**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“Like a Child”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

October 6, 2024

*Mark 10:2-16*

In our reading for today, the Pharisees come up to Jesus and ask Him a question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” As a pastor, I get lots of questions like this. Most of the time people are trying to find out how far they can go without sinning. Is it a sin to steal bread to feed your family? Is it a sin hurt someone if it stops them from hurting someone else? Other times, they are just going trying to trap you, “Could God make something so big that He can’t lift it?” Questions like that. The answer to all these questions is actually another question, “Why do you want to know?”

A lot of the time, the question that people ask isn’t their real question. In my experience, there is often another question hiding behind the original question. We all do this; we have a question in our head but are afraid to ask it, so we try to get the answer in an indirect way. Maybe it’s a way to sort of hedge our bets, a way to protect us from conflict. For example, someone might ask if it’s a sin to get a divorce. In their head, the real question might be a few things: “Am I going to hell if I get a divorce,” “I am thinking about getting a divorce, is it wrong,” “This person I know got a divorce are they a sinner now,” or any myriad of other questions.

The reason you answer a difficult question with another question is to try and draw out the real question because the law isn’t always as black and white as we would like it to be. The Bible doesn’t always give us as clear of answers or guidance as we might like. Then, of course, there is sin. Sin complicates things even more. There is hardly ever just one sin involved in a difficult situation. One sin leads to another until there is just a whole tangled up mess of sin.

In order to answer the real question, you need context. In the example of divorce like our reading for today, we don’t ever want to lose the truth of what God has given us in the Bible. Jesus shows us that truth very clearly today. Divorce is wrong; it breaks God’s design for creation. Notice, however, that Jesus doesn’t condemn Moses; He condemns the people for whom Moses made the law. There are times when divorce is allowed, and there are other verses in the Bible that describe those.

The devil is always in the details. Why do you want to get a divorce is always the answer to whether or not divorce is wrong.

Jesus doesn’t need to ask the Pharisees why they wanted to know. He can read their hearts, and He answers accordingly. Given the strictness in His response, it seems as though they were in favor of Moses’ allowance for divorce. Maybe they had had divorces, maybe they wanted to have divorces. Of course, being the Pharisees, they didn’t really want to learn from Him and probably barely listened to His answer. They were testing Him, perhaps even trying to trick Him. Jesus responds with only Law, no Gospel.

The contrast between the first section of our reading and the second is striking.

I’ve always noticed that the disciples never seem to try and hinder the Pharisees and the Scribes from coming near to Jesus. But they do try to stop the children from being brought to Him.

The Pharisees received all Law, and notice the children receive nothing but the Gospel. Adults often ask questions with an ulterior motive. My 3-year-old will ask me a million questions with no ulterior motive; she just wants to know. Kids are naturally curious, and they listen to your answers. If you listen to a child and answer their question directly, they will listen to you because they want to know.

There is a sincerity to children that most adults seem to lose. As sin beats and wears on us, we get skeptical of those around us. When people are constantly lying to you and trying to trick you, it becomes hard to trust. I’m not saying that children are sinless, far from it, but often times children are protected from many outside sins by their parents. They have an innocence that we have lost and tend to be more trusting. Few children would turn down a gift because they are afraid of strings that are attached to the gift.

Jesus offers the kingdom of God—eternal salvation—as a free gift, without strings. He gives it to us without any merit or worthiness in us. Many of you received this gift in your baptisms when you were a little child. Others of you received it later on. Some Christians don’t baptize children; they treat baptism as another law to follow. It is Law; Christ commands us to baptize. But it is also Gospel; it is a free gift to us from our heavenly Father.

It was something that happened to us once but has a continuous effect on our lives. Each day in the face of the sin around us and the sin we feel in our hearts, let us remember our baptisms. Maybe you remember the day you were baptized or maybe you were much too small. Either way, remember that you are baptized. Remember that you have been given eternal life and salvation as a free gift. Remember that God has claimed you as His child.

Luther urges us to make the sign of the cross to remember our baptisms. As we cross ourselves, we recall the first time the cross was placed upon us, when the pastor made the cross on our head and on our hearts.

It is a terrible thing when a child loses their trust in adults. Many children in our world today are hurt or let down by the ones who are supposed to protect them. There are many children who are just as callous and lacking in trust as we adults are. Some children have lost their ability to trust.

Dear Christians, don’t lose your child-like trust; remember your baptism and receive its gifts freely. This world will throw you around, bad things will happen, sin, death, and the devil will all try to get you to lose your faith, to lose your ability to trust. Don’t become callous, don’t harden your heart. Become a child once again, remember your baptism and trust God’s Word of forgiveness.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.