make God any less sad.

The question remains: How do we remain faithful to today's teaching from Jesus and act with compassion toward our siblings?

The Church has struggled with this and other questions. The Church has struggled on the issue of slavery and there are still denominations in the U.S. that still haven't written a formal apology about their past to begin to seek reconciliation. The Church has struggled and continues to struggle with women's ordination. The



Church has struggled and continues to struggle with those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and non-binary.

Certainly, many of us who are cradle Presbyterians listening to this sermon remember the days when the southern branch of the Presbyterian Church wrestled with divorce and women's ordination. Many of us have certainly heard a story or two about the heretics in seminaries who defended slavery as if it were an institution ordained by God. Certainly, there are still people upset that the PCUSA as a whole allows the ordination of ministers who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and non-binary as well as the denomination's overall support of same-sex marriage. Certainly, I support both the ordination and marriage of those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and non-binary and I realize not everyone listening is on the same page with me.

With today's scripture and others, we must interpret the context of the problematic passage with the rest of the book. The first century world was nothing like today. Thankfully, we have made progress, especially in our own country. Although, much progress is facing obstacles and even setbacks. But, in the first century world, especially for Jews, there were religious leaders who prohibited divorce. Although, only remarriage after a spouse's death was allowed. There were other leaders who probably had multiple wives. But, divorce for the Jews meant that a woman could be put away with or without her consent. For men, their consent was required before a divorce could occur.

So in this scripture, did Jesus forbid divorce to protect marriage or to protect women from being abandoned with no resources to take care of them? Knowing that Jesus is famous for outsmarting people, probably both.

It's complicated. And that's the point of what I'm saying. Don't be afraid to wrestle with the scriptures. Obviously, I don't have all the answers. No one does. But, what all of this boils down to is the greatest commandment: Love the LORD your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

It would be great if every marriage were stable. But, we live in the real world. Marriages fail. In all things, there must be support from us to those who are in relationships. In those relationships, we will see the good, the bad, and the ugly. In all things, whether there is reconciliation or a split, compassion is always needed. It's not up to us to be the judge, jury, and executioner. It's up to us to be faithful and compassionate followers of Christ.

My hope is for all of us to pause when we see a troubling verse or to speak up when someone quotes scripture to harm someone

else, even if we don't know the entire context of the passage off the top of our heads. Because using the Bible as a weapon of terror is not love. Taking up our cross and following the Suffering Servant to the people who are hurting is love.

Friends in Christ, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.