

Pent19\_Prop22\_YrB\_100415\_mcr  
All Saints Episcopal Church

In the name of God who creates us, who saves us and who loves us always. Amen.

Let me ask y'all a question. How many of you have been divorced, have married someone who was divorced, have parents or grandparents who have been divorced, siblings who have been divorced, children who have been divorced or a good friend who has been divorced? Is there anyone here who has NOT been affected in some way by divorce?

The reason I ask is because when this passage from Mark is read in church, we tend to hear it in a very personal way. Of course, for those of us who have been divorced, it is particularly personal. We feel ashamed or angry or hurt or embarrassed. We feel singled out. We feel guilty.

And for those of us who have not been divorced but have someone close to us who has, the reading is personal also. We, too, feel ashamed or angry or hurt or embarrassed. We feel guilty for those who seem to be singled out.

But stop feeling that way for a second and hear this: I don't think Jesus was talking to us as individuals.

Let's look at the reading. "Some Pharisees came and to test him, said, 'Is it lawful...?'" Did you hear it? They came to *test* him. It wasn't a conversation or even a debate. And, it wasn't really about divorce; it was about the law. Now, back in the day, divorce was legal; the question was under what circumstances could you legally divorce. So the Pharisees wanted to test Jesus - to see if they could trip him up over legalities and their nuances.

But Jesus didn't fall into the trap. Instead, he turned the focus away from the law and toward relationship. That is why he recalled *Genesis*: to say that marriage and divorce is not simply about legal details, but about God's intention that we have relationships that are healthy and mutually dependent.

And then, Jesus went one step further: instead of divorce as a legal convenience for the man (because, after all, women were little more than property, and marriages were not made because 2 people were in love), Jesus wanted his

listeners to know that this law, and *all* law, actually, is intended to protect the vulnerable. Think about that. Laws, intended to protect the vulnerable.

Women, after all, as property, lost pretty much everything when they were divorced - they lost their status, their reputation, their economic security. They were, indeed, vulnerable. So every time the law is used for some purpose other than protecting the hurting and vulnerable, we ignore God's intention for us, violating God's plan in spirit, if not in letter.

This is how Jesus is speaking to us, not as individuals, but as community - inviting us to imagine ourselves as communities focused on real relationships, founded on love and mutual dependence, encouraged by respect and dignity, and worked at for the sake of the community's health and for the protection of the vulnerable.

So even the second half of today's lesson, which some people think is included to soften the seeming harshness of the divorce section, is about community. And not about the kind of community that we are used to seeking out in our world - you know - a community of the powerful, the strong, the independent and the wealthy. When Jesus told the disciples that welcoming the kingdom means welcoming children, he again means welcoming the vulnerable, those at risk and those in need.

The community we are to seek is a community of the broken, the vulnerable, those at risk... a community of those who know their need, who seek to be in relationship with each other because they have learned that when they are open and honest with each other, they are in relationship with God - the One who created them for each other in the first place.

You know, this is what the Church was all about originally - a place for the broken, the rejected, the outcast - learning to experience God through Jesus, who met them in their vulnerability. Meeting Jesus wasn't designed to put some kind of impervious, Teflon coating on them that would keep them from harm, but to make them open to the need of others around them.

That's hard to remember, though, isn't it? A lot of time has passed since Jesus walked the earth, so it's easy to get into the mindset that strength and power and wealth are the things we need to get by. Only the strong survive! Being needy is embarrassing - we must be strong, right?!

And I'm not talking about the old idea that the church is a hospital for sinners, either. Brokenness, vulnerability, need, being at risk are NOT sins! To be broken is to be human. And to be human is to be loved by God and to be drawn into relationship with all the others that God loves, too.

So, remember at the beginning of the sermon when we all raised our hands in response to the question about divorce? Well, we are a community of the broken. We are divorced, we are little children, we are poor, we are at risk, we are vulnerable, we are sick, we are lonely. We are all broken in some way.

But when we gather here on Sundays, we are the broken and loved, we are those who are hurting but also healing, those who are lost but have also been found, those who know their need and seek, not just to get those needs met, but to help others meet their needs as well. Lest we wallow in our brokenness, let's remember that our calling is to bear God's life and love to others.

In this community and all others, God works to heal and restore the whole creation, not by taking away our problems, but by surrounding us with people who understand - and care - and help us to discover our potential to reach out and care for others with compassion and love. God loves us and is healing us, using us to make all things new.

We are communities broken and blessed. That may not be what you wanted to hear this morning. It is, after all, the opposite of the conventional wisdom of today about strength and security. But to acknowledge our brokenness is life-giving, both for ourselves and for those who God places in our lives. May we discover God's life-giving grace, love and mercy. Amen.